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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER—A. Blake

POSTMASTER—J. Arnold

TRANSPORT MANAGER—R. H. Hyde

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 165**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1989-90

House of Commons

Monday 15 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Wednesday, at Seven o'clock.

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday.

MEDWAY TUNNEL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Central Line

1. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the total cost of re-equipping the Central line.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): The Central line is to be re-equipped with new trains that will carry more people, it is to have new signalling to enable more trains to be run and it will be thoroughly modernised. This investment will cost about £720 million.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend's answer shows that the Government are fully committed to improving the Central line, and it will be much welcomed in my constituency of Wanstead and Woodford. My hon. Friend has dealt with the long-term solutions to the problem of the Central line, but does he accept that short-term interim improvements are needed, particularly to the signalling and track? Is he able to give any good news about that?

Mr Portillo: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. I agree with him that my answer demonstrates the Government's long-term commitment to improving the Central line. We have brought forward the order for trains to the earliest possible date so that they will be running in 1992. More staff and trains need to be available to improve the reliability of the service. More staff will be available on stations to look after passengers. I am particularly keen that the escalators should be available for use more regularly. That point is covered in the objectives that have been set for London Regional Transport.

Mr. Tony Banks: As the Minister knows, the Central line rattles through my constituency to Stratford station, and more often than not stops there. How much of the new investment is Government money as opposed to internally generated LRT money? Furthermore, will the long-awaited and much-welcomed proposals to improve the

Central line take into account the possibility of Stratford being used as the site for the second London terminal of the Channel tunnel link?

Mr. Portillo: If Stratford became the second London terminal, there might have to be some reappraisal, but the hon. Gentleman knows that a further £1 billion is to be invested to extend the Jubilee line to Stratford. There will, therefore, be additional capacity at Stratford in any case. It is also one of the candidates for a new railway line in the shape of the east-west cross rail link. The hon. Gentleman's point about Government subsidy gives me the opportunity to say that over the next three years Government subsidy to LRT will rise by 113 per cent. As a former chairman of the Greater London council, the hon. Gentleman will know that already the investment on London Underground is double what it was in his day as chairman of the GLC.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware of press reports that Central line and other London Underground drivers have been asked to switch off electricity to save it, thereby saving money? Will he confirm whether those press reports are true? If they are true, how much money is saved, who gains it and is it safe to switch off in that way?

Mr. Portillo: I read the reports to which my hon. Friend referred, but I am afraid that I cannot help him. I do not know whether the reports are accurate. I am not responsible for the day-to-day management of London Underground. The plans for the Central line include a 16 per cent. increase in capacity and a 12 per cent. reduction in journey times. Whatever may be going on at the moment, electricity is being saved. The long-term objective is to carry more passengers more quickly on the Central line.

Ms. Ruddock: Does not the Minister acknowledge that LRT would have liked substantially more money to be made available to it by the Government? Is it not a fact that the investment plans for the Central line and other parts of the Underground system may be delayed or cancelled because of the lack of and the cuts in Government support, as is happening currently over the investment that British Rail has sought but has failed to get from the Government?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady surprises me. There has been no cut in Government support for LRT. There has been an enormous increase. I repeat, in case she had difficulty hearing me a few moments ago, that there will be a 113 per cent. increase in the Government grant during the next three years. LRT may wish more money, but it must recognise that those are record sums. Any child who goes into a sweet shop learns that what he wants is not what he can have. The Government have been generous in providing extra money to LRT.

London Regional Transport

2. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department invested in London Regional Transport for 1989-90.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): Government grant to London Regional Transport for 1989-90 is £287 million. That will enable LRT to invest approximately £400 million—a 60 per cent. increase in real terms since 1984 when the GLC had responsibility for funding.

Mr. Summerson: Those are impressive figures. In view of the unprecedented increase in the number of passengers carried by LRT in the past few years, will my right hon. Friend confirm that his Department will make further sums available to LRT, so that it may enhance and improve services to the people of London in the next few years?

Mr. Parkinson: Yes, in our present plans we have announced an investment programme of more than £2·2 billion for the next three years, and we have announced that, as a result of the central London rail study, we shall come to Parliament with proposals for another line in November this year. Therefore, the figure of £2·2 billion excludes the substantial investment that is likely to take place in additional lines. That makes an all-time record of investment for London transport.

Mr. Leighton: Is it not a scandal and a disgrace that, after 10 years of Conservative Government, the situation on the Underground is so bad that fares are being deliberately pushed up by well above the rate of inflation to discourage people from using it, which is pushing more people on to the congested roads? Why does the right hon. Gentleman not invest in cross-rails from north to south, and east to west, and a line from Heathrow, through Paddington and Oxford Circus, to Stratford in the east end of London?

Mr. Parkinson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the central London rail study made three suggestions. The first was the upgrading of the existing lines—£1·5 billion has been earmarked for that over the next three years. Secondly, it suggested an east-west cross-rail link. Thirdly, it said that a line from Chelsea to Hackney should be considered. As we have already told the House, one of those lines will go ahead, and we shall come forward with proposals in the autumn. We have also pointed out—and if the hon. Gentleman took a little more interest he would know—that we do not believe that London can stand the simultaneous construction of the Jubilee line, the east-west cross-rail and the Chelsea to Hackney line. They might make London a better place in 10 years, but they would make it impossible in the intervening period.

Road Construction

3. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any proposals to shorten the period between the announcement of a road and its construction.

Mr. Parkinson: We have set targets for reducing the average time taken to progress a scheme from start of preparation work to opening for traffic by four years. In introducing the changes, we have taken care to ensure that the rights of interested parties will not be affected.

Mr. Stern: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. Does he agree that one of the ways in which implementation can be brought forward is by the earliest possible consultation with all interested and affected parties, rather than waiting for the inquiry? Does he agree that one way of bringing forward the Avonmouth relief road in my constituency would be to instruct the

Department of Transport to talk to the owners and tenants of houses affected by the overhead section at the earliest possible date, in the hope that an alternative route might be found?

Mr. Parkinson: As my hon. Friend knows, the consultation period on the Avonmouth relief road has ended. We expect to make an announcement on the agreed route of the proposed road in the spring. After that, statutory procedures will have to be followed because it is vital that people whose rights may be affected should have the right to make representations. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend knows that I shall bear his comments in mind.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: May I remind the Secretary of State that it is nearly 20 years since the Government announced their intention to build a motorway around the east side of Manchester, in which time less than half of it has been built? It now finishes in Denton in my constituency and does not continue to Middleton, which is causing difficult conditions for people on the old road. Will he speed up its completion and ensure that we have a motorway around the east side of Manchester as soon as possible?

Mr. Parkinson: I shall look into the point that the hon. Gentleman raises, but I thank him for underlining something that does not always seem to be understood by many Labour Members—that roads will play a vital part in Britain's future transport infrastructure.

Mr. Higgins: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the present arrangements for compensating those whose property values are affected by the announcement of a preferred route are grossly unfair? As I understand it, at present, those who are in the line of a route cannot claim compensation until two years after the road has been completed. Is that not totally unfair and unjust, and what will my right hon. Friend do about it?

Mr. Parkinson: My right hon. Friend has touched on an important point. I am not convinced that the present arrangements are satisfactory. I believe that there is great concern among those who could be affected, and we must find better ways of dealing with the problem than we have at present. I have the point firmly on board.

Traffic Delays

4. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the total value of the extra fuel used by motor vehicles in the United Kingdom due to delays in 1989.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins): While accurate estimates are not possible, road congestion clearly increases fuel consumption, which must be a wasteful use of resources.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister accept that the volume of fuel consumed by stationary or almost stationary vehicles must soon equal the total that was consumed by freely moving vehicles not all that many years ago? Will he study the matter to arrive at an estimate of the cost of those delays and the other consequencies of traffic congestion and traffic thrombosis, which are experienced on almost every long car journey throughout the country?

Mr Atkins: I defer to the hon. Gentleman's mathematical genius in doing such a calculation. As the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said earlier, that demonstrates the need for improved, wider and, where necessary, new roads, which is part and parcel of the Government's policy.

Mr Amos: My hon. Friend recently visited the north-east—we were very pleased to see him—so I am sure that he is aware of the amount of fuel that is wasted by drivers travelling from London to the north-east on the A1. Can he offer me and my constituents any hope that the A1 will be improved to motorway standard within the foreseeable future?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is a doughty supporter of the new requirements for the A1, and I give him credit for that. He will know that we are devoting much time, effort and commitment to improving the A1 and that we are giving much consideration to its conversion to a motorway between London and Newcastle. As he well knows, the problems involve several local people on either side of the A1, and they must be taken into account. My hon. Friend was right to raise the matter in the terms that he did.

British Rail

5. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail; and what was discussed.

Mr. Parkinson: I last met the chairman of British Rail on 13 December, when a wide variety of rail topics were discussed.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend tell me what British Rail's investment plans are for the next few years? Does he believe that its provision is adequate nationally and in the north-west?

Mr. Parkinson: Over the next three years, British Rail plans to invest £3·7 billion in the network, which, as Sir Robert Reid mentioned in his very interesting speech, represents a doubling of investment from when he began his job. It is a record level of investment, and, in his own words, is,

"practically as much as we can manage."

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Does not the Secretary of State accept that rail commuters, wherever they live, are entitled to parity of services? Is he aware of British Rail's ludicrous proposal in my area to remove the Super Sprinters from the Inverness to Aberdeen route, to resolve some little local difficulties elsewhere in the network? Does he therefore accept the need for investment to cover the whole country, to ensure that some regions do not benefit at the expense of others? Will he look into that ridiculous proposal?

Mr. Parkinson: I shall happily look into that matter on behalf of the hon. Lady and write to her. One difficulty has been that much of the new rolling stock has failed to perform. British Rail has found itself in substantial difficulties, with new trains that do not meet the required specification.

Mr. Adley: Was there not something of a discrepancy between the recent speech by the chairman of British Rail and press reports of it? Given one of the points that the present chairman made about the need for assistance to

complete an environmentally acceptable link from London to the Channel tunnel, can my right hon. Friend tell me whether the Government are unwilling to provide assistance or whether they believe that section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 precludes them from doing so?

Mr. Parkinson: My hon. Friend has noticed what even *The Observer* noticed yesterday: the report of the speech and the speech bore little resemblance to each other. Sir Robert said that, at the end of his period as chairman, British Rail was in an unprecedented position of strength. His speech was widely misreported.

The Government's position on a fast link is clear. They committed themselves to ensuring that the existing infrastructure—road to rail—would be improved to service the tunnel when it opened in 1993. The fast link is a private venture between British Rail and a private sector partner. The Government are precluded by section 40 from subsidising that line.

Mr. Snape: Does the Secretary of State accept that, according to the interpretation of at least such well-known Left-wing newspapers as the *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*, Sir Robert Reid's recent speech was a denunciation of the Government's investment policy? What proportion are the Government providing of the billions of pounds that are soon to be invested in British Rail? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, if he used the same cost-benefit analysis that he uses to justify the Government's road programme in order to electrify and modernise our railway network, Britain could have a railway system that is desirable as well as profitable?

Mr. Parkinson: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the whole speech. He will find that Sir Robert pointed to the tremendous improvement in British Rail—69 million more passengers and record investment—and said that his successor would inherit a rail system that was infinitely better prepared for the 1990s than it was for the 1980s, when he took over. The Government will put in substantial parts of the programme.

Mr. Snape: How much?

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has today tabled a question on that matter to the Treasury, and I shall not anticipate the answer. By the way, I should like to know where the hon. Gentleman is—this is the second Question Time in succession that he has missed. Perhaps he does not approve of televising the proceedings in the House and is making his protest. When the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) sees that answer, he will find that the investment is substantially funded from the public purse.

Traffic (London)

6. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any representations on the implications of the traffic assessment studies for London on traffic congestion in the outer London boroughs following his statement on 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, columns 1184-1202.

Mr. Atkins: Not yet, but any such comments received by 28 February will, of course, be considered carefully.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my hon. Friend and the Department for handling this matter flexibly and creatively. Does my hon. Friend agree that, after so much waiting, hesitation and uncertainty, it is essential that we proceed rapidly? Does my hon. Friend further agree that we could call Marsham street Robert Atkins avenue if he said that the period of consultation would be completed as rapidly as possible?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is right to suggest that the proceedings have gone on too long and that there should be early completion of the consultation. I am grateful to him for his kind remarks, but of course I should defer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in these matters.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Minister will be aware that the proposals in the east London assessment study for a major highway from Archway through the heart of my constituency to King's Cross are causing my constituents enormous concern. Can he assure me that the consultation exercise, which ends on 28 February, is not simply a cosmetic exercise, that the Department will listen to the representations that are made and that, if it becomes obvious that the overwhelming majority of people in my constituency are opposed to the road going past their doorstep, he will abandon the proposals?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is to raise the matter on the Adjournment later this week, and I look forward to debating it with him in detail then. He may or may not know that the Archway road saga and related developments have been going on since 1947, if not before. As someone who served on that local authority, I understand only too well the concerns about the Archway road. The hon. Gentleman's point about consultation was well made and I can assure him that any representations will be listened to most carefully and that, depending on what the consultations show, we shall take appropriate action.

Mr. Jessel: Would not traffic congestion on the west side of outer London be increased by the construction of a fifth terminal at Heathrow?

Mr. Atkins: I know that that subject is dear to my hon. Friend's heart. He could possibly tempt me into making a long comment about it; suffice it to say that his views are well known and that we shall consider them carefully when we consider the question overall.

British Rail

7. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail concerning freight facilities in south Wales.

Mr. Portillo: In December Ministers were given a presentation on British Rail's plans for rail services between the Channel tunnel and every region of the country. Those plans envisage a major terminal in south Wales.

Mr. Hughes: May I draw the Minister's attention to the importance of the area bordering the proposed second Severn crossing? Does he appreciate the fact that local interests are now calling for the reopening of closed railway stations and for more extensive use of existing

stations, for park-and-ride facilities, for a rail terminal and for the electrification of the main lines from Paddington to south Wales? Will the Minister assure the House that he fully realises the importance of the area stretching all the way along the coast to Newport?

Mr. Portillo: Certainly, British Rail recognises the importance of the area and that is why, in its plans for the Channel tunnel, it has included a freight terminal somewhere between Newport and Cardiff. The exact location is yet to be determined. British Rail recognises the importance of the development for passengers, too. It envisages services connecting south Wales to Waterloo to give passengers an easy interchange with the international services and so that there can be night passenger services direct from south Wales to the continent. In all those respects, British Rail recognises the vital part that south Wales has to play in the post-1992 European structure.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Pembroke dock in my constituency, at the end of the west Wales railway line, is conducting an increasing amount of trade with Ireland and Spain. Will the Minister bear in mind the merits of a terminal in that region so that we can take advantage of the increasing trade in 1992?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend would expect me to reply that, if private sector elements wish to develop the dock further and if trade is available from Ireland, through Wales to the United Kingdom, we shall look favourably on investors coming forward with proposals. I am sure that British Rail will want to play its part in any such venture.

Mr. Anderson: Did the Minister note reports published over the weekend of a Belgian study showing that the older industrial areas of the United Kingdom, such as south Wales, could become increasingly marginalised as a result of European Community developments unless there is major investment in infrastructure? Will the Minister look at the implications for new freight terminals and acknowledge that the regional implications of European Community developments are properly a matter for central Government and not just British Rail, and that central Government should be co-ordinating regional arrangements to deal with the impact of the EC?

Mr. Portillo: The whole of the United Kingdom is at one extremity of the European Community and the issue therefore arises about our becoming peripheral in some sense to Europe. As the hon. Gentleman knows, train services between south Wales and the south-east of England are extremely good. He may know also that Britain has more train services running at more than 100 mph than any other European country except France. We already have a very high standard of infrastructure use and British Rail has expressed its wish to develop that further.

Network SouthEast

8. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much Network SouthEast plans to spend in the next three years.

Mr Parkinson: Network SouthEast has plans to invest some £1·2 billion between 1990-91 and 1992-93. This represents an increase of about 30 per cent. in real terms over the previous three-year period.

Mr Moate: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the long-suffering commuters of the south-east are entitled to a much fairer deal than they have received in recent years in terms of restraints on prospective fare increases and travelling in comfort? With regard to the latter, when can we expect delivery of the new rolling stock that we have long been promised?

Mr Parkinson: In August I approved an order for £257 million worth of new rolling stock for the north Kent lines. The first of those trains will come into service in January 1992. I expect to receive an additional application for further investment for the 471 series trains which will serve my hon. Friend's constituency, and they will come into service a year later.

Mr Dunn: In considering Network SouthEast, will my right hon. Friend undertake to make representations to British Rail to the effect that all interested parties should be involved in the process of policy and decision-making leading up to the final delineation of the high-speed link through Kent to south-east London so that there will be no loss of service in Network SouthEast as a result of the development of that link—if and when it takes place?

Mr Parkinson: British Rail recognises that its early handling of that issue and consultation with the public left something to be desired. It also recognises that Network SouthEast is one of the fastest-growing networks in terms of passengers, with a 25 per cent. increase over the past five years. British Rail recognises that additional capacity will be needed, and that is one reason why the high-speed link is under consideration.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Secretary of State did not answer the question about the price of developments in the south-east. It is clear that passengers will not continue to pay high fares for poor accommodation. Will the Secretary of State accept that too many passengers throughout British Rail's network are paying for almost the entire investment programme?

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Lady's latter assertion is not true. During the past five years, the subsidy has been reduced, the income of the system has risen and investment has increased enormously. We now have more passengers while the system is less heavily subsidised, and passengers are using an improving service. I believe that that is the right way forward, not the Labour party's policy of subsidies to passengers and no investment.

Heathrow and Gatwick

9. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to auction aircraft slots at Heathrow and Gatwick airports to the highest bidder.

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): My right hon. Friend has no such plans. He is awaiting advice from the Civil Aviation Authority on how the price mechanism might be used to make the most effective use of airport capacity.

Mr. Steen: In the light of the link-up between Air France and UTA at the weekend, which will give Air France control over all domestic flights in France and regional and international flights, and in the light of the non-aggression pact between Lufthansa and Air France, is my right hon. Friend aware that two blocs will emerge

—Air France and Lufthansa together and British Airways, Sabena and KLM—which will control 60 per cent. of the slots at Heathrow? Is he also aware that, as a result, British Midland Airways, which was granted seven licences by the Civil Aviation Authority to fly to Europe, cannot use any of them because of the absence of slots at Heathrow? What will my right hon. Friend do about that in connection with the Government's competition policy?

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are addressing ourselves to the matter, and we have asked the CAA to advise us so that we can ensure that smaller airlines receive equal opportunities to some of the larger ones.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ease pressure at Heathrow and Gatwick airports, what progress are Ministers making in their negotiations with the United States about more transatlantic flights to and from Manchester airport? Is the Minister aware of the considerable urgency of that important issue?

Mr. McLoughlin: Indeed, I am. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met Secretary Skinner last week, and we are hopeful of the outcome of that meeting. We are aware of the important role that regional airports can play. During the past 10 years, the Government have made a considerable amount of money available to regional airports. There is nothing to stop regional airports attracting private sector involvement. which would provide greater user potential. Both Manchester and Birmingham airports issue scheduling rights.

Mr. Wilshire: Whatever the CAA might propose, will my hon. Friend assure the House that he has absolutely no proposals to increase the number of flights allowed out of Heathrow, or to do anything to increase night quotas or relax noise controls at Heathrow airport?

Mr. McLoughlin: I assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently said that we will not increase the number of night flights from Heathrow. My hon. Friend's other two points are in our minds when we make decisions on practices at Heathrow airport.

Light Railways

10. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the development of rapid light transport railway systems.

Mr. Portillo: Light rail systems can play a part in improving public transport in some of Britain's cities. We will consider making available central Government grant to those which are expected to bring about reduced road congestion, environmental improvements and economic development.

Mr. Fearn: Does the Minister agree that restrictions on section 56 grants hamper progress on light railways? Does he further agree that light railways are required in our cities and towns, and required quickly?

Mr. Portillo: I cannot agree that our section 56 criteria are inhibiting investment. Only in October last year the Government were able to agree to the Manchester Metrolink, which is a £110 million project, financed and operated in the private sector, and which is likely to enjoy a Government grant of about £40 million. Last year, we were also able to authorise investment in building a case for the South Yorkshire supertram.

It is important to make sure that the most cost-effective investment is being made. In some cities, it will be in light rail systems, while in others it might be in less glamorous options such as making the priority for buses more effective.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend should be aware that my constituents would not wish him to be distracted by light railway systems from ensuring that the traditional Network SouthEast services are improved to their absolute maximum rather than building unnecessary roads in the London area.

Mr. Portillo: I assure my hon. Friend that I will not be distracted by light rail systems, but I hope that I will give them the consideration that they merit. Certainly, the fact that there will be a £1·2 billion investment programme in Network SouthEast over the coming three years suggests that we will not be distracted.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) please not read a newspaper?

Mr. Spearing: Have not the Government shown a rather belated recognition of the important part that light rail has to play in places such as Croydon and London docklands? Is the Minister aware that, about two years ago, I approached his predecessor but two asking that the docklands light railway be extended to Barking and Thamesmead, and that I was turned down? Is it not stupid to build a six-lane highway across the River Thames, irrespective of the merits of doing so, and not extend at least one line of the docklands light railway across a new bridge to Thamesmead?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman cannot sustain the accusation that we have been behind the game with light rail in London. After all, the docklands light railway was constructed when many Labour Members thought that docklands would enjoy no success and that the establishment of the docklands light railway was a waste of money. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Croydon. I am told that there is a plan to deposit a Bill in the House in November 1991. A proposal is being formed for an extension of the docklands light railway to Lewisham. We do not yet know how that will be financed. When we know that, we can consider whether to allow London Regional Transport to deposit a Bill next November.

Mr. Fry: Does my hon. Friend agree that at long last a number of encouraging schemes for light rail transit are coming forward? Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), is it not true that in the capital such schemes are not as well advanced as in other of our major cities? Would not the expedition of such schemes do something to allay increasing congestion on London's roads?

Mr. Portillo: May I welcome my hon. Friend back and say how pleased we are to see him here? The schemes are progressing apace in London and throughout the country. Many schemes are being talked about now, but not many of them have been brought to the point at which an application for Government grant has been made.

However, we expect to hear shortly from Avon and West Midlands, and there is a long list of other authorities which may or may not apply for grants in due course.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Uniform Business Rate

46. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he plans to visit the county palatine to discuss the impact of the uniform business rate.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I shall visit the county palatinate on 1 and 23 February. On 1 February I shall be speaking at a dinner of the Manchester chamber of commerce and I am sure that there will be ample opportunity to discuss the enormous benefits accruing to businesses in the county palatinate from the uniform business rate.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the uniform business rate is the most effective instrument of regional policy since the war? Will he reiterate the Government's willingness to reconsider the transitional arrangements for small businesses?

Mr. Baker: On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, the answer is most certainly yes. There are substantial benefits to businesses in the north—in the whole of the north, not just the north-west—as a result of the uniform business rate. The yield of business rates in the north-west will fall by about £300 million over the coming years, with substantial reductions of about 44 per cent. for factories, 16·5 per cent. for shops and 35 per cent. for offices.

On the question of transitional relief, my hon. Friend knows that arrangements have been made so that no small business will face a rise of more than 15 per cent. in real terms each year as the new uniform business rate is phased in. In London, which is one of my hon. Friend's particular concerns, the limit of transitional relief for small businesses is extended to £15,000 new rateable value as opposed to £10,000 elsewhere in the country.

Dr. Cunningham: When the Chancellor visits the north-west, will he talk to Mr. Duffy at his grocer's shop in Adlington, which is in the constituency of Chorley, as the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) is telling him? Mr. Duffy faces almost a doubling of his local tax under the scheme, which is the right hon. Gentleman's own work. When Mr. Duffy's poll tax is added, he will face an increase in his local taxes in excess of 100 per cent. Even allowing for the transitional arrangements, he is likely to pay a minimum of 25 per cent. more, which will be about £500 per year extra. What will the Chancellor say to Mr. Duffy?

Mr. Baker: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what I should say to Mr. Duffy; that if we had kept the rating system, as a result of the overspending plans of Lancashire county council the rates this year would have risen by over one third, which would certainly be a great problem for Mr. Duffy, both as a small trader and an ordinary taxpayer. There is no doubt that this is a fairer and better system of local taxation for businesses and for ordinary community charge payers.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in future businesses in Lancashire will be protected from the appalling weight of the burdens thrust on them every year since Lancashire county council fell under the control of Labour, which is probably why the Labour party did not do too well in the by-election in Blackpool on Thursday? As my right hon. Friend has observed, under the old system, the increase this year would have been very nearly one third.

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend. The advantage of the uniform business rate to businesses not only in the north-west but across the country is that local variations, which are largely due to overspending by Labour local councils, will be a thing of the past. In the Labour-controlled local authority of Manchester, which is one of the jewels in the Labour party's local authority crown, the rate poundage has increased over 10 years by 240 per cent. compound which, after allowing for inflation, is 44 per cent. That is an enormous burden upon businesses in Manchester.

Official Duties

47. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much time he has spent on official duties since he last answered oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have spent up to a quarter of my time carrying out my duties as Chancellor since I last answered oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Banks: That does not seem to be a heavy workload. The right hon. Gentleman's job seems about as relevant as that of court correspondent for the *Exchange and Mart*. Is this not just a con—a way to get the British taxpayer to pay him a salary of £52,000 so that he can sit in the Cabinet as chairman of the Conservative party? Would it not be better, because of his role as the Josef Goebbels of the Conservative party, for Central Office, rather than the hard-pressed British taxpayer, to pay his salary?

Mr. Baker: I receive no ministerial salary. The hon. Gentleman should be the last person to attack me for having two jobs because he used to have two jobs. He was chairman of the Greater London council while representing Newham, North-West in the House. I deprived him of his first job in 1986 and I shall do all that I can to deprive him of his present job at the next general election.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

National Audit Office

52. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what recent discussions he has had with the National Audit Office; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Peter Hordern (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): I met the Comptroller and Auditor General and the head of the National Audit Office and his deputy at the meeting of the Public Accounts Commission on 12 December 1989. In addition, I have regular informal contacts with the Comptroller and the Auditor General and his staff.

Mr. Skinner: When the hon. Gentleman next meets the officers, will he say to them that there is continuing disquiet about employers not handing over to the Exchequer national insurance contributions that are collected? According to one civil servant who has blown the whistle, an estimated £1 million a day that is collected from low-paid workers in this way is not handed over. Will he tell the officers that it is high time that they used their powers at the National Audit Office to investigate this serious complaint? If the Government can have officers running round all parts of the country investigating people who have received £30 from the Department of Social Security, they should be investigating this matter.

Sir Peter Hordern: That is an interesting question, but unfortunately it is not one for the Public Accounts Commission. It sounds to me like one for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, I shall write to the Comptroller and Auditor General to see that the hon. Gentleman gets a reply.

Commission Meetings

53. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission when the Public Accounts Commission last met; and what matters were discussed.

Sir Peter Hordern: The Commission last met on 12 December 1989 when, among other subjects we discussed the Estimates for 1990-91 of the National Audit Office and the Northern Ireland National Audit Office, and the corporate plan for the National Audit Office to 1994-95.

Mr. Allen: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, last week, statutory instruments relating to the Official Secrets Acts were before the House but were blocked. Hon. Members blocked them because of a condition relating to the National Audit Office, which is that those who work for the office could be described as Crown servants and could therefore fall under the ambit of the Official Secrets Acts. Will the hon. Gentleman reassure the House that National Audit Office staff will be free to continue their work on behalf of the Public Accounts Commission to examine all papers relevant to the pursuit of public money? Will he make those assurances publicly?

Sir Peter Hordern: I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that the Comptroller and Auditor General and the National Audit Office will be able to pursue their duties, as they have always been able to, under the new legislation affecting the Official Secrets Acts.

Mr. Marlow: Will the Public Accounts Committee look into the massive £2,000 million net contribution that we made last year to the European Community, which I understand is a major—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This question is about the Public Accounts Commission, not the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Marlow: Indeed, the Commission is even better than the Committee. Could it look into that matter and see whether we can get more of our money back?

Sir Peter Hordern: I am not sure that the Commission is any better than the Committee. The matter is more properly for the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee than for the Public Accounts Commission.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is unacceptable, on an issue where the Public Accounts Commission could make representations, that the Public Accounts Committee is unable to—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The same rules apply. The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Public Accounts Committee, so he should know.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am referring specifically to the Commission's relationship to the Committee and the fact that it can make representations to the Committee. The PAC does not have access to information about state expenditure on the security services and GCHQ. That is shown as a single sum in the Vote and we are not allowed in any way to investigate the areas of expenditure covered by those headings. Members of Parliament may want more information, although not wishing to interfere in the operational work of that department.

Sir Peter Hordern: Although that is another interesting question, I fear that it is not one for the Commission, whose remit in these matters is limited.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Standing Order No. 10

54. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to invoke the use of the provisions of Standing Order No. 10.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I have no such plans.

Mr. Allen: The Lord President will be aware that Standing Order No. 10 which related to the possibility of adjourning the House and resuming on a morning sitting has been in disuse for nearly 20 years. It was introduced by one of his predecessors, Richard Crossman. After that 20-year gap, does he consider that it is time to look again at the relevance of a similar Standing Order, either by revamping or reinstituting Standing Order No. 10 or by some similar measure, so that hon. Members can proceed with business more rationally?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is unusual for the hon. Gentleman to express such enthusiasm for a matter on which there has already been an experiment which failed. Standing Order No. 10 was introduced in 1967——

Mr. Allen: I was at school then.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman may have been at school then——

Mr. Allen: Primary school.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: So much the better for the hon. Gentleman. The Standing Order has not been used since 1969. It was found to be inconvenient, not just by Ministers but by hon. Members on both sides of the House to reassemble the House the following morning. It broke the continuity of the debate and did not work. I see no case for re-examining it.

Mr. Conway: Will my right hon. and learned Friend resist any suggestion to adopt the policy advocated by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), because

of the pressure that that would place on Members who represent provincial constituencies a long way from London to base their families in London? That would break the link that many Members find important of living in the communities that they represent rather than in this all-too-dominating capital city?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend makes a good point. No doubt it was one of the many that led to the disuse of the Standing Order 20 years ago.

Private Bill Procedure

55. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he is ready to announce what changes he proposes to the private Bill procedure; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No, Sir, but I hope that it will be possible to announce before too long how we intend to take this matter forward.

Mr. Skinner: I hope that the Leader of the House will make a better fist of this than he did last week. When he introduces any alterations, will he bear in mind last week's unseemly behaviour when the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill received its Third Reading? During those proceedings there were never fewer than 50 hon. Members opposed to the Bill present in the House. Yet at 10 o'clock there was a sudden traffic jam outside when ministerial cars packed to the roof with Ministers came rolling in to secure the Aye vote. They argued that they were not on a three-line Whip, but they were led by the Prime Minister. Is it not a scandal that the Government promoters and, in this case, the South African authorities which wish to bring coal into Britain, are abusing so-called private Bills?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman is such a bad loser in that and many other matters. The Bill commanded substantial attention from both sides of the House for a long time. It is not surprising, therefore, that it received a substantial vote in its favour last week and was safely enacted by the House.

Mr. Barry Field: Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider the simplest reform of the private Bill procedure advocated by the Procedure Committee which relates to the means of objection and which is supported by both sides of the House? The mumbling behind hands and behind Order Papers in order to object to a Bill is unseemly and does the House no good.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall certainly take account of that point among the many recommendations of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure. It is clear that the House wants the private Bill procedure to remain an effective force, but it is equally clear that significant changes must be made to it. I shall consider them all.

European Parliament

56. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals for an institutional link between the House and the European Parliament.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no plans at this stage to bring forward proposals for a formal link of this kind, but I am giving careful consideration to the Procedure Committee's important discussion in its recent report of the other possible aspects of this matter.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Leader of the House agree that Members of the European Parliament are not elected to be a mouthpiece either for this House or for the British Government? Nevertheless, because of the nature of the subjects and the interchange of legislation between the European Parliament and this House, some type of institutional connection would be valuable to all concerned, whether they be elected for the governing party or the opposition parties. At least that would save the time of the chairman of the Tory party, who last week called in dissident Tory Members of the European Parliament and threatened them with expulsion from the Tory party because they were not toeing the line in Europe. We do not want that type of confusion; people should be allowed to speak freely. We in this House should have the means of input with Members of the European Parliament when they get to grips with that end of the legislative operation.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman's case does not need to be supported by unjust accusations against my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Procedure Committee has made recommendations for developments in this area. In recent years there has been a steady series of changes, informal and formal, so that Members of the European Parliament increasingly attend Back-Bench meetings of both major parliamentary parties. Certainly the European Democratic Group meets regularly in the Palace of Westminster. There are a number of initiatives, including that taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to inrease such informal contacts and there will be others. They all deserve to be considered sympathetically.

Mr. Stanbrook: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the cause of many of the difficulties that we have had in recent years with the European Parliament is that Members of that Parliament are in a political vacuum? That arose largely because the House agreed to the direct election of Members to the European Parliament. Would it not have been better to have had indirect elections of Members of this House who could have served in Europe by rota? All of us would have had the experience of exercising responsibility towards the European Community.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is entitled to advocate such an approach, but it is not required by or compatible with the arrangements made with the EC. Most people believe that it is difficult to combine both jobs, and one consequence of trying to maintain the dual mandate was that we moved to direct elections.

Mr. Benn: Is the Leader of the House aware that the problem derives from the fact that, under the treaty of Rome, Members of the European Parliament have no control over the legislation and, under the prerogative, the House of Commons has no control over the Ministers who go? Therefore, both the European Parliament and the House of Commons are impotent observers of decisions taken in secret by the Council of Ministers on the instructions or the advice of the Commission, which is elected by nobody but appointed by Governments.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is a very compact oversimplification of the position. As a result of the Single European Act among other things, Members of the European Parliament have a significant role in legislative matters coming before the European Parliament. As a result of hon. Members' continued consideration of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee and others, hon. Members also have a significant influence on the position adopted by Ministers in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Dykes: The Lord President rightly says that there are growing party and personal links, but is not part of the equation missing if we do not have the institutional links suggested by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker)? We need the formal linkage of membership to, for example, a Select Committee for the Members of the European Parliament, and MEPs should have facilities such as telexes, a fax room and telephones as are provided in other national Parliaments.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot comment in detail on the Select Committee's recommendations on this. However, my hon. Friend will remember that the report recently submitted by the Select Committee concluded that there were no strong arguments for recommending formal links such as he suggests. There is certainly a case for looking at the improvement of physical communications by post as well as telecommunications.

Souvenir Kiosk

57. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the take at the souvenir kiosk in December 1989.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Gross takings in the kiosk for the month of December 1989, including VAT, were £171,325.

Mr. Banks: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. Will he convey the thanks of the House to the staff who work in the kiosk for the enormous work that they do before Christmas? Would it not be appropriate for them to receive a hefty bonus for that work? It seems from the figures that the path to reselection is paved with Victorian House of Commons mints and tins of humbugs and fudge. Would it not be appropriate to relocate the kiosk to Westminster Hall, where members of the general public could get to it and purchase some of the excellent commodities on sale? That would also improve the profitability of the House.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There is certainly a case for examining the possibility of extending this facility, but such matters must always be considered in the light of the limited accommodation available in the Palace of Westminster. I hope that, as the hon. Gentleman seeks reselection, he will find it convenient to make use of House of Commons fudge in large quantities.

Shootings (West Belfast)

3.30 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement about the killings in west Belfast on Saturday night.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): At about 10.50 am on Saturday 13 January, two soldiers on duty in civilian clothes were leaving west Belfast and driving along the Falls road in the direction of the city centre. By chance, they saw a car approach from the other direction and stop at the junction of the Falls road and the Whiterock road. They then saw two masked men, one of whom was armed with what appeared to be a sub-machine gun, run from the car into a betting shop. A third man remained in the driver's seat of the car.

It is clearly the responsibility of members of the security forces to take immediate action to respond to a situation which appears to pose immediate danger to life. What precisely happened next, and why, is properly the subject of the investigation now being rigorously pursued by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the House will not expect me to comment on details. However, as the House knows, both the driver of the car and the two men who entered the betting shop were subsequently shot and killed. I am afraid that a passer by was also injured, although not seriously. The identities of the three men have been released by the RUC.

After the shooting, the soldiers recovered the sub-machine gun which had been in the gang's possession. A crowd immediately began to gather and a number of vehicles, including black taxis, began to block adjoining roads. The soldiers accordingly drove immediately to an RUC station in order to report the incident. Subsequently, they were interviewed by the RUC. Meanwhile, the RUC, supported by the Army, moved immediately to the scene of the shooting and took control within a few minutes.

The House will be aware that the sub-machine gun used by the robbers was in fact a replica. In addition, a replica pistol was recovered from the betting shop. These were not toy guns, but exact-scale replicas, convincing in every detail—so convincing that only very careful examination shows that they cannot fire live rounds. Clearly, the availability and use of such realistic replica weapons for criminal and terrorist purposes poses a serious problem for the community, particularly in Northern Ireland. It is a problem which is treated seriously by the courts. In a recent case, two men were sentenced to seven years imprisonment for robbery carried out with imitation firearms. In that case the judge expressed concern at the fact that such weapons were easily obtained in Northern Ireland. I share that concern and have been considering whether there are any further steps that can be taken to deal with this issue.

I should like to place the incident in its proper context. As the House knows, there exists in Northern Ireland a serious terrorist problem which requires the continuous deployment of armed forces in support of the RUC. No one regrets that more than I do. I particularly regret any deaths which, directly or indirectly, have been caused by terrorism. Terrorism has encouraged other types of violent crime, such as armed robbery. In combating such violent crimes, the security forces are required to operate within the rule of law, using such force as is reasonable in the circumstances. Specific instructions and thorough training are given to the security forces to help them carry out their duties. The instructions make it clear that firearms are a last resort, to be used only when life is likely to be endangered and when there is no other way of preventing the danger.

Finally, I think it is only right to remind the House of the often dangerous circumstances of Northern Ireland —circumstances in which we expect the security forces to act in accordance with the very highest standards on every occasion. That is only right and proper. We expect them to evaluate a situation, judge the risks to their own lives and those of others, and act appropriately within the law, often in a matter of seconds or less. We should not under-estimate the difficulties that they face. The RUC is conducting a full and thorough investigation. This must now take its course. I hope that nothing will be said in this House that could hinder or prejudice the completion of this important task.

Mr. McNamara: I thank the Secretary of Sate for his answer. However, I very much regret that the Government failed to volunteer a statement on such a sensitive issue, which has aroused a great deal of controversy throughout these islands, not least because of the questions that it raises about the rule of law, the relationship of the Army with the RUC and the minimum use of force.

The Opposition are well aware of the difficulties that the security forces face in Northern Ireland, but it is precisely because incidents of this nature have the capacity to inflict great damage on public confidence in the rule of law and in the security forces, and to make their task that much more difficult, that the circumstances of last Saturday's shootings must be subject to the fullest possible scrutiny.

A number of questions must be answered. First, can the Secretary of State inform the House of the rules of engagement under which the Army operates in Northern Ireland? Did the yellow card rules apply—aimed shots only, and only sufficient to prevent escape?

Secondly, may we have a commitment again to the primacy of the RUC? Was the RUC aware of the presence of the Army unit undercover squad in the area and of the instructions under which the unit was operating? Were the soldiers tasked by the RUC for this duty?

Thirdly, can the Secretary of State tell us why the RUC and the Army were not able to issue a statement on Saturday evening at the end of a special meeting held by them to discuss these shootings? Why was it possible for the Army yesterday heavily to brief selected members of the press on the very issues which today the right hon. Gentleman is asking the House not to pursue?

A number of more specific questions arise from the briefings given yesterday. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the driver of the car was the first to be shot; that he was not challenged; that no arms, either real or replicas, were found in the car; and that no paramilitary uniforms were there, either? Was the Army unit in radio contact with its immediate superiors, what information was sent forward by it, and what instructions may have been relayed to it?

Can the right hon. Gentleman refute the most serious allegations of witnesses, some of whom we saw on television on Saturday, that the other two men were administered the coup de grace while lying on the ground?

[Mr. McNamara]

Will he confirm that the soldiers involved were members of the 14th Independent Company? Can he tell us the purpose of this unit, when it was formed and what its particular duties are? Can he say whether there was any connection between this incident and the reported shootings which occurred at approximately 11 pm on Friday in the near vicinity and the markedly increased heavy military presence in the area over the preceding 24 hours?

Many other detailed questions need to be asked, but I am conscious of the time. What is most important is that we should be able to maintain confidence in the security forces. That is why we need an early and speedy answer to these many difficult and awesome questions that have been raised by the sad events of last Saturday evening.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman has asked me a series of questions, the first of which related to the rules of engagement. He specifically asked a question about the yellow card. It represents operating instructions for use by the security forces in their duties in Northern Ireland. As it is an operational instruction, it would not be appropriate to publish it. The other questions of that nature which the hon. Gentleman asked come within the same area of operational details.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a number of questions about the RUC and its awareness of the presence and the tasking of the soldiers. That brings us back to the inquiry in which the RUC is engaged.

The hon. Gentleman asked why a statement was not issued. He probably knows that a short statement was issued by the RUC on Saturday night. He also asked questions relating to the driver of the car, radio communication and the condition of the men after they had been shot. They all come into the same area of operational details. I made it perfectly clear in my statement that I was not going to enlarge on those matters to the House. The hon. Gentleman also asked about the unit to which the men belong. It is not our policy to reveal the units to which soldiers belong.

As to the hon. Gentleman's final question about the reported shootings the previous evening and security force activity in the neighbourhood, there is no connection whatsoever between them. I go back to the remark that I made, that the car containing the soldiers passed by chance.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Is not the area of the Falls road and Whiterock road among the most dangerous in the whole of Europe—a danger posed by continuing terrorist action? Can my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the inquest into the deaths of the three people who were killed on Saturday will be held at the earliest date, consistent with the proper process of law?

Mr. Brooke: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that assurance. I share his views about the neighbourhood of which he spoke. I reassure him that the inquest will be conducted under the due process of law.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Does the Secretary of State agree and accept that the rules of engagement do not require the security forces to hesitate when they apprehend that their lives are endangered? Does he also accept that many will wish to suspend judgment until the inquiry that is clearly necessary has been carried out? When the Secretary of State has seen the report of the RUC inquiry, will he consider whether a wider inquiry that does not directly involve the security forces may be appropriate, since at least one of the issues is the extent to which the armed forces were acting on instructions from the RUC?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his comments about the circumstances in which members of the armed forces have to take decisions in Northern Ireland. I cannot discuss details of the incident without risk of prejudicing the RUC inquiry. I am happy to say that the RUC will of course be passing its conclusions to the Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration. In the context of the present investigation and the hon. Member's question about subsequent action, I have every confidence that the RUC will conduct the investigation in the most thorough and painstaking way.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): Sad and tragic though the whole matter is, does my right hon. Friend agree that any criminal who pursues his activities on the streets of west Belfast, armed and masked, must expect to meet more than an unarmed British policeman? I suggest to my right hon. Friend that he must have the matter thoroughly investigated. Will he please not be diverted from his important announcement, and the efforts that he can make to bring parties together in Northern Ireland to remove the basis for the terrorism that has caused the tragedy to happen?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend makes comments about the circumstances on the streets of west Belfast, and many hon. Members and members of the public will agree with his analysis. I am grateful for his appreciation of the manner in which the matter is being looked into. I confirm that a continuing advance in political development makes a contribution to security. I look forward in the hope that we shall be able to continue those conversations.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Secretary of State will be aware that 12 people have been killed since 1982 in similar controversial circumstances, and in a manner that has caused enormous distress in the North of Ireland. Will the Secretary of State accept that all those incidents have one thing in common—that none of the victims was armed in such a way that they could have perpetrated lethal force on any member of the security services? Will he confirm that such incidents do enormous damage to confidence in the process of justice in the North of Ireland, and also that they give the oxygen of propaganda to the IRA at a time when it needs it most? Most important of all, do those incidents not convince many people that, when it comes to a choice between expediency and acting within the integrity of the law, the Government always seem to choose expediency?

Mr. Brooke: I share the hon. Member's concern about the maintenance of the confidence of the community in Northern Ireland in the security forces. That confidence is likely to be sustained and supported by clear evidence that the security forces are operating under the rule of law, as they understand they must.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Does my right hon. Friend share my sadness about the implicit and explicit assumption that is often made by Opposition Members,

that the security forces are always wrong, whereas the terrorists are quasi-innocent or hard done by in some way? Can we have any sensible discussions about the issues before the rigorous and much-needed investigation has taken place?

Mr. Brooke: The issue whether anyone is wrong or right in matters relating to the law is for the courts, but I am sure that my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to what sometimes seems to be an over-bias in one direction.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Would it not have been better to volunteer the interesting statement that the Secretary of State has made instead of leaving it to a private notice question, and leaving the running during the weekend to the leader of Sinn Fein, who is a former brigade commander? In the past, he has had the nerve to suggest that Amnesty International should investigate the issue. If there is anything in that suggestion, will the Secretary of State ensure that there is an investigation into those who shoot to kill in the incidents that have left 3,000 dead during the past 20 years?

There have been big changes in west Belfast over the years. There are very few British soldiers in Northern Ireland now compared with the past. Irrespective of anything else that comes out of the inquiry, I hope that the Secretary of State will ensure that the police are in charge. They have views about the policing of west Belfast. We should not carry out a policy using soldiers, who have a rotten job—few people can comprehend the difficulties that they face—and we should see whether the numbers of soldiers can be further decreased.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful for the manner in which the right hon. Gentleman put his question. Statements were made throughout the weekend by my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), who was on duty in Northern Ireland, and by the RUC. It was a matter of particular concern that in my statement today I should be able to provide as full disclosure as possible at this stage, and the passage of time has enabled me to do so. I totally concur with the right hon. Gentleman about the exercise of double standards that were apparent in the statement made by the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams). The right hon. Gentleman referred to Amnesty. It is worth reminding the House that, in the first 10 months of 1989, 363 persons were charged with terrorist offences; 340 persons were convicted; and only two were killed by the security forces.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): My right hon. Friend cannot comment in detail on yellow card procedures, but I suspect that I should not be far from the truth if I said that they do not require a challenge to be given if soldiers suspect that their lives, or other lives, might be in danger. In those circumstances, will my right hon. Friend accept that Conservative Members have rather more sympathy for members of the security forces, who put their lives in danger to protect freedom under the law, but rather less sympathy for those who deliberately don the uniform of a terrorist to commit what appears to be armed robbery and thereby spread fear through the community?

Mr. Brooke: For reasons that I gave earlier, I shall not be drawn on the use of the yellow card. References to the statement that I made will find an echo of what my hon. Friend has said. I am certain that the security forces will be grateful to him for the expression of confidence that he has uttered.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I hope that the Secretary of State will take it from me that, when honourable and searching questions are asked by Labour Members, it is an abuse for Conservative Members to imply that we are all IRA sympathisers. Many of us have fought against that all our lives. There is real and deep worry, not merely among Labour Members but among our people, about what happened, especially after Gibraltar—and in the Stalker affair, in which the police inquired into the conduct of the Army. The result was that Mr. Stalker was taken off the inquiry. May we have an assurance that, if this inquiry is conducted by the police, its findings will be made available to the general public and it will not be just a police inquiry, since such inquiries always seem to come out in favour of the police and Army and to abuse people who ask honourable and searching questions?

Mr. Brooke: It is obviously the duty of hon. Members to ask searching questions, not least when an incident such as this has occurred. The whole country shares the concern simply to get at the truth, as the RUC is trying to. I am sorry that my confidence in the RUC does not seem to be held totally throughout the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must have regard for the subsequent business, in which I shall have to place a 10-minute limit on speeches. I shall call one hon. Member from each side, but then we must move on.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Against the background of almost daily violence in west Belfast, are not soldiers who come upon armed criminals apparently engaged on a criminal enterprise that is endangering the lives of others, including themselves, entitled to fire first?

Mr. Brooke: Other hon. Friends, like my hon. Friend, have drawn attention to the conditions in west Belfast. We are all aware of the dangers that exists there. It would be wrong for me to make any other statement in this instance.

Mr Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that the interest of those who ask these questions is that justice should be done? In addition to the stifling of the Stalker inquiry and the lies told after the Gibraltar killings, we recall the false evidence that led to the wrongful conviction of the Guildford Four and the doubts about the Birmingham Six. An internal inquiry will not carry credibility.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the killings in last Saturday's circumstances will increase the conviction of people that the soldiers and security forces in Northern Ireland are running rampage? That impression will be widely shared. The fact that the right hon. Gentleman expressed no regret in his statement for the families of the people killed will confirm the impression that anything that the security forces do, whether within or without the law, carries the Government's endorsement.

Mr. Brooke: I do not think that this is an occasion for going back over many previous cases. The finding of the inquest in Gibraltar into the deaths of self-confessed terrorists speaks for itself.

[Mr. Brooke]

The right hon. Gentleman refers to people "running rampage". I think that he knows within himself that those are absurd words to use to describe the manner in which the security forces conduct themselves most bravely in Northern Ireland on behalf of us all. As for the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about expressing regret about the deaths, I did in fact express regret in my statement.

Mr. Speaker: Statutory Instruments?

Mr David Lightbown (Staffordshire, South-East): Not moved.

Orders of the Day

Environmental Protection Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

[Relevant document: Second report of the Environment Committee of Session 1988-89, HC 22 (Toxic Waste), and the Government's reply thereto, Cm. 679.]

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, which is relevant to this Second Reading debate, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Government to pre-empt one of the most controversial aspects of this legislation by announcing today through the Scottish Information Office, rather than in a statement to the House, the appointment of a chairman to a new Scottish conservation body which does not exist and cannot exist until the legislation is approved by Parliament?

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that the decision by the Scottish Office to announce at this stage the appointment of Mr. Magnus Magnusson suggests that the special subject of the Secretary of State for Scotland might well be contempt of parliamentary procedure. It represents a declaration that he has no intention of allowing the nature of this proposed organisation to be influenced one iota by the procedures of Parliament. The House is a forum for debate in the process of legislation, rather than an ancillary to the Government's public relations machine.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot see that there is anything out of order in what has been done. If something ultra vires is alleged, it is a matter for the courts, but it is not one for this debate.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take Mr. Skinner first.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is to do with the Bill. My information is that part VII, which deals with the break-up of the National Conservancy Council—[HON. MEMBERS: "Nature."]—Nature Conservancy Council; I stand corrected—is not complete and that certain parts of the Bill dealing with the Welsh agency aspect have not been finalised either. You will recall that the Government have often come along in the late stages of a Bill with as many as 500 amendments, causing considerable trouble. My information is that this Bill will be subject to hundreds of amendments, because it is not complete.

It has been drawn to my attention that a rival group of civil servants involving four Government Departments has been set up to deal with the Welsh agency aspect. It has been suggested that, to complete the Welsh agency parts of the Bill, those people will instruct the Minister to give a written statement to Parliament—not one that is debateable but one that will probably form the answer to a written question by a Conservative Member——

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are matters that the hon. Gentleman should raise during the Second Reading debate. It is the function of the House and its Standing Committees to amend Bills; there is nothing out of order about that.

Mr. Skinner: And it is the function of the Speaker—as long delays may otherwise arise on Report and thereafter

—to establish whether a Bill is complete before it starts on its merry road through the House. It would be a good idea if we knew whether the Bill was complete, and a good idea if the Speaker of the House knew whether the Bill was complete——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We shall know more about that when we have heard the Second Reading debate.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to raise a grave matter that will be of considerable concern to the House and the country. In December, I spoke to Mr. Ian Greer of Ian Greer Associates, who told me that he had been making payments not to one but to a number of Members of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to allege something against hon. Members, on either side of the House, he must draw the matter to the attention of the Select Committee concerned. It is not a matter for me to deal with in the Chamber.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is not quite as simple as that on this occasion, Mr. Speaker. I understand that payments have been made not only by that company but by another public relations company. The payments were made as a commission on first-year fees for work carried out by Mr. Ian Greer's company. I am informed that a number of Conservative Members have been paid. They have used their position to tout for business. Frequently, the payments have not been declared.

I also——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is once again abusing the procedures of the House by seeking to make allegations against hon. Members on the Floor of the House. That is not part of our procedures. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, if he has such allegations to make, he must make them to the relevant Select Committee. I am not prepared to hear allegations made in this way on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I give the hon. Gentleman that warning——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I understand that, Mr. Speaker. But you will note that I have not named any hon. Members——

Mr. Speaker: Order. And that is just the point. It is just as bad, in my view, to make allegations across the Floor of the House without naming the hon. Members concerned as it is to name them. If the hon. Gentleman has definite information, he should take it to the Select Committee on Members' Interests, of which he is a member.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You will know, Mr. Speaker, that if I wish to make a complaint to the Select Committee of which I am a member, I must produce names, and Mr. Greer is not prepared to give me the names of the hon. Members to whom he has been paying large sums on first-year commission turnover.

I understand from Mr. Greer that he has been approached on two or three occasions each year and asked to make such payments. I believe that the honour of the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat that what the hon. Gentleman must do is take the matter to the Select Committee, which has the power to send for persons and papers, and let the matter be dealt with there. I deprecate —and the whole House will deprecate—what the hon. Gentleman is now seeking to do in the Chamber.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I give the hon. Gentleman this warning: I am not prepared to tolerate behaviour of this kind.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In that case, may I ask you to do something, Mr. Speaker? You are willing to deprecate my actions and to ask the House to deprecate them. Would you be prepared to deprecate the practice of companies' making payments to Members of Parliament which are not then registered? Furthermore, would you be willing, in your office as Speaker, to approach the company concerned and ask for the names of the hon. Members to be revealed?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that there is an obligation on Members of the House to register their interests.

I announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of——

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet and the hon. Lady must not persist.

I announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

In view of the number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to put a time limit on speeches between 6 pm and 8 pm. I appeal to hon. Members who may be called before that time and afterwards to bear that point in mind so that as many of their colleagues as possible may be called.

Ms. Primarolo: Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), Mr. Speaker. Will you advise the House about the extensive and developing use of lobbying, as the rules of the House do not permit an exact debate to be held on that, and tell us how we, as hon. Members, can bring to the attention of the House the fact that this lobbying is occurring and that payments are being made for it?

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Lady will look at Standing Order No. 128, she will clearly see the answer to her question.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): But, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman knows that these points of order delay the debate.

Mr. Benn: At the beginning of every Session, we pass a Sessional Order saying that it is a "high crime and misdemeanour" to tamper with witnesses, and we take that very seriously. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is alleging that witnesses, and also Members, are being tampered with—and that applies whether or not an hon. Member declares that he has been paid.

[Mr. Benn]

I am not involved in muck-raking, and I have no direct interest in this. However, a statement from you as Speaker of the House, deprecating and deploring the practice of paying hon. Members to use their powers in Parliament in the interests of a particular cause might be something you should consider—although perhaps not now. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington is right.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take the hon. Gentleman's point of order—at the expense of delay.

Mr. Heffer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) was to put the matter before his Select Committee, would it be possible for the Select Committee to have the gentleman in question brought before it and ask him to name the names? If that is possible, that is precisely what my hon. Friend the Member for Workington should do. The names would be revealed on oath and we would really know what was happening in relation to certain corruption in the House.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening carefully, he would know that that was exactly what I said to his hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the matter was to be ventilated by the Select Committee, would it be possible to find out precisely which hon. Members are sponsored by trade unions—[Hon. Members: "It is in the Register."] —and the amount of money that trade unions spend on political sponsorship in the House?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Members now rising wants to participate in the debate. It will not improve their chances if they continue to raise points of order on this matter. I have already dealt with this matter at some length. I confirm what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has said that the correct procedure, as I have already mentioned, is that, if the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has allegations to make, he should take them to the Select Committee, which has the power to send for persons and papers and to investigate them.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I will hear the hon. Gentleman, but I will have to bear it in mind when I select the speakers in the debate.

Mr. Leighton: I apologise for taking up more time. However, as we are considering this point, do you accept, Mr. Speaker, that there is increasing concern about a practice that seems to be getting out of hand? When hon. Members rise we look at them, but we do not say that that hon. Member represents this or that constituency. Instead, we say that he is the hon. Member for this special interest or that special interest, or this consultancy or that consultancy, or this industry or that industry. That affects the standing and reputation of Parliament and that is something which you above all, Mr. Speaker, should consider.

Mr. Speaker: The Register of Members' Interests has been in existence for several years. As the whole House knows, there is an obligation on hon. Members with interests to register them. I am sure that that is exactly what happens.

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Chris Patten): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is now a commonplace that environmental issues will play a prominent part in the national and international political debate in the last decade of this century. It is therefore particularly appropriate to begin the decade with this Bill. Whatever the arguments about the Bill—a number may, I suspect, be a little cosmetic—it will surely provide us with the basic framework for much of our pollution control in Britain well into the next century.

Before I refer in detail to the provisions of the Bill, I should like to make four brief points.

First, environmental regulation and control have a long legislative pedigree in Britain. It goes back to the industrial revolution. On this side of the House, there have been times when it seemed as though we have talked of little other than Disraeli's interest in sewers. More recently, we can recall the Clean Air Acts, the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and last Session's Water Act. Many of the proposals in the Bill—innovatory though they are, both domestically and internationally—have been discussed for a number of years.

The Royal Commission on environmental pollution, for example, first proposed the integration of pollution control, so that harmful industrial emissions come under one regulatory system covering land, air and water, 14 years ago. The measures on waste are very much on lines recommended by the Royal Commission in 1985 and, by and large, welcomed by Select Committees both here and in another place I know about our Select Committee's reservations, and I will refer to them later. Our proposals —long and fully discussed—for regulating genetically modified organisms, received a more recent endorsement with the Royal Commission's report on this subject six months ago. I congratulate the commission on having produced a thorough, well-argued and well-presented survey, which will continue to provide a source of guidance and advice.

I hope that the weight of informed judgment and opinion that lies behind many of the proposals in the Bill, and the extent to which they have already been fully debated, will mean that we can proceed from the basis of a broad measure of agreement on the principal features of this legislation. That is certainly what happened with the last major legislation on this subject in 1973 and 1974. I hope also, therefore, that we shall have a constructive debate today and an equally constructive time in Committee. I cannot for the life of me see why this Bill should produce much acrimony, but I admit that life can be full of surprises.

Secondly, control and regulation are essential to the improvement of environmental quality, just as they are important to the raising of health standards and the securing of safety at work. But they provide only part of the means for enhancing environmental quality. Our unequivocal view is that the best way of securing that objective is a judicious mix of governmental regulation

and market economics. The market and private enterprise are often challenged by regulation to higher technological standards and better performance. I do not believe that the environmental history of eastern Europe or, for that matter, the history of the water industry in Britain, suggest that leaving everything to the state is the best way of improving the environment.

I am not entirely sure where the Opposition would place the balance. I trust that they will accept that controls are not costless and that incentives other than controls are often the best means of achieving environmental goals in a cost-effective way. Whatever the Opposition's views on that point, they must surely be with us in believing that sensible and sustainable growth is the friend, not the enemy, of a cleaner and greener environment. I find it especially difficult to contemplate a Socialist approach to economics without at least the fiction of growth at its heart.

Thirdly, it is vital that the sophisticated and coherent system of pollution control that we are introducing should be credible. Credibility requires that such a system should be operated by strong and effective institutions and that it should be open to public scrutiny. We are still to some extent in the painful early stages of establishing some of the institutions to monitor and control pollution. For instance, the National Rivers Authority has been in operation for only a few months, and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution was not established until 1987.

We have faced real, though I think understandable, problems in getting the inspectorate set up with the right complement and the right recruitment. I hope that some of our recent recruitment problems will be alleviated by the new and much improved salary scales that are now in place. I should like to pay a special tribute to the late Brian Ponsford, who brought to the difficult task of running the inspectorate high intelligence and great personal dedication.

But these institutional questions will inevitable take some time to get right. We shall naturally be looking at them in the context of the work we are doing on the White Paper that we shall publish later this year. Let me only repeat here once again that there would be little point in having an excellent system of pollution control without the means to implement it. I do not intend that we should find ourselves in that position.

On public access to environmental information, I shall have more to say later. I have no doubt that greater openness and more information are the best way of combating the sort of charlatanry that can give serious environmental causes a bad name.

Fourthly, this Bill, important though it is, is far from being our last word on the environment. It would be ludicrous to try to solve every environmental problem in one Bill—doubly so in the case of environmental issues, where we require both more scientific information and also unparalleled international co-operation in order to do what is both wise and workable. I hope that the House can resist the temptation to try to hang every pet environmental objective on the branches of this particular legislative tree. In addition, we should all of us resist another temptation—of casually fabricating environmental policy as we bowl along.

It is even more dangerous to make environmental policy off the cuff than it is to make policy in other areas —but I do, of course, recognise that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) has exceptionally capacious cuffs.

Let me now turn to the detailed provisions of the Bill. I hope that the House will forgive me if I speak at some length, because it is a long Bill and its detailed provisions need proper attention.

Part I establishes two innovatory pollution control systems, integrated pollution control and local authority air pollution control. Simpler, less polluting processes will be designated under part I for local authority air pollution control. Up to now, local authorities have had to rely on cumbersome controls after the event. They are costly to local authorities, to the environment and to industry. The new regime strengthens the local authorities' role and gives them the means of tackling air pollution before it occurs. Their powers will cover a range of processes such as smaller power plants, glass works and municipal and hospital incinerators.

Major processes on the other hand will be controlled by the inspectorate of pollution under integrated pollution control or IPC. Some 3,500 sites, such as oil refineries, major iron and steel works and large chemical works, will be subject to the new system.

The United Kingdom's existing pollution control system has developed piecemeal over many years. Releases to air, water and land are subject to three distinct sets of controls, with no account taken of the effect of one on the other. IPC changes all that. For the first time, a single authority will control emissions to land, water and air within a single framework. Conditions will be set in the authorisations given to each industrial process which will ensure the greatest protection to the environment as a whole.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My right hon. Friend is well aware that, for many years in Lancaster, we have had an animal waste processing plant which emits a certain smell. The owner of the plant has been very good and has always done what the city council has asked in installing the latest anti-pollution techniques; at the moment, he is installing a biological filter. However, my council is particularly anxious about two points relating to the regulations and code of practice under the Bill. First, could the lorries that transport this sort of waste be strictly specified and, secondly, could the waste be collected from the abattoirs within 24 hours to minimise the smell? That would make an enormous difference, but it relies very much on the regulations.

Mr. Patten: On the second point, it is possible for the local authority, under the aspects of the Bill relating to local authority air controls, to agree to the sort of provisions required by the local authority in my hon. Friend's case. The powers now given to local authorities should ensure that the sort of processes to which my hon. Friend referred can be improved, that pollution can be reduced and that the best technology is installed to ensure that the people who live in the vicinity of such a plant have a more reasonable environment.

Authorisations will be based, under the IPC system, on the "best available techniques not entailing excessive cost" to prevent or minimise the release of the most dangerous substances and to render all emissions harmless. Therefore, there will be a built-in mechanism for stronger environmental protection. As techniques improve, higher environmental standards will be required.

The IPC system set out in part I does not apply to Scotland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary

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of State for Scotland has conducted separate consultations on pollution control in Scotland. He intends to table amendments to part I in Committee which will adapt it for implementation in Scotland.

This will be the first system of integrated pollution control in Europe. We are ahead of the field. Other countries, particularly in the Community, are turning their attention to this question of the integrated nature of pollution control. They will, I believe, be impressed by the advantages of our approach.

Part I—like other parts of the Bill—contains important new proposals for public access to environmental information. A company's image can all too often be damaged by the activities of less environmentally concerned competitors. Making more information available will change that by identifying inadequate performers and rewarding environmental achievers.

In a consultation paper on public access to information last autumn, I left open the question whether access should be extended to the raw monitoring data supplied by firms to the enforcing authorities. Having considered the responses, I have concluded that all monitoring data required by the enforcing authorities should be made available to the public, save for necessary exemptions—for example, to protect commercial confidentiality.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): People can never get such information because the authorities concerned claim commercial confidentiality. The measures that the Secretary of State has announced are meaningless.

Mr. Patten: I can conceive of few processes where the argument of commercial confidentiality will apply, although I shall not necessarily hold that that is so when we come to discuss the proposals on chemicals and genetically modified organism, because arguments about commercial confidentiality are more likely to apply to those cases. We shall publish regulations, guiding our inspectors and the Secretary of State, about commercial confidentiality, and it is my strong belief that commercial confidentiality will apply in few cases. I cannot honestly believe, although no doubt we shall have an opportunity to discuss this at great length in Committee, that the Opposition seriously think that commercial confidentiality should never be considered in such cases.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I have in my constituency a considerable quantity of a poisonous cocktail, although the substance was not supposed to be contaminated when it arrived from the United States. It came from a firm making fertiliser, and I am told that that company wants to build a similar factory here. When I asked the Department of Trade and Industry whether that was the case, I was told that the information was confidential, and must remain confidential because it is commercial. Some of the rules seem to be preposterous, especially if the Secretary of State's claim that we are at the head of the field is to be justified.

Mr. Patten: First, the hon. Gentleman will be pleased that we are taking greater powers in the Bill to control the movement of waste both into and out of the country. Secondly, if such a factory operated in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and was subject to the sort of controls that we are discussing in the Bill, it would be difficult to imagine circumstances in which commercial confidentiality considerations would apply to the provision of the raw material.

Such information is asked for by the enforcing authorities and should be available wherever possible to the public in its town halls, local authority offices and the offices of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. It is important that more rather than less information should be available. The argument about commercial confidentiality will apply from time to time. I am sure that there are factories and firms in the constituencies of Labour Members which could make a strong argument for commercial confidentiality in some cases.

Save for necessary exemptions, for example to protect commercial confidentiality, the rule must be that the public should get what the enforcing authorities get. That should help to ensure that in future public debate on the environment is rather better informed. The public are unlikely to have trust in a system of pollution control unless it is as open as possible and subject to rigorous scrutiny. Part I fully recognises that imperative.

Part II controls waste management. Our review of waste legislation has been under way for some time. This is a broad subject. It has been investigated both inside and outside Parliament. The latest investigation was the Environment Select Committee's report on toxic waste published early last year under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi). I am pleased that there is substantial agreement between the Government and the Committee in this area. The main exception concerns the proposed new regulation authorities, and I will return to these in a moment.

The measures in part II point to a new approach to waste. In the past, economic development and growth have meant an increase in waste. Now is the time to break that connection. Our aim is that all waste disposal should meet the highest standards. That will be the job of the regulation authorities. The enforcement of higher standards will mean that the true costs of disposal will be felt by everyone. These costs must be passed back to the waste producers, forcing them to reappraise the true economics of their production processes. That will be a powerful encouragement to reduce and recycle waste.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is the Secretary of State aware of the proliferation of applications from commercial waste disposal companies effectively trying to get in before the terms of the Bill can be executed? Will he take action where those applications are referred to him to ensure that they do not slip through the net before he has instituted a strong regulatory regime? The public are worried that toxic waste sites are being developed now, before stricter regulations apply.

Mr. Patten: I shall follow that up. It is a matter of concern in some areas. We do not want the provisions to be circumvented, perhaps by cowboy operations setting up while we are discussing the Bill.

For improved regulation, the site licensing of the 1974 Act will be strengthened. In future, operators will be vetted to keep out convicted offenders, those who are unqualified or incompetent and those who cannot afford to finish the job properly. The licensee will not be able to walk away from his licence; once licensed, he will have to see the job through to completion.

The new duty of care puts responsibility on everyone who produces or handles waste. They will have to make sure that the waste is managed safely by whoever takes it off their hands. Through the application of this duty, the waste regulation authorities should find it easier to trace illegal disposal. Waste producers will have every incentive to make sure that they deal with reputable businesses.

The House will know my strong commitment to recycling. This is an area where there is an immense fund of good will.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): It is all very well dealing with the future, but what does the Minister propose to do about the many sites up and down the country where extremely toxic mixtures have been dumped in the past 20 years and more? Methane gas is now escaping from a number of those dumps. Will he ensure that local authorities have the money to clean up the mess left by other people in the past, given that we cannot send the bill to them?

Mr. Patten: There are two particular aspects to that problem. The first is the discussions on which we are embarked with the National Rivers Authority about the leaching from some landfill sites into the water supply. In due course resources will be provided to deal with that problem. Secondly, we must ensure that within the capital provision for local authorities there are adequate funds for dealing with some of the old sites to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. This year we have begun on that process with local authorities and I have no doubt that we shall continue to have to ensure that the capital allocations for local authorities contain adequate funds to undertake that extremely important job.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Secretary of State assure us that, in future, we will not accept all the toxic waste from the rest of the world, as happened with the Karin B? Will this Bill ensure that we will not get any more Karin Bs on our shores?

Mr. Patten: In due course I shall come to the provisions in the Bill that will assist the hon. Gentleman in securing that objective. I do not happen to take the view—it may be an issue on which the hon. Gentleman and I will disagree—that it is possible to ban completely all movement of toxic wastes. We have taken an initiative in the European Community and in the OECD to try to get industrialised countries to agree to deal, as far as possible, with their own waste because we need to reduce the unnecessary movement of toxic waste around the world, even when there are adequate controls on that movement.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Before the Bill becomes law, we on Teesside need more reassurance than the right hon. Gentleman has just given, particularly in reply to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are now six applications on his desk for incinerators on Teesside. Some of those incinerators will deal with hair spray from West Germany and paint spray from Switzerland. We need some reassurance now that those applications will not go through as they would ruin still further the environment in which many on Teesside must survive.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Lady would be surprised were I to give her an answer on those planning applications at the Dispatch Box—conceivably delighted, but certainly surprised. As my former boss, Lord Joseph, might have said in these circumstances, I hear what the hon. Lady says.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but then I must move on.

Mr. Devlin: I believe that four rather than six applications have been submitted at the same time, regarding Teesside. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a need for them to be considered together? Although the House accepts that he cannot give an answer from the Dispatch Box now, we would at least expect that any decisions will be delayed until after the Bill has gone through the House. Does he accept that all applications across the country should be dealt with at the same time, so that we can develop a proper national strategy on how to deal with such problems?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend's final point is rather difficult, but I shall bear it in mind. I shall consider seriously what he said about Teesside, and I understand the concerns he has expressed.

To increase recycling, what is needed is local leadership and organisation and an effective industry that can turn the waste to profitable use. The measures in the Bill will increase the effort devoted by local authorities to recycling, particularly the waste collection authorities. They are in the best position to tackle the recycling where it is most effective, at the point of collection. That should lead to real progress towards our target of recycling half of all recyclable waste by the end of the decade.

Improved regulation and the need for better value for money amply justify the measures in the Bill to reform the waste disposal authorities. The separation of disposal from regulation will enormously benefit the water environment, and will also ensure more effective waste management.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I shall give way, but this will be the last time for a bit.

Mr. Corbyn: In that case, I particularly thank the Secretary of State. Does he not agree that his arguments in favour of recycling, particularly of paper waste, would be far stronger if something was done about reducing the amount of paper used, the size of newspapers and the amount of unnecessary packaging, particularly in supermarkets and other shops?

Mr. Patten: There is certainly a case for reducing the amount of packaging—which causes many people concern—to the minimum necessary. In due course, market pressures will probably bear down on this.

We all feel that, if the hon. Gentleman could specify which newspapers should not appear from time to time, we might have more sympathy with the proposal. I sometimes think that we are better off looking at trees than newspapers. However, we live in a plural society, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to suggest that we should reduce the free flow of information.

The regulation authorities will be free to concentrate their efforts on improved monitoring. They should make use of their improved powers to demand high standards. I am sorry not to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for

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Hornsey and Wood Green about this. It is right to leave regulation with the local authorities, which are run by elected members. In my judgment they can do the job, and the best of them are already doing it. To ensure that they do all that we want and expect of them, the Bill contains measures to ensure that their performance can be properly judged.

The job of disposal will be put out to tender. Local authority companies will compete with the private sector on even terms. This will ensure that disposal costs are accurately charged in the public as well as the private sector. The companies will be subject to full licensing and will be able to compete for business outside the local authority. The disposal authorities will retain the function of arranging for getting rid of the waste collected by the collection authorities. They will want to set high environmental standards for the tenders for carrying out this work, but these standards will have to apply both to in-house and private sector bids.

I do not shirk the point that higher standards cost money. The Bill makes provision for the regulation authorities to recover the costs of regulation from charging. Moreover, in 1990-91 we shall nearly double permitted capital spending by waste disposal authorities in London and the metropolitan areas. To take up the point under discussion a moment or two ago, we shall also be making a special sum of £33 million available next year for remedial works on landfill gas sites.

Overall, part II of the Bill provides a strong framework for the better management of waste well into the next century.

Part III of the Bill strengthens the powers of local authorities in dealing with nuisances such as noise and smells. By and large, their powers have stood the test of time, but circumstances change, and following consultation, it is clear that their powers need to be streamlined and strengthened. So part III of the Bill enables local authorities in England and Wales to deal more expeditiously with statutory nuisances. As one example, we are proposing to cut out an unnecessary legal stage in the abatement proceedings.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I shall give way, but the more often I give way, the longer I shall be and the smaller the number of hon. Members who will be able to speak in the debate.

Mr. Adley: Most of my hon. Friends enjoy listening to my right hon. Friend so that will not be a great problem.

When talking of part III of the Bill, my right hon. Friend referred to premises and any trade. I can see nothing in part III which refers to many of the nuisances that are emitted by vehicles, be they lorries or coaches. Is it possible that, for the purposes of the Bill, vehicles could be considered premises on wheels?

Mr. Patten: That would be a legal definition which A. P. Herbert might be able to manage. However, we had better leave further discussion about the way in which a vehicle might be premises or part of premises until we discuss the matter in Committee.

Local authorities will also gain a useful new power, under part III, to deal with transient nuisances—not vehicles—such as dust from demolition. Part III also removes doubt concerning the application of nuisance powers to tackle smells. It paves the way for bringing offensive trades—for example, blood boiling—under the new system of air pollution control in part I.

We all know that there is a good deal of public concern about noise from a variety of sources. We have decided to undertake a comprehensive review of noise legislation and controls. I expect our working party to report and bring forward its recommendations by the summer.

Part IV deals with an issue which has rightly risen up the list of national concerns. For many people, care for the environment begins with the condition of their streets and neighbourhood rather than with what is happening to the ozone layer. Litter is an issue which causes mounting public anger, and we are determined to act decisively to deal with litter and filth on our streets.

Our first concern must be to persuade people not to drop litter in the first place. If we cannot do that, we shall always be fighting a losing battle. A concerted programme of education should help convince people of the virtues of keeping their neighbourhoods clean. That is why we have given the Tidy Britain Group £3 million this year. We have promised further substantial funds for next year.

For those who ignore their responsibilities as good citizens and good neighbours, we intend to increase dramatically the maximum penalty for littering, from £400 to £1,000. If arguments fail to convince them, perhaps an assault on their wallets will do the job. I have considerable sympathy with those of my correspondents who despair when they read of convicted litterers escaping with derisory fines. I hope that magistrates will take into account the growing public concern when they impose penalties for littering. Paltry fines are unlikely to deter.

However, I fear that litter will continue to be dropped; once dropped, it must be efficiently cleared up, and it is here that local authorities are in the front line. One aspect that is apparent is the disparity between the standards of cleanliness achieved by different local authorities. Some do their ratepayers proud; others satisfy themselves with at best indifferent standards and at worst, appalling ones. So we intend to place all local authorities under a new duty to keep their open-air public streets and land free of litter. I will shortly publish a code of practice on litter clearance. It will describe the standards that should be met and advise on the best ways of achieving them.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): One of the reasons why some boroughs are cleaner than others is that the people in those boroughs are cleaner. It gives me no pleasure to say that, in Newham, I have one of the dirtiest populations, as measured by the amount of litter that people throw down on the street. What additional resources will the Secretary of State make available to local authorities so that they can enforce these welcome increased penalties? What will he do about those who litter the streets, as they do in London, by digging them up, leaving behind filth that no one appears to be responsible for clearing up?

Mr. Patten: I imagine that we shall have a good deal of opportunity to discuss resources with the local authority associations in the context of the code of guidance, which we shall certainly publish before we reach these provisions in Committee. Some local authorities with lower rates manage to clean up rather better than others with higher rates. Nevertheless, we are prepared to undertake studies

of the implications of the code of guidance with the local authority associations, and if there is an argument for more resources, we shall have to face up to it in the revenue support grant negotiations next year.

Those who pay for their neighbourhood to be cleaned should be able to call their local authority to account if it neglects to discharge its duty. We shall therefore give citizens the right to apply to the magistrates court for a litter abatement order compelling a defaulting authority to clear up litter.

A similar duty will also fall on certain statutory undertakers such as British Rail and the owners of other land. In addition we shall give local authorities the power to extend the duty to certain types of land in other ownership, such as supermarket car parks, by designating them litter control areas.

Finally, we look to commercial operators, especially retailers and take-away food shop owners, to take their responsibilities seriously, as a great many already do. As a powerful back-up to moral persuasion we propose—we shall add this to the Bill in Committee—that local authorities should be able to serve on businesses which fall down on the job of litter abatement notice requiring them to keep their frontages clear of litter. I hope that all businesses will behave responsibly; after all, that is in their own interests—filthy frontages are bad for business.

Mr. Marlow: When this Bill was trailered, there was going to be a measure to deal with that most revolting of all forms of litter: dog mess. I understand that clause 70 provides potential enabling powers to allow my right hon. Friend to bring measures before the House. What is in his mind at the moment? How long does he intend to take to bring those measures forward, and what will they encapsulate?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right. The Bill also covers the duties of clearing up dog mess. That subject, like others, will be covered in the code of guidance that we shall issue later this year. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have his comments to make on that code, particularly as it relates to dog mess, a subject in which I know he has shown a commendable interest down the years.

I also look to manufacturers and retailers to reduce packaging to what is really needed. That will do a great deal to help——

Mr. Leighton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: Yes, but this will be the last occasion for some time.

Mr. Leighton: Is the Secretary of State aware that I have organised a meeting for tomorrow night with the Tidy Britain Group in Newham? One of the issues that will be discussed will be that of fines and the attitude of the police. What discussions has he had with the police? Existing legislation provides for a fine of £400, so what is the point of increasing the fine if the present law is not enforced? How many prosecutions have there been, and what discussions has the right hon. Gentleman had with the police to ensure that the law is enforced?

Mr. Patten: We have discussed all these issues with our colleagues in the Home Office, who have been in touch with the police. I referred earlier to magistrates courts and to the importance of not imposing derisory fines when people are convicted of littering. I do not think that I can add anything to what I said then.

Part V amends the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, which controls the keeping and use of radioactive materials and the accumulation and disposal of radioactive wastes. At the moment, no radioactive material can be kept or used unless a registration is first granted by my Department or the relevant territorial Department. Similarly, no radioactive waste may be accumulated or disposed of unless that is first authorised.

Our view is supported by the results of our public consultation exercise. It is that the Act continues to provide an effective control mechanism. The system of registrations and authorisations will remain, but a number of amendments will be made to this part of the Bill to improve its operation and extend its scope.

Part VI provides new safeguards against risks from genetically modified organisms. It lays the foundation for a comprehensive consent system for the control of the import, keeping or release to the environment of such organisms. Against the background of the increasingly rapid development of technology, the powers that we are seeking are innovatory, apt and timely.

Our approach, which has received wide public support, closely reflects the main recommendations of last July's report by the Royal Commission on environmental pollution. It is also consistent with European Community directives on a harmonised system to regulate genetically modified organisms.

Techniques for artifically altering an organism's genes have been exploited only within the past 20 years; yet biotechnology based on these techniques is today an established industry. Substances such as insulin could be produced only with great difficulty by other means.

Biotechnology has an excellent safety record. Increasingly, however, GMOs may be expected to have a wider environmental impact. Development has already reached the stage at which GMOs are routinely employed in contained factory processes. They may thus reach the wider environment in waste streams, or by accident. Other GMOs are being developed for specific functions such as pest control in the environment at large. Such products offer the prospect of great benefits, but progress depends on their safety being maintained. This part of the Bill is designed to ensure that the environmental risks are properly controlled and that the good safety record continues.

At the heart of the proposals is a requirement for any person who intends to import, keep or release a GMO to the environment to carry out a risk assessment. When necessary, my Department must be notified and in prescribed cases our consent must be obtained. I envisage making a comprehensive set of regulations setting out the details of the regime. We shall establish a unified system of control in which the new provisions will interlock with existing health and safety and product controls.

My right hon. Friends and I, and the Health and Safety Commission, will be advised on notifications and consent applications by a committee whose terms of reference will cover all safety and environmental aspects. I am pleased to announce that Professor John Beringer of Bristol university, who has wide relevant experience, has accepted an invitation to chair the committee.

I come now to the Government's proposals to strengthen the protection of the countryside. The Bill

[Mr. Patten]

establishes strong new conservation agencies in England, Scotland and Wales to take on the functions of the Nature Conservancy Council, and, in the Principality, those of the Countryside Commission. These provisions have been carefully designed to build on the experience and knowledge which the NCC and the Countryside Commission have built up over the last 40 years. They will ensure that their inheritance which includes a network of national nature reserves, sites of special scientific interest, national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty —is passed on smoothly to the three successor bodies.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Patten: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to get through most of what I intend to say about the countryside agencies, after which I shall gladly give way to him and other hon. Members.

The reforms are essential if we are to establish a more sensitive and accountable framework for conservation. It should be easier to co-ordinate the work of the new agencies rather better with those of Government. There will be clear lines of responsibility to the three Secretaries of State who have the task of integrating conservation with other land use policies. The NCC is a major executive and advisory agency, responsible for protecting more than 7 per cent. of the land surface of Great Britain.

I believe that the House will agree that the reporting lines to Ministers should be as clear as possible. It is Ministers who have to account for the use of those powers, and for the broad framework of policies and priorities for conservation policy. The framework for public regulation must also be sensitive to local needs and concerns. The voluntary approach to conservation in this country depends critically on obtaining the co-operation of individuals, local organisations and communities. We believe that the country agencies will be better placed to achieve this, as conservation continues to rise in importance on the public agenda.

The current arrangements for the NCC—hallowed though they may be by the passage of time—are actually anomalous in comparison with most other executive non-departmental public bodies acting in the environmental arena. In almost every other arena within my Department's ambit—the built heritage, water, rural development, sport, housing associations—there are separate non-departmental public bodies for Scotland, and in some cases for Wales, too. They report to my right hon. Friends. Where co-ordination is necessary—outside or inside Government—the necessary steps are taken.

This is a prosaic but fundamental aspect of the machinery of government and its relationship with non-departmental public bodies, which critics have largely overlooked. They seem to assume that wildlife in Wales and Scotland should be governed from Peterborough and Marsham street, rather than by the people and institutions in those countries. It is a strange and, frankly, patronising argument, which we reject. It is extraordinary for the party that wants a Parliament for Scotland, to argue that the Scottish people cannot be trusted to protect their own environment.

The new country agencies will be able to tailor the delivery of conservation more closely to regional and local needs. Nevertheless, the Government's conservation policies remain as strong as before, as we have demonstrated not only by passing the 1981 Act but by financing it to the tune of an increase of over 160 per cent. in real terms in the NCC's grant over the last decade. We shall also ensure that the new agencies receive funding which fully meets the conservation programmes that they will be required to undertake. There will be no return to the dark days experienced by the NCC as a result of the cuts that were forced on it by the last Government.

The Bill provides for the new Countryside Council for Wales to have responsibility for countryside issues as well as nature conservancy. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is to assume direct responsibility for nature conservancy in the Principality, it is only logical that he should assume responsibility for the complementary functions of the Countryside Commission. However, as the commission has only 14 staff in Wales, a separate body would not be viable. The Bill therefore establishes one body in Wales to deal with both the wildlife and countryside functions.

It will be essential for the new agencies to have the right leadership and commitment to their objectives. It is therefore with great pleasure that I am able to tell the House today that Lord Cranbrook has accepted my invitation to serve as the first chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council for England. He is a zoologist with a long track record of achievements in the conservation world, and he was a member of the Natural Environment Research Council from 1982 to 1989. He has always been a clear and independent voice for conservation, and I look forward to working with him. He has kindly agreed to serve in a shadow capacity in the run-up to the reorganisation, and I shall be making a formal announcement about the details shortly. Sir William Wilkinson, who has made a major contribution to the subject, has accepted my invitation to remain as chairman of the NCC until reorganisation.

While on the subject of appointments, I am now in a position to tell the House that we propose to appoint a most distinguished and independent scientist to be the first chairman of the joint committee, on which I will have more to say in a moment. Professor Fred Holliday, who is currently the vice-chancellor of Durham university, has accepted my invitation to serve in that capacity. I am sure that my hon. Friends and Opposition Members will welcome this news.

Professor Holliday has had a most distinguished career. He is an outstanding zoologist and has already served a period as chairman of the NCC, from 1977 to 1980. I am sure that he will bring this expertise to the joint committee, to the benefit of the three new bodies and to nature conservation as a whole. I also hope to appoint him in a new capacity shortly, so that I can have the benefit of his advice as the detailed arrangements for the work of the joint committee are put in place over the coming months.

Finally, before I leave the subject, I am delighted to say —this point was referred to before we began our debate —that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has separately announced that Mr. Magnus Magnusson has accepted his invitation to serve as the first chairman of the new NCC for Scotland.

The English, Welsh and Scottish agencies will operate within a firm statutory framework which will ensure that Great Britain and international issues are dealt with, and that there are comparable standards and protocols for

scientific work and the designation of sites. I have had many representations about maintaining these aspects of the current NCC remit. These are legitimate concerns which must be met under our plans.

The wider view is vital—whether to meet our European Community responsibilities to monitor endangered species, or to assist Government in implementing international wildlife conventions. This was recognised from the outset, and the options for meeting these objectives were discussed during the autumn with the NCC itself, and with a wide range of scientific opinion. As a result I was able to announce in the House in November that certain key responsibilities for international and Great Britain nature conservation issues, for setting scientific standards and for commissioning and supporting research on issues which transcend country boundaries would be exercised jointly by the three new country bodies, acting through a statutory joint committee. The Government's decision to appoint an independent chairman to the joint committee will enhance the confidence of the wider scientific community and ensure that Great Britain and international matters are viewed from a broad perspective. This will be covered in an amendment to the Bill, which the Government will table in Committee.

The country agencies will be required to ensure that the joint committee has adequate resources to provide appropriate scientific advice on matters within its remit. The Bill provides me with reserve powers to direct them to do so, If I believe that their own proposals are not adequate.

I should emphasise that the arrangements in the Bill, including the establishment of a joint committee under an independent chairman, meet all the main requirements which the full Nature Conservancy Council itself sought from Ministers, following its meeting to discuss reorganisation last November. The NCC asked for independent and properly resourced agencies for each country, properly backed up by science. Our proposals will set up such agencies. It asked for a co-ordinating committee with an independent chairman to deal with scientific, Great Britain and international issues. The Bill will establish one. It asked for a secretariat and technical unit to support the committee, and hence the country agencies. The Bill will allow for this. Furthermore, we will take the opportunity to bring Northern Ireland into the formal arrangements for the first time, so that we can obtain a United Kingdom as well as a Great Britain dimension to nature conservation policies.

The Bill also delivers two other important commitments. First, it guarantees that every existing NCC scientist—and indeed all existing members of the NCC's staff—will be offered posts in one of the successor bodies. This will ensure that the existing skills and expertise of the NCC are transferred to the new bodies. Secondly, the Bill will provide for the transfer of the NCC's existing property and commitments. This means that the many hundreds of management agreements which the NCC has negotiated will remain in force. It also means that our 235 national nature reserves will be passed on to the stewardship of the country body responsible for the area where they are located.

Each of the new agencies will inherit precisely the powers and duties of the present Nature Conservancy Council, including those to set up, manage and maintain nature reserves. I have been advised that the Bill definitely secures this, but if there is any lingering doubt, I shall be happy to see that it is removed.

I have no doubt that any reasonable person will view these reforms as a strong and flexible framework for countryside protection throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ron Davies: It would be churlish of those hon. Members who opposed the original proposals not to recognise the substantial concessions that the Secretary of State has announced this afternoon. I am grateful that he has come such a considerable way from the position outlined by his predecessor when the scheme was announced. However, will he acknowledge that there is still total opposition to the dismemberment of the NCC within that organisation? [Hon. Members: "No."] Perhaps those hon. Members who disagree will have the opportunity to put their point of view later.

The staff and membership of the NCC are still opposed to its dismemberment. The voluntary organisation is unanimous in its opposition to dismemberment of the NCC.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that two fundamental questions have not been answered? First, the science base will be undermined by the dismemberment, and nothing that the Secretary of State has said this afternoon has given us any assurances on that. Secondly, nature conservation transcends national boundaries. Issues that are important in Britain are important to the whole of western Europe. The Secretary of State should——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. That is enough for an intervention.

Mr. Davies: My final point——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is being unfair to the large number of hon. Members who wish to speak.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Ron Davies) said that there was widespread opposition to the proposals within the NCC, and to the proposals that I have announced this afternoon. As far as I am concerned, my proposals meet all the suggestions put to me by the full NCC council.

I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Caerphilly, and the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), to the fact that, among those bodies which appear to support our proposals, are the English, Scottish and Welsh committees, of the NCC. Indeed, the Welsh committee of the NCC has enjoyed, or even bathed in, the endorsement of the Leader of the Opposition, who has supported our proposals. As the CID says, I have documentary evidence to support that, should it be required.

As I said earlier, some issues need to be dealt with on a Great Britain basis, and that is why we are setting up a joint statutory committee. If the hon. Member for Caerphilly believes that scientists and public servants, such as Lord Cranbrook and Mr. Holliday, would connive to weaken the science base for nature conservancy, I suspect that he does not know as much about the subject as I thought he did.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If the NCC is so happy, why was Sir John Burnett, the vice-chairman, in the Lobby

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

at 2.30, anxious that hon. Members should continue to press the case that some of us have been pressing for months?

Have Sir William Wilkinson and Sir John Burnett agreed to the Secretary of State's proposals, and could he satisfy one lingering doubt? He talked about the comparable protocols in scientific research. Does that mean that there will be no duplication of scientifically scarce resources between Scotland, England and Wales?

Mr. Patten: I hope that there wil be no duplication, and that will be one of the tasks that the joint statutory committee will want to turn its attention to. That committee will also want to ensure that there is a common scientific base for work throughout Great Britain, but I hope that that does not lead to duplication of scarce scientific resources.

On the hon. Member's first question, I will not speak for individual members of the NCC, as I am sure that they can speak for themselves—indeed, they have not been slow to do so. The chairman of the NCC wrote to me, on behalf of the council, in November, setting out what he wanted me to do to make the proposals acceptable. I think that, with the best will in the world, I have met the council on every point.

Part VIII contains a number of small but important measures. In clause 110, we are taking new powers to regulate the trade in waste. I refer to that clause in response to earlier interventions on the subject.

Clause 111 allows for strengthened controls over the disposal of waste at sea. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, will say more on that subject later, if hon. Members wish.

In that part of the Bill, we are also giving statutory backing to payments to environmental bodies, such as the United Nations Environment Programme. That has been urged on us on a number of occasions by the Select Committee on the Environment, and I hope that it is pleased with the proposals.

Having outlined the main elements of the Bill, I shall mention one or two items that time has prevented us from including in the print. At a later stage, we shall introduce an amendment to require information on the environmental hazard of certain industrial chemicals—the so-called "existing chemicals" which have been sold and used for some time—as opposed to new chemicals marketed for the first time. My Department published a consultation paper on the proposals last year. Full account has been taken on the responses in preparing the amendment. I hope that the House will see that as a worthwhile step forward.

One issue that was covered in the consultation paper, which we have already included in clause 109, is the proposal to broaden the control powers currently contained in section 100 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced to the House on 30 November, we intend seeking powers in the Bill to enable us to prohibit the burning of all crop residues. The intention is that the prohibition will take effect in the late autumn of 1992 to give farmers time to adjust.

Hon. Members will recall that, before making his statement, my right hon. Friend conducted a thorough review, which included a careful examination of the effectiveness of existing controls. In last year's dry summer, burning straw proved particularly difficult. There were literally thousands of complaints from local authorities, fire brigades and the general public.

I should emphasise that the problems that arose were not confined to those burns which failed to comply with the byelaws and the National Farmers Union's code of practice. The reduction in public nuisance that a ban would represent will be obvious to anyone who lives, in particular, in eastern and southern England. Our proposals have been warmly welcomed on both sides of the House.

Hon. Members may have noticed that the Bill does not specifically address the question of Crown immunity. I do not intend that the Crown should be immune from the provisions of the Bill. Far from it: the Government should be seen to be in the lead in protecting the environment. The proposals I will be bringing forward will therefore ensure that where Government Departments do not come up to the required standards, that failure will be plainly identifiable.We will follow the provisions already put into practice in the food safety legislation, that the House is considering at the moment.

By any standards this is a major Bill. If we judge the importance of legislation by its length—I hope that the same is not true of speeches—I believe that the Bill should be seen as a measure of particular note. It will lay the foundation for pollution control well into the next century. The Bill is a demonstration of our commitment to improve and protect the environment of our own country and to play a major role in international environmental policy.

No-one can sensibly argue that we can cope with every environmental problem at home and abroad through some great green contraption, wheeled into the heart of government to provide comprehensive answers to every environmental question. To secure those environmental objectives which most of us share, we need a number of things. We require a good scientific base for our policies; we need to take a precautionary approach whenever it is justified; we require a sensible attitude to environmental economics; we need a sound legislative framework, which this Bill helps to provide; and we need a coherent intellectual framework for coping with all our environmental problems, and that we intend to set out in terms in our White Paper later this year.

When the time comes, as come it inevitably will, the Government will be content to be judged on their record in working for a cleaner and a greener Britain, and on their plans for contributing to the solution of general environmental problems.

The Bill is a central part of our strategy for the environment. I apologise for having spent so long setting out its merits to the House. I wanted to go through the provisions in detail, and to respond to every question, if I was able to do so. Therefore, I commend the Bill with enthusiasm to right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

5.9 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a second reading to the Environmental Protection Bill because of its failure to address the urgent and major problem of global warming; its failure to establish a comprehensive system of integrated pollution control administered by a fully independent, properly staffed and resourced Environmental Protection Executive; its failure to provide sufficient safeguards on the release of genetically

engineered organisms to the environment; the inclusion of hasty, ill conceived and arbitrary proposals to restructure the Nature Conservancy Council, and because it fails to incorporate into British law proposals arising from the European Community's Fourth Action Programme on the Environment and other international agreements.

There is no doubt that we need a Bill to protect the environment; unfortunately, this Bill is not it. The environment certainly is in grave danger, and action is urgently needed. The need for an environmental protection Bill has never been greater, but the Government's response to the major threats to the environment, such as global warming, is not to be found in the Bill. Unfortunately, it is still to be found at Noordwijk, where the Minister for the Environment and Countryside committed the Government, yet again, to refusing to accept an internationally agreed timetable and targets to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish intentionally to mislead the House. I was pleased and proud to lead the United Kingdom delegation to the Noordwijk conference. I therefore assure hon. Members that I was a party to the brokering of the declaration, which fixed a date for the reduction of CO_2 emissions to the year 2000. I should be most grateful if the hon. Gentleman would withdraw his comment.

Mr. Gould: I am afraid that the record simply says otherwise. The Minister may wish to adhere to his position, which he has taken since he returned from Noordwijk, but the record says otherwise, as do other independent observers who were present.

Mr. Trippier: May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, rather than reading some of the selective material produced in certain newspapers by journalists who did not attend the Noordwijk conference, he should read articles that appeared in *The Times* and *The Independent* which were written by journalists who were present? I assure the hon. Gentleman that I was a party to the signing of the declaration, which included that date, and played a significant part in brokering the deal.

Mr. Gould: As I suspected, the Minister will continue to adhere to his position. My information comes from those who were present and who participated in the conference. No doubt that argument will rumble on.

The Government's failures relate not only to their weaknesses in international negotiations but to their failures in domestic policy. Their response to these grave problems is to be found not in the Bill but in their difficulties in international negotiations and their continuing inability to adopt domestic policies on energy and transport to enable them to commit themselves to reductions in carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): If the hon. Gentleman is unable to accept the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister, will he accept that almost all the measures in the Bill have been widely discussed over several years, and that to introduce proposals on the greenhouse effect, however desirable or important, that would not be discussed or canvassed would lead to the sort of botched legislation that we should not support?

Mr. Gould: I shall deal with botched legislation, of which the Bill is a prime example.

The Bill fails to address those major issues. The claim that it is a "green Bill" is vainglorious nonsense. In so far as it has any colour, it is at best mottled, and blue rather than green. It owes more to Tory dogma and ideological obsessions—the free market, an antipathy to local government and to public spending, the protection of powerful vested interests and all those familiar landmarks of the Tory political landscape—than to any appreciation of the true scale and urgency of the threat to our environment.

That is not to say that there are no worthwhile or welcome provisions in the Bill. Much of the Bill is welcome —we shall try to improve on those parts in Committee —but overall it is a disappointment.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): As the hon. Gentleman likes so little in the Bill, perhaps he will tell the House, apart from the Control of Pollution Act 1974, which was largely a Conservative measure, how many environmental measures the last Labour Government enacted?

Mr. Gould: If the hon. Gentleman considers the record of the last Labour Government on matters such as energy conservation and public transport, which are crucial to environmental concerns, he will find that the comparison is favourable to that Government.

The Bill is disappointing because it is little more than a rag-bag of measures drawn from disparate sources, many of which have been dusted down and brought to life again simply to be cobbled together to give it a lick of green paint and the impression of action and cohesion. That is all designed to conceal the fact that the Government have neither the will nor the conceptual ability to understand what is truly required to protect our environment against modern challenges.

Even judged by those unheroic standards and as a rag-bag, hotch-potch measure, the Bill is still a disappointment. It fails, even in those terms, to legislate on some of the welcome, laudable and relatively minor commitments that the Tory party gave in successive manifestos. For example, where are the measures to protect common land and to safeguard public access to footpaths? Why was not the opportunity taken to legislate on those matters, given that the Government were clearly scrambling around for small measures to sustain their green reputation?

The problem is that the Bill is such a hotch-potch that it has ended up hopelessly and appallingly badly drafted. Everyone who has considered its provisions—including, I suspect, the Secretary of State's civil servants—agrees that it is riddled with imprecision, conflicting definitions and straightforward drafting errors. It gives the impression of a measure that has been hastily cobbled together and not properly thought through.

Even when the Secretary of State published the Bill, he had to announce that there were omissions in it that would be made good. Every time he opens his mouth on the subject, he announces yet another series of additions and amendments, and he was at it again today. I note that with gloomy foreboding, because I have seen the Government produce ill-prepared legislation that has required literally hundreds of Government amendments as it has proceeded through the House. I speak as a veteran of the Financial Services Bill and the Insolvency Bill, and my hon. Friends are veterans of the Local Government and Housing Bill.

[Mr. Gould]

We know what a burden is placed on the House and on Committee when the Government introduce badly thought out proposals such as these.

The Bill exhibits the other characteristic of a measure that has been badly thought out and badly drafted—it is replete with general powers to be created by the Secretary of State, with little sign of how they will be exercised or little assurance that they will be used. For all those reasons, we shall vote against the Bill, on the grounds specified in our reasoned amendment.

We have more detailed and specific reservations. Even in its major objective—the control of pollution—the Bill is seriously deficient. The introduction of integrated pollution control is welcome but long overdue, as the Secretary of State conceded. It was first recommended by the Royal Commission on environmental pollution as long ago as 1976. Even this part of the Bill is vitiated by a failure to understand the problem. There is little attempt to prevent pollution, merely an attempt to regulate it. The approach is to cast the Secretary of State in the role of the man who comes along with a shovel after the lord mayor's show—in other words, pollution is treated as something to be cleaned up afterwards rather than prevented from the outset.

There is little recognition that this will often be too late, that environmental damage is increasingly operating on a ratchet which clicks forward but cannot be turned back. What is needed is what the Labour party recommends in its policy review—a presumption against pollution. The benefit of the doubt must be given to the environment. We need to apply a precautionary principle: if in doubt, do not do it. It is not good enough to rely on the "polluter pays" principle—welcome though that may be—as evidence that even the Government recognise the need to intervene in the market and ensure that environmental costs are not always simply externalised.

There will be some forms of pollution which cannot be tolerated, whoever pays for it. The same point can be made in respect of the BATNEEC principle enshrined in the Bill —the obligation to use best available techniques not entailing excessive cost. How much unacceptable pollution is to be tolerated on the ground that prevention would be excessively costly? Costly to whom? What is excessive, and who is to judge?

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman has talked about the Labour Government's record. Why, when ordering the Drax power station, did they not fit flue gas desulphurisation equipment, although the problem was known? It was left to this Government to retrofit it at much greater cost.

Mr. Gould: I wish that the Government would proceed with that programme with rather more dispatch than they have shown.

The experience with other similar phrases in the statute, such as "best practicable means", and the interpretation placed upon them by the inspectorates that apply them do not inspire confidence that the community and the environment will be offered effective protection.

Similar doubts arise about other provisions in part I. Why will integrated controls apply to such a narrow range of pollutants? Why is the red list so restricted, applying to only 22 chemicals rather than the hundreds that are regulated in the United States? Why will it be so slow to take effect? Why are the standards that have been set so low—sometimes they are lower than current practice—that we will lose the advantage of what the experts call "technology forcing", whereby higher regulatory standards compel the development and application of new technology?

Are we still lumbered with the outdated view that fixing higher environmental standards means imposing a competitive burden on British industry, whereas our more successful rivals in Germany and Japan have repeatedly demonstrated that fixing higher standards confers upon them a technological lead and competitive advantage?

Why is there such imprecision in the relationship between Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and other authorities such as the National Rivers Authority? Do not those potentially damaging administrative problems show all too clearly the need for an environmental protection executive with comprehensive jurisdiction? Is not this omission from the Bill one of its primary flaws and defects?

What is the point, as the Secretary of State conceded, of creating a regulatory structure if there is no adequate machinery to enforce it? What reliance can be placed on Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution when it is notoriously under-researched and understaffed and its morale is consequently at rock bottom?

Are the Government ready to accept the recommendation of Friends of the Earth that a threefold increase in the staff of Her Majesty's inspectorate will be needed if the Bill is to be effective? Will the Government pay attention to their friends in the CBI, the Chemical Industries Association and even in the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors, all of which in their different ways have expressed grave fears and reservations about the inspectorate's effectiveness in its current state in regulating and monitoring the regulatory structure?

Why is there no overriding commitment to freedom of information? I listened with great interest to what the Secretary of State had to say on this subject. In common with, I suspect, all my hon. Friends, I was amazed at his initial remark on this subject, but I am afraid that our amazement turned to an all-too-familiar disappointment when we heard the weasel words, "subject to the exception of commercial confidentiality".

We know all too well, even if the Secretary of State does not, that that exception is so wide as to render virtually nugatory the fine words with which he tried to blind us. Why is no duty imposed on industry to carry out waste orders? These are some of the points in part I on which we wish to press the Government in Committee.

We have similar reservations about part II.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am following the hon. Gentleman's comments closely and should like to clear up one point. Is he saying that commercial confidentiality should never be taken into account in deciding whether to make environmental information available?

Mr. Gould: I am glad to answer that point. Of course we are not saying that. We say that a commitment to freedom of information—to public access to information provided to the inspectorate—is rendered nugatory if it is subjected to an unspecified and undefined exception in respect of commercial confidentiality. We will need to hear a great

deal more from the Secretary of State and hear more about the Bill before we can give any credence to his apparently wide-ranging assurances on this subject.

Mr. Patten: I should like if we can to secure a measure of agreement, because it seems as though we are not as far apart as I had thought. We will certainly publish the guidance of which we think the inspectorate and Ministers should take account in determining what constitutes legitimate confidentiality. I hope that we can publish that guidance before we reach that part of the Bill in Committee. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure what the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) is saying to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) out of the corner of her mouth, but perhaps it is part of the consensus building. I hope that, in the light of my comments, the hon. Gentleman will agree that our proposal is reasonable, balancing access to information and those occasional examples of commercial confidentiality which must be honoured.

Mr. Gould: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, because his intervention concedes the entire point that I was making. He has just admitted that he has yet to publish the information on which we will be expected to make a judgment. As we do not yet have that information and have had no assurances about what it will contain, we are right to be cautious about the apparent amplitude of the assurances that the right hon. Gentleman appeared to offer the House.

We will carefully look at what the Secretary of State produces. Let us see whether his actions and the words in his guidance note match the breadth of the commitment that he purported to give.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my hon. Friend aware of the situation in my borough involving a firm dealing in toxic waste called Leigh Interests, on which a Select Committee reported, stating that the relationship between the council and that firm was at an all-time low? Is my hon. Friend aware that, although there may be some limited improvements in the Bill, that firm will continue to operate in the borough and cause all the difficulties that it has been causing in the past two or three years? That is far from the substantial improvement that many of us locally would like to see.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend makes a point that I made earlier—the much touted move towards integrated pollution control will take a long time to come into effect and will have a pretty limited application.

In respect of parts I and II, we welcome recognition of the fact—this is unusual for the Government—that local authorities have a key role to play. We argue, as we have argued in the past, that for a long time local authorities have been local environmental protection agencies. They have been in the front line in the fight against pollution, waste and litter. But there is no point in creating new duties and functions in relation to pollution, waste management and litter unless resources are provided commensurate with those new duties. The explanatory and financial memorandum is laughably over-optimistic on that score. The Government must think again. Any excess of spending—even if mandatory—will fall disproportionately on poll tax payers under the new poll tax arrangements.

We believe that the Government have been over-optimistic in arguing that local authorities will cover their costs in a variety of ways. If the exercise of the new duties involves extra spending that has not been taken into account in the revenue support grant, the poll tax will rise by four times the amount of every item or unit of that additional spending, as the Secretary of State well knows. That means that the Government have a grave responsibility to ensure that resources are provided to local authorities for every aspect of the new duties and responsibilities that they are being asked to undertake under the Bill.

There are other aspects of part II with which we are unhappy. If the separation of waste disposal functions from waste regulation functions is so essential—and not merely, as we believe it to be, a prelude to privatisation—why is that not also true for Scotland? What is so different about Scotland? As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) asked in an earlier intervention, why is there nothing in the Bill to deal with waste reduction or packaging? Why are there no measures to deal with the problem at source? Why is there nothing about clean technology? If the Bill is meant to contain the Government's comprehensive statement of their policy on waste management, that policy is woefully deficient in those respects.

So far, we have been talking about errors of omission. But there are also errors of commission, the most notable of which is the proposal to dismember the Nature Conservancy Council.

Dr. Derek Ratcliffe, who recently retired as the NCC's chief scientist, wrote in *The Times* of 15 July:

"The Government's proposals to dismember the NCC are a potential disaster for nature conservation in Britain."

Nothing that has happened since—no expression of opinion from those primarily involved in nature conservancy, and nothing that the Secretary of State has announced today or in recent weeks and months—has changed that basic judgment or the accuracy of the view of that well-respected commentator.

The measure flatly contradicts any claim that the Bill may have to be a green Bill. It threatens major damage to nature conservancy in Britain. The dissolution of the Nature Conservancy Council will throw away 40 years of experience and scientific effort. The proposal threatens the destruction of an important and painfully constructed Great Britain-wide science base. It will deny the Government an essential expert adviser on matters of national concern and deprive the increasingly important international environmental effort of a powerful partner and participant.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): The hon. Gentleman is totally out of touch with present-day thinking. The majority of members of the Nature Conservancy Council are in favour of the proposal. We have a scientific committee with a most distinguished chairman and we look forward to the establishment of a satisfactory scientific base in the home countries.

Mr. Gould: Let me say straight away that I am the first to pay tribute to the heroic restraint shown by the NCC in public. I am absolutely satisfied that the NCC remains implacably opposed to the principle of its own destruction.

Sir Hector Monro: But I am a member.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman may be a member but he is not entitled to speak——

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Hon. Members: Give way!

Mr. Gould: If Conservative Members would cease their baying and allow me to hear what is happening on the Opposition Benches, I shall gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Thomas: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Welsh committee of the Nature Conservancy Council, building on its long experience of trying to extend its own scientific base and working alongside the other nature conservation agency in Wales—the Countryside Commission committee for Wales—warmly welcomed the proposals? I was lobbied both publicly and privately and asked to ensure that the Welsh Office does not surrender any of the ground that the commitee regards as a major strengthening of environmental conservation in Wales.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman is referring to a different matter. *[Laughter.]* Conservative Members' response shows how little they understand what is truly at issue. They do not understand the central concern of the Nature Conservancy Council. What is at issue is not the degree of devolution or arrangements in Wales or Scotland for the protection of the Welsh or Scottish environment.

The Opposition would welcome a substantial element of devolution, as I shall shortly say in terms. But we say, "Devolution, yes, but destruction and dissolution, no." Why is it necessary to dismember, destroy and dissolve the Nature Conservancy Council? That is the central question that the Secretary of State, for all his manoeuvring, has yet to resolve. He has not yet been able to square that circle, and I shall explain why in a moment.

The proposal moves in the opposite direction to the trend of international and European co-operation and standards throughout Europe and elsewhere, which is increasingly being regarded as the way forward in environmental protection. The proposal was introduced without consultation. It came as a bombshell to the NCC. It has few friends, if any, among conservationists. Virtually all the major conservation bodies oppose it, and that includes the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, a body whose name has been taken in vain by the Secretary of State for Scotland, who listed it as a supporter of the measure. That has been flatly contradicted by the APRS.

This provision, above all others in the Bill, is badly drafted. It fails—at least, it arguably fails—to provide the necessary power in the hands of the new council. In trying to deal with the question whether the Bill transfers to the council the absolutely essential power to establish, maintain and manage nature reserves, even the Secretary of State had to concede that he would need to take further advice to ensure that the Bill achieved that objective. It is hard to believe that such an omission or defect could be the consequence of mere incompetence.

Mr. Chris Patten: Let me make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that the legal advice that we have received from draftsmen is perfectly clear: we do not need to write that provision into the Bill. But if it is felt in Committee that we need both belt and braces, and if that point can be made overwhelmingly, I am content to write into the Bill what I am told at the moment is not necessary.

Mr. Gould: I am glad to have that assurance from the Secretary of State, but the very terms of his assurance and his earlier remarks show that even in his mind there remains a doubt that may have to be resolved.

Part VII of the Bill is unequal and complicated in its effect. It is internally inconsistent. It creates different structures for different parts of the country, and those structures are to be created according to different timetables.

Why has this friendless measure been introduced? The game was given away in the September edition of *Forestry and British Timber*. [HON. MEMBERS: "Really!"] Ah. Conservative Members believe that that is not a source on which one can rely. Nevertheless, I suspect that this is, indeed, the truth of the matter. An article in that publication makes it clear that Ministers have acted in this matter because they disliked the robust stance taken by the NCC against afforestation in the flow country. It says:

> "One of the tasks of the new Scottish natural heritage agency will be to investigate all SSSIs and sweep away the dross created by indiscriminate conservation."

There, I suspect, is the truth of the matter. That is the pressure that has been brought to bear on the Government to produce the measure, which has no logic or support to commend it.

Mr. Adley: I gather that the Welsh nationalists, the Scottish National party, the Social and Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party all take the same view on this issue. The sole exception is the Labour party. Do I take it, therefore, that the hon. Gentleman regards splendid isolation on political issues as matter for commendation?

Mr. Gould: Clearly the hon. Gentleman was not listening to me. It is perfectly clear that on this issue the Labour party is supported by all those involved in nature conservancy and the protection of the environment. That remains the case. Even today I received a copy of a lengthy letter addressed to the Secretary of State for Scotland by the Worldwide Fund for Nature's Scottish conservation office which expressed again, on behalf of that organisation and others which have been involved in conversations with the Secretary of State, fundamental reservations and opposition to the measure.

The Government may look for political allies, and that confirms my view that the Bill is a political measure. However, when we judge the measure according to nature conservancy and protecting the environment, I am content to look to allies with some expertise in that area.

Mr. Chris Patten: While the hon. Gentleman is on this point, will he clear up the issue about where the Leader of the Opposition stands in relation to this matter? Does the Leader of the Opposition agree with the political consensus referred to by hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), or has the Leader of the Opposition changed his mind? As the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) will be aware, on 6 November the Leader of the Opposition's secretary told one of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents:

> "Mr. Kinnock was grateful for the information provided and welcomes the proposal to establish a Countryside Council for Wales."

Is that still the position of the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Gould: The Secretary of State is being uncharacteristically slapdash. He failed to understand my earlier point, and his advisers have failed to draw his attention to *Hansard* of 7 December. In an Adjournment debate on that date, my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) referred to the point in the same terms that I have dealt with it.

The Secretary of State continues to confuse the extent of devolution in Wales and Scotland in nature conservancy and protection and the separate point about the destruction of the Nature Conservancy Council. We regard the latter point as being unacceptable and that destruction is condemned in Britain as a whole and in Scotland by such bodies as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Friends of the Earth and vast majority of the community concerned with such issues.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: How can the Labour party support the devolution of nature conservancy to Scotland without recognising that we must create a separate Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland? It is not convincing to claim that the two issues are separate.

Mr. Gould: I will gladly deal with that point. We are not opposed to some element of devolution and we would welcome that and intend to bring forward our proposals when we return to government. However, any element of devolution must be genuine devolution. It must not be achieved through the creation of a non-accountable quango based on a deal cobbled together between the Scottish Office and a minority of vested interests. It must be based on a genuine devolution affecting all of Scotland's interests, not just those of a powerful minority who want afforestation to proceed.

The devolution must be motivated by a genuine desire to improve the Scottish environment and it must not damage or fragment the increasingly international breadth of the conservation efforts being made throughout Europe and beyond. The Government's proposals fail on all those counts, and that is why we oppose the Bill.

The Secretary of State recognises the force and justice of our arguments. We must be clear that the proposals are not like other proposals that the Secretary of State inherited in other parts of the brief. We can perhaps forgive the Secretary of State for feeling himself to be locked in on such matters as the poll tax and water privatisation. We can understand that he may feel that he cannot do much about those matters. However, the Secretary of State must bear the responsibility for the proposals under consideration today.

The Secretary of State is unable to buck the deal which has been made. He has been unwilling to face up to the possibility of a Cabinet battle in order to rid himself of these unpopular and friendless measures. That is why he has come forward with an absolutely typical response. He has recognised the force of the argument and the need to maintain a national body to maintain the scientific base to participate in international arrangements and to advise the Government on national policy.

In recognising that, the right hon. Gentleman pulls the rug from under the proposals. In his attempt to deal with the force of the argument, he comes forward, typically, with a cosmetic arrangement which appears to give back what has been taken away, but really leaves the substance of the proposals unchanged. That is what is wrong with this part of the Bill, even with the changes announced by the Secretary of State today. Having destroyed the Nature Conservancy Council, he is trying to undo the damage with a device that will satisfy no one and which falls far short of what is required to make the new co-ordinating body effective.

That is why so many questions have been left unanswered. The RSPB wants to know where is the independent budget for the co-ordinating committee, where are the staff to carry out Great Britainwide functions and where are the powers to direct the agencies as to priorities in conservation matters. It is not too late for the Secretary of State to withdraw this ill-considered measure, and I urge him to do so now.

There is much more to be said. With regard to litter, the Secretary of State and I agree that filthy streets in our cities are one of the major and most viable manifestations of what is going wrong in Britain today. There is no point in willing the ends without willing the means.

With regard to genetically modified organisations—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry, I meant genetically modified organisms. However, we are well accustomed to dealing with such organisations when dealing with the Government. Part VI is also very important, and it is badly drafted. We will have to pay particular attention to that issue in Committee.

With regard to dumping at sea, the Bill perpetrates a confidence trick which diverts attention from the fact that Britain remains the only country which continues to dump dangerous chemicals in the North sea, and that should be a cause of shame and regret. However, the Government persist in refusing to accept any timetable in that matter or any commitment to ending that practice.

The Bill is defective, and it will provide an enormous amount of work for the Standing Committee if it is to be made effective and workable. We face that task with good will, and we intend to improve the Bill in Committee. We believe that it can be made more effective and that some of the deficiencies can be made good. If the Secretary of State will listen to reason, we believe that some of the Bill's mistakes and errors of commission can be remedied.

We do not give up hope on the Bill. That is why we are not flatly opposing it by simply voting against the Second Reading. We are opposing it on a reasoned amendment which sets out the basis of our disquiet, concern and disappointment. That is why we ask the House to support our reasoned amendment and to vote against the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind hon. Members of Mr. Speaker's announcement that the 10-minute limit on speeches will operate from 6 o'clock.

5.49 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I cannot for one moment accept the hyperbole of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) or the Labour party's ridiculous posture in imposing a three-line Whip on a Bill of this sort. I can only assume that, after a disastrous and dismal record of neglect in government, the Labour party is now trying to prove to the country that it is like the proverbial fig—green on the outside while remaining red on the inside.

I recognise that the hon. Gentleman has only recently come to these issues, but he should be far more careful about his sources than he clearly was in the preparation of

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

his speech. It is no good relying on sources reporting what the Minister said at a meeting which the Minister does not recognise, or relying on what the Nature Conservancy Council has said internally when all its public statements are quite to the contrary. The hon. Gentleman diminishes his arguments by making such a speech.

I must confess that I am a little disappointed with the Bill—*[Interruption.]* I should like to know what Bill is not a disappointment to most hon. Members. I am disappointed that the Bill does not contain all that I should like to see in it. Nevertheless, it contains a large number of useful and long-needed measures which it would be totally irresponsible to vote down.

I welcome part I because of the integrated pollution control regime that it introduces. As has been said on previous occasions, it is impossible to separate the interrelationship between land, water and air and the effect that emissions into one has upon all the others. Environmentalists outside the House have generally recognised that part I will introduce the most stringent form of pollution control to be found in Europe. That is something to be proud of, not to be thrown away lightly or for party political reasons.

However, I wish to put some questions to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the implementation of IPC. The burden of ensuring IPC will lie upon Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. In recent months, many worrying reports and rumours have circulated about the state of morale in HMIP. There have been successive resignations, overshadowed by the recent tragic death of its latest head, Brian Ponsford, to whom the Secretary of State rightly paid tribute. Does that not underline the existing lack of morale in HMIP? Can the prevailing idea that IPC can be achieved by asking one inspector to look after all aspects of pollution control on an industrial site be sound? Instead, would it not be better for separate disciplines, knowledge and training to be involved, quite apart from the distinct traditions of the different inspectorates that have been brought together to form HMIP? Surely IPC should not mean one man trying to tackle all the problems of air, land and water. It means multi-disciplinary teams of experts working together over a common problem.

I should like that idea to be promulgated within HMIP, and I should like my right hon. Friend to take charge of HMIP strategy, structure, formation and resources, to make sure that the present unhappy state can be corrected. My right hon. Friend referred to the number of inspectors in post and the Bill envisages the creation of 15 new inspectors, but the announcement in October 1988 that more inspectors will be recruited has not been implemented. My right hon. Friend has sought more money from the Treasury and has increased salary scales, but even now, because of the overall position of HMIP, he has not been as successful as he would like in the recruitment of a vital force to ensure that the legislation has teeth and is effective.

The difficulty of interface between HMIP and the National Rivers Authority must be resolved if difficult demarcation disputes are not to arise and affect the morale of one or other of those bodies. These are serious administrative matters for the Secretary of State. Hon. Members cannot deal with them on the Floor of the House —it is not within our competence to do so—but we can ask my right hon. Friend to give them personal attention.

I welcome, too, in part I the reinforcement of the principle that the polluter pays. The most significant provision in part I is the requirement for the payment of, I hope, substantial fees for authorisations. If a polluter finds that he must pay a lot of money to emit pollution, he will look at ways within his processes to reduce emissions so that he can get a cheaper authorisation in future. That is how I hope the system will work.

Like the hon. Member for Dagenham, I am a little troubled by the wording of the condition that processes should use the

"best available techniques not entailing excessive cost to prevent, and minimise releases of, prescribed substances".

On the face of it, the requirement seems admirable and should encourage waste minimisation, which is essential. It is certainly an advance on the old formula of "best practical means". However, I am not clear about the words "excessive cost". Do they mean excessive in proportion to the cost of the processes being carried out or excessive in proportion to the cost of cleaning up the environment or making good damage that is caused by processes?

The difference in definition is crucial and will make a great deal of difference to the way in which industry's attitudes are fashioned and altered by our legislation. I hope that that matter will be clarified in Committee to the satisfaction of hon. Members.

Part II deals with the control of waste management, a matter to which the Select Committee's report on toxic waste, which was published more than a year ago, is highly relevant. I warmly welcome those aspects of the Bill which strengthen controls on waste management. They are very much along the lines of my Committee's recommendations. In particular, the concept of duty of care from cradle to grave in respect of all waste is of outstanding importance.

It is important that we do not delay the passage of the Bill for other considerations. My right hon. Friend knows that I should have preferred the principle of strict liability, rather than reasonable care, to be imposed. Reasonable care raises the concept of negligence and all the defences that can arise in negligence cases. Again, the Standing Committee might care to examine that matter further. I should like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or my hon. Friend the Minister of State to tell me when the code of practice, which is at the heart of the duty of care, is to be issued for consultation because people outside the House are waiting anxiously to see the extent of the advice that is to be given about the duty of care.

My right hon. Friend referred to my next point and he knows that I must do so, too. He knows that I am more than disappointed that the Government have not accepted the Committee's recommendations for larger licensing units. We suggested that there should be 10 regulatory authorities for the United Kingdom, structured along the lines of the successful London Waste Regulation Authority, rather than continuing the existing framework of local authorities which, as was clearly shown in the evidence adduced by my Committee, has largely failed in the task given to it. Although some local authorities are obviously better than others, the bad ones are very, very bad.

We are left with the anxiety of how, when there are 173 authorities dealing with these matters, we can achieve the uniformity of practice and standards throughout the United Kingdom that is essential if we are not to perpetuate the current situation of rubbish and waste being moved from one part of the country to another simply because in that other area the regulations and controls are less strict and the local authority does not care or charge enough. I expect that we shall return to this matter in the future.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Hugh Rossi: I should like to, but if I am not careful I shall overstray the time limit.

There is an attempt in part II to meet our criticism of the poacher-gamekeeper regime that is operated by the current structure of local waste authorities, which are based partly on the county councils and partly on the district councils. However, the provisions seem to leave in place the system under which the variations in standards are so worrying.

My attention has been drawn to clause 41, which it is suggested will cause considerable confusion and difficulty —especially in London—the area with which I am most concerned as I am a London Member of Parliament. In Greater London, the waste disposal duties will be carried out by the four statutory authorities and 12 local authorities; the duties for waste collection will be carried out by the 33 London boroughs and the duties for waste regulation will rest, now, with the London Waste Regulation Authority. It is proposed that the duties for preparing waste disposal plans will rest with the waste regulation authorities for the whole of the United Kingdom, except in London. There, the duty will rest with the 33 London boroughs, which are the collection authorities, not even the disposal authorities. I cannot see the logic behind that framework.

The duty of the collection authorities to produce waste recycling plans requires consultation with the waste disposal authorities where the duties differ. However, in Greater London there is no requirement for the London boroughs to consult the London Waste Regulation Authority about either waste recycling plans or waste disposal plans.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucester, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Hugh Rossi: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I should rather not give way because I do not want to detain the House for too long.

The provisions that deal with the preparation of these most important plans do not lay down a timetable although we have had the experience of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Today, 15 years later, a disgracefully large number of local authorities have still not submitted their waste disposal plans to the Department. However, a Bill has been presented to us in which local authorities are to be required to produce further plans but which does not lay down a timetable. This matter requires remedy.

I could continue to discuss many other aspects of the Bill, but I am conscious that many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate and I do not want to abuse my opportunity. Generally speaking, the conclusions of the hon. Member for Dagenham about the Nature Conservancy Council are unfounded in view of the statements that my right hon. Friend has made today. My right hon. Friend has met all the objections that have been raised hitherto about the proposal for the creation of three regional bodies. I welcome especially the imposition of a duty on local authorities to keep their streets clean, rather than them merely having a power to do so. The residents of Haringey and the constituents of Hornsey and Wood Green will bless my right hon. Friend for that. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.6 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I shall endeavour to discuss my party's attitude to this big Bill in the 10 minutes available to me, but I shall obviously be unable to cover some points. First, I must make it clear that we shall support the Bill and that we do not support the Labour party's rather spurious opposition to the Bill as it stands. We should certainly like a more radical Bill, but that is different from whether one should support the Bill as it stands. There are urgent environmental problems in this country and it would be appropriate to ensure that the Bill addresses them. We shall table amendments accordingly.

The Bill does not address the need to change attitudes and habits. Nor does it deal with the problems of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions which it could address. The Bill does not take the action on chlorofluorocarbons which the West German Government already have in hand. It does not set adequate targets for recycling, although that may be achieved in Committee. The Bill does not reduce the pressure on local communities faced with an upsurge of new toxic waste disposal applications, to which I referred when I intervened in the Secretary of State's speech. The Bill does not set standards or codes of practice; it only enables those standards to be set. Such standards and codes of practice should be published while the Bill is in hand.

The Bill falls short in terms of actions taken by councils that the Liberal-Democrats control or influence. We are doing things that other authorities should be doing, and it is a pity that at this stage the Bill has not adopted the best practice that Liberal-Democrat councils have established throughout the country, which has been acknowledged not only by our party but by environmental organisations.

The Bill does not deal with public transport policy—legitimately I am sure that the Secretary of State will say —or the need to achieve the dramatic increases in energy efficiency that the Department of Energy says can be achieved but has no plans to set in hand. The Bill does not address the need to change manufacturing technology so that we eliminate many waste disposal problems and ensure that recycling is a characteristic that is built into product manufacture in the future. But although there are many gaps in the Bill, there are also many elements that we support and that we shall seek to strengthen by amendments.

It has already been said that the integrated pollution control section of the Bill is only an enabling section and that its real value will depend on the measures that the Secretary of State introduces and on the codes of practice and standards that are established. It is acknowledged that the present position has been reached by a piecemeal approach that needs sorting out. Unfortunately, now,

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

before the Bill is law, we have a proliferation of applications for planning permission and for new licences for existing toxic waste sites.

It looks like a break for cover before the new regulations come into effect. Most local authorities are understandably ducking out. Nobody wants to give planning permission or to issue licences for new toxic waste sites, and most of the applications will land on the Secretary of State's desk, if they have not already done so. Therefore, it is in the right hon. Gentleman's own interest to establish those standards so that he can use them as a means of judging applications.

In the past few weeks, I have visited a number of existing and proposed sites, in places like Doncaster, Walsall and Matlock, and the Rechem facility at Pontypool. I have seen how contentious those sites are, and how much local opposition there is. In Doncaster, Matlock and Walsall, there is concern about toxic waste getting into the water system, about processes that do not fulfil the claims that were made for them and about gases and carcinogenic materials being released into the atmosphere. The public are not sure that the existing set-up gives adequate safeguards.

The Rechem plant at Pontypool uses a system that I understand would be banned in West Germany. I was not happy to see a door through which toxic wastes and polychlorinated biphenyls were being loaded left open without a canopy. There had been a blow back, and I could see smoke seeping out while I was watching. Although the management told me that the draught would pull this through, I was not reassured by what I saw. I should like a system that would give more public assurance and more control.

I am also concerned about the fact that local authorities will be responsible for long-term monitoring of sites tht have been developed by commercial interests. It is not right that commercial interests should secure the profit and leave the public sector to underwrite the long-term protection of the environment and the costs of environmental damage that might be so produced.

Litter is not very exciting, but it causes widespread concern, and there is no doubt that the politicians who can solve the problem of dog excrement will be one of the most popular people in the country, because this problem continually recurs with no adequate resolution. The habits of many of our citizens are less than the best in dealing with their litter and environment. Without singling them out, I have to say that I am concerned when I walk and drive round the streets of Aberdeen to see the citizens throwing litter out of car windows and dropping it on the pavement without regard to the mess that they are causing or the cost of cleaning it up. We must encourage people to be more litter-conscious.

We have to be cautious about genetically modified organisms. There is a temptation to believe that we can play God and fix the environment. These processes should be treated on a case-by-case approach, and carte blanche should not be given to even the most reputable of organisations.

The most contentious issue is, predictably, the reform of the Nature Conservancy Council. My party has long called for the devolution of nature conservancy to Scotland and Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) was the first to call for the creation of a Scottish nature conservancy council. Therefore, we welcome the proposal, although we shall table some detailed amendments.

It is extraordinary that the Labour party opposes this move. Because this proposal was introduced by the previous Secretary of State, whom they understandably did not like, many of the environmental groups have not worked out the logic of the argument. I have asked them to explain why it is impossible for a Scottish body, a Welsh body and an English body to establish nature conservancy standards that meet the needs of the local communities and the environmentalists.

The issue is how these are constituted, whether they are genuinely independent and whether they can ensure that the local community and conservation interests are properly represented. We shall press to ensure that that is the case. We want adequate funding, and where there is a United Kingdom-wide case for joint research and advice, that should be produced. The Government have responded to many of the representations, and we look forward to clearing up the details in Committee.

As a Scottish Member of Parliament, I find some of the arguments against this proposal patronising and arrogant, and based on the assumption that people in England have a greater commitment to the environment than those of us who live, work and have our being in Scotland. Many do not realise that, in large parts of Scotland, people are the endangered species. They should be taken into account and their interests should be monitored. Fish farming must be done in an environmentally sensitive way, forestry must be to scale and in a way that takes account of local needs and species must be protected; a body based in Scotland and staffed by Scottish people would be capable of doing that.

I hope that the Secretary of State will go even further in his devolution and establish the body in the north of Scotland, because many of the most contentious environmental issues are there. Furthermore, the Government should accept that a Scottish body should be based outside the central belt and in the rural areas that it is designed to serve.

I have cantered over this long and detailed Bill as quickly as I can. It is useful, in that it gives us an opportunity to deal with legislation on environmental issues. It is not the radical Bill that is needed to tackle the global and major environmental problems, but it can address some of the other issues. We shall be tabling amendments to strengthen the Bill and to clarify the Government's points. We shall introduce some means to ensure that the Bill is more radical. However, we do not see any justification for opposing the Bill. The opportunity to legislate on environmental matters should be welcomed and the Labour party has made a tactical mistake in deciding to oppose it. It will be labelled a party that is not prepared to legislate on the environment and to use the opportunity presented by the Bill. Instead, it is trying to frustrate it.

6.15 pm

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): I am glad of the support of the Social and Liberal Democrats for much of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is proposing, and I agree with what the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said about nature conservation—a

subject that will occupy most of my speech. However, I shall start with a few remarks about other aspects of the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the White Paper on the environment to be published later this year. I hope that, before he draws his conclusions about what should be included in the White Paper, he will take account of the views that may be expressed by the many voluntary environmental organisations, and perhaps even go so far as to consult some of them.

Meanwhile, it can be reasonably claimed that the Bill is state-of-the-art legislation. It is good for environmental protection, for conservation, for the appearance of town and country and for my temper because, for once, I can give a Bill my wholehearted support—somthing that I have not been able to give to a lot of other legislation that we have had recently.

I am glad that the powers of local authorities to deal more easily with local nuisances, particularly noise, are to be strengthened. Noise is one of the most insidious and infuriating interferences in people's private lives, so I hope that local authorities will not hold back in the use of their new strength and power. I welcome the statutory duty on litter to be put on local authorities.

What will be the position with litter on roads and motorways? Will litter on motorways be the responsibility of the local authority through whose area the motorway runs, or will it be the responsibility of the Department of Transport? For the next three months, when grass and undergrowth are at their lowest, it will be evident that motorways are a disgrace. I hope that the duties imposed on local authorities to control litter will also apply to the Department of Transport.

I am glad to note that, since my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced his proposed ban on straw burning, plans for the construction of factories to make use of straw in paper production have been mooted. That shows yet again that necessity is the mother of invention. None the less, the Government must realise that, in some parts of the country, the ban on straw burning will result in difficulties, particularly where soils are thin and the incorporation of straw is difficult.

Farmers will wish to use more nitrogen to increase the breakdown of straw, and that will lead to difficulties with water purity. Additionally, areas such as Salisbury plain and the Cotswolds have thousands of adjacent acres of straw at harvest time. My right hon. Friends will have to give careful consideration to the possibility of a licensing system, if only to create fire breaks for fear that there may be a huge conflagration covering many thousands of acres.

In considering the proposed changes for nature conservation, I wish that we did not have to be where we are. In theory, the Nature Conservancy Council meets the need. It provides the Government with advice on conservation, it manages national nature reserves, informs and warns the public, and initiates inquiries and research. Annually it produces an excellent report, albeit not as attractive or as readable as that published by the Game Conservancy, of which I am chairman.

Why, therefore, propose changes in the structure of the NCC, amending the manner in which England, Scotland and Wales are to be dealt with? The answer is that the NCC is not working out in practice as well as it should or as well as it needs to. Based at Peterborough, it is virtually impossible for it to take full account of the delicate sensitivities of people in Scotland and Wales, let alone in some parts of England.

Too many of those who work for the NCC—I am sorry to have to say this—appear to have forgotten that, in advancing the cause of nature conservation, one cannot disregard or even discount the influence, interest and interests of the most important mammal on earth, man. Even when account has been taken of the importance of mankind, too often NCC personnel on the ground have not taken adequate account of mankind's interest and interests.

If we want successful conservation, we must take account of farmers, farm workers, landowners, foresters, forestry workers, gamekeepers and local councillors who are elected to represent local people and their opinions. I do not claim for a moment that all those people are right all the time. Far from it. Often they are wrong. If nature conservation is to proceed effectively, the feathers of all those assorted birds must be smoothed, not ruffled.

Far too often, feathers have been ruffled when some NCC employee, often young, perhaps still wet behind the ears and with limited experience and a limited view of life, lands on an important site for conservation, like Christopher Columbus having just discovered America, and behaves as if no one has ever been there before and certainly as if no one has paid any attention to its conservation. Yet, often, the basic reason why the site has retained the characteristics which give it its significance is that, by his action or purposeful inaction for the past 10, 20, 40 or even 50 years, the farmer or landowner has maintained the site, only to discover that from now on he is to be treated as a threat to its preservation.

When that happens, there is bound to be a political reaction. In this case, it has meant that many people do not have the confidence that they should have in the existing NCC structure. The moral to be drawn by all organisations and Government Departments is that they must pay attention to the people on the ground.

The Government are right to propose an alternative structure based on the component parts of the United Kingdom. I have no doubt that in future people in Scotland and Wales will be able to take pride in their council as they cannot do in the NCC at present. I have no doubt also that the Secretaries of State will compete furiously with each other to extract more money from the Treasury for the benefit of conservation.

The establishment of the joint committee is of fundamental importance, but there is a bit of an anomaly in that the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales has responsibility for nature conservation as well as the countryside, whereas the chairmen of the Nature Conservancy Council for England and for Scotland do not have countryside responsibilities. What consideration has my right hon. Friend given, if not to the amalgamation of the NCC and Countryside Commission, at least to their close involvement, perhaps through the joint committee?

What consideration has my right hon. Friend given to the advancement of nature conservation via the European Commission? It will become increasingly necessary to have the equivalent of a Nature Conservancy Council, perhaps on a mini basis, available to the Commission to advise it as the NCC advises our Government. If that council does not exist, it will be to the disadvantage of nature

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conservancy throughout Europe. It will make the task of producing sensible European legislation more difficult than it needs to be.

6.25 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): Like many others, I welcome many of the provisions in the Bill but, as they have said, it is extremely limited. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said, the crucial issues of global warming and acid rain are not mentioned——

Mr. Chris Patten *rose*——

Mr. Oakes: I am sorry not to give way, but I am under the 10-minute rule for speeches. Perhaps the Minister who replies can deal with the matter.

I am surprised that the Secretary of State said that the Bill was central to the Government's strategy for dealing with environmental pollution. Many people will be surprised at that because, as many Tory Members realise, we are talking about what will probably be the major battleground of the next general election. The British people are extremely worried about the environment. They voted massively, in protest, for the Green party at the European elections. I do not think that they will do that at the general election, but they will compare Conservative and Labour policies. If this Bill is central to the Government's strategy for dealing with environmental pollution, I am afraid that the electorate will find the Conservative party considerably wanting.

Although many of the aims of the Bill are laudable and well intentioned, I fear that the Government will not put money where their mouth is. It is clear from the explanatory and financial memorandum at the beginning of the Bill that the mean way in which resources are planned will not match the considerations that local authorities will be asked to express. These ideas have been around for a decade and some for longer. To use appropriate language, this is legislative uncontrolled tipping. All the matters are swept together in one Bill.

In particular, I welcome the provisions on recycling. I congratulate the Secretary of State on having got the word recycling and any idea of it into the Bill. Fifteen years ago, when I was Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, I had the duty of preparing a Green Paper on recycling. Out of it arose a waste management advisory council, which I, together with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) chaired. Both of us were keen on recycling. The public were keen on it. Industry was somewhat ambivalent. If my memory serves me correctly, local authorities were not at all keen, and civil servants hated the whole idea. That is why I congratulate the Secretary of State on including recycling in the Bill.

There are many problems. The Bill does not answer all the questions about recycling.

Mr. Marland: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Oakes: I should like to, but I cannot, because of the 10-minute limit.

We should tackle recycling by naming the substances to be recycled—paper, plastics, bottles, cardboard and aluminium—in the Bill.

Mr. Marland: Not scrap?

Mr. Oakes: Scrap is dealt with by recycling agencies other than local authorities.

Mr. Marland: The right hon. Gentleman made a mistake in his Bill. Will he give way?

Mr. Oakes: No. The 10-minute rule is in force and I must make my speech in that time.

The Government should consider placing receptacles at all supermarkets of a certain size and at off-licences so that those shops' waste materials can be collected. The public are keen on recycling if the facilities are provided for them to do so. I wish that the Government had used the Bill to impose a duty on existing supermarkets, new supermarkets and off-licences to make provision for such collection points in the curtilages of their car parks.

A deposit system on bottles should also be reintroduced. That may not be within the purview of the Department of the Environment, but that was the system that operated when I was a young chap. One could return beer bottles, pop bottles and all the rest and one received a penny or tuppence on them. I am certain that the public would welcome the reintroduction of that system, but I am not sure about the retailers. The Government, however, should take the initiative.

When I was a Minister, various local authorities pointed out to me—the rule still applies—that the market for such things as waste paper is fickle. The Government should consider the possibility of the bottom falling out of that market. That happens from time to time, and the local authorities that recycle paper are left with vast stacks of it. That occurs because, at the time, it so happens that it is cheaper for manufacturers to use virgin trees and forests than recycled paper. The Government should stabilise that market by insisting that certain products are made from recycled paper only.

I am glad that there are provisions on litter in the Bill as we have become a filthy nation. Foreigners always remark on the state of our streets, particularly in cities. A British citizen who has lived abroad for a length of time, and who comes back, is appalled at the state of our streets, public places and Underground stations. An initiative undertaken in the city of Westminster has supposedly made great strides, but Westminster is still filthy.

The public are, of course, to blame for dropping litter. The Government, however, bear some blame as they have borne down so heavily on local authorities that those authorities are unable to spend the money that they did on cleaning up the streets, or emptying the bins. Local authorities provide litter bins at capital cost, but they do not have the money to spend on the manpower needed to empty them. When that happens, the worst of all situations arises, with overflowing litter bins causing litter to be blown across the streets. The Government should carry some blame for our little problem.

The explanatory and financial memorandum of the Bill states:

> "The duty to keep land clear of litter and refuse may entail some additional costs for some authorities."

There is no doubt that that duty will entail additional costs for all authorities. When the Secretary of State attends the next revenue support grant meeting, he should bear that in mind. The Government have omitted to recognise that the

collection of litter is manpower-intensive. The only capital plant that is needed is a sack and a spike, but many people are needed to pick up the litter.

There is no mention in the Bill of one of the principal causes of pollution—dogs.

Mr. Chris Patten: Dog faeces are mentioned.

Mr. Oakes: That may be so, but there is nothing about what should happen to dog owners. It is no use putting up notices about prosecutions should a dog foul a pavement —there are many loose dogs and they are notably illiterate. Unless something is done to provide a dog registration scheme, the problem will get worse. That would be the suitable answer to deal with people who turn their dogs loose on school playing fields for the purpose of fouling that area.

There is much in the Bill that I like, but there is much more that should be included.

6.36 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I give a broad, genuine welcome for a substantial measure that covers a number of important areas.

The major items in the Bill have been out for discussion for two or three years, so it is right and proper to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). Sometimes he is not the obvious model for every conservationist, but, as originator of the Bill in draft form, he deserves full tribute.

I also pay tribute to the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), who has temporarily left the Chamber. In a good speech, he set out precisely why many hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber who speak after him will no doubt sound like Little Sir Echo, such is his command of the subject. The leadership that he gives to the Committee is extremely good.

Integrated pollution control represents the central part of the Bill, and associated with that is waste minimisation. When the Select Committee visited the United States during its inquiry, it was brought home to us that waste minimisation is the starting point for tackling waste disposal. It is no use looking at what one has at the end: one must find ways in which to reduce the waste in the first place. I welcome the emphasis on waste minimisation in part I.

When we move on to the best available techniques for such waste minimisation, we shall need detailed definitions within the regulations so that industry and commerce have some reasonable idea about the route that they should follow. Arguably, waste minimisation could also crop up with advantage elsewhere in the Bill. In Committee, we may discover other ways in which to extend that process.

Hon. Members have already spoken about the need for adequate resources at the centre of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The Bill speaks of the financial impact of an increase of 30 members to that inspectorate, but I believe that that increase will be the bare minimum in terms of the work that will be needed from that body in the future.

There is also a particular need to clarify the relationship between parts I and II of the Bill. In that regard, I am picking up points not only made by the Confederation of British Industry, but by the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors, whose members are the major operators in this sphere. I have received a letter which states:

> "Part I introduces integrated pollution control for prescribed processes and prescribed substances, to be applied by authorisations granted by . . . HMIP or, in cases to be designated in respect of air emissions only, by a local authority. IPC is intended to control pollution caused by the release of substances into air, water or land. But, most substances released into land are likely to be waste materials —which are to be dealt with under part II of the Bill."

There is some uncertainty about how parts I and II link together, particularly as part I will be the responsibility of HMIP, whereas part II will be the resposibility of the waste regulatory authorities. The House would not want unfairly and unneccessarily to burden businesses with two totally separate lots of controls if that can be avoided.

On waste disposal, my right hon. Friend's earlier comments show that he has taken on board that fact that parts of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 were simply inoperable. That was, and is, the central criticism of the Act. It is welcome to see in clause 31 that he is tackling the nonsense whereby the operator of a site taking waste disposal material may simply surrender the licence and walk away as if he had no other responsibilities. It is extraordinary that we passed such legislation all those years ago, and its rectification is overdue.

I give an unqualified welcome to clause 40, which deals with recycling and the necessity for local authority plans. As many hon. Members know, this country produces 18 million tonnes per annum of domestic waste, of which we currently recycle 2·7 million tonnes—about 15 per cent. That compares with 50 per cent. in West Germany and 60 per cent. in Denmark. My right hon. Friend has taken on board the necessity to improve those low figures, which are partly the consequence of the highly variable skills of local authorities—which were referred to by previous speakers. Some local authorities are very good indeed, while others have hardly started to tackle the issue.

My right hon. Friend must ensure that the plans which the local authorities are required to produce, are produced. We would not want to be coming back here 15 or 16 years after this Bill is enacted, as we are having to do because a number of plans under the 1974 Act are still not being produced by local authorities.

I shall introduce what may be a minority view when I comment on clauses 109 and 110, which deal with the control which the Secretary of State is to have over the shipment of waste. I am concerned that it is easy, in an emotional response, to say yes, the Government and my right hon. Friend or his successors must have such powers. I pause and suggest that proper, good and safe waste disposal does and will require substantial capital investment, some certainty of market and all the proper skills expected in a developed market and science. It requires some certainty.

If there are materials such as chemicals that we do not wish to import or tranship, we should spell that out in legislation. Logically, that is the way to do it. We should say that we want no truck with such materials. My fear is that under clauses 109 and 110—I see from one or two nods that I may not be in the minority—whoever is in my right hon. Friend's position will find that he or she has created a rod for his or her own back. At the first hint of something different coming in—it may be less dangerous than many things that we currently import for a wide

[Mr. Robin Squire]

variety of uses—my right hon. Friend will be pressurised into banning it. It may be right to do so, but a better approach is to spell out in advance what we want and do not want.

As the originator of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, I can only welcome as overdue the inclusion in the Bill of clauses 18 and 54 which deal with public information registers. They face up squarely to the need for the public to be better informed about such matters and provide an opportunity for discussion, when it takes place, to be rational rather than emotional. The exchanges between my right hon. Friend and Opposition spokesmen marginally improved my knowledge of this matter. I recognise that there will be grounds for commercial confidentiality. However, I urge my right hon. Friend to resist stoutly any suggestions that he faces bloodcurdling fears and tremors from industry. In my experience, most of the forebodings about public information and availability turn out to be groundless once the system is in operation.

My last detailed point relates to noise pollution. Clause 64 could be taken to refer to noise pollution, among various other forms of pollution. It simplifies the procedures for abating nuisances. I welcome that, but I fear that it will not be enough on its own. Noise, particularly in city areas, is all-pervasive, and arguably one of the biggest pollutants of all after poverty. There is an enforcement problem, which may be partly due to the absence of a simple and agreed measurement of what constitutes unacceptable noise. I note that a committee is to report to my right hon. Friend in due course. Its findings may not be included in this measure, but I hope that they will be included in a future measure.

My right hon. Friend wrote a good book, "The Tory Case" which I read over Christmas. In it, he said:

> "We may stand a better chance of encouraging man to have more respect for nature than of inducing man to have more respect for man".

The Bill encourages that respect. I give it my full endorsement and look forward to serving on the Committee.

6.47 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): As Chairman of the Welsh Select Committee currently undertaking an inquiry into toxic waste disposal in Wales, I was grateful for this opportunity to make, first, some introductory remarks. The activities of the Department of the Environment must be watched carefully. Its ducking and diving on the 1976 directive on bathing water of the EC is a classic example of its activities. To avoid implementing the directive, the Department defined a bathing beach in such a way that not a single bathing beach existed in Wales. The directive was therefore rendered inapplicable in Wales because it applied only to beaches used for bathing.

The Association of County Councils says that it is over-optimistic for the Government to assume that the Bill will have no significant cost implications for waste disposal authorities. There will be a need for extra skilled staff, which will involve increased costs. The revenue support grant arrangements are so tightly set that the spending incurred under the Bill will mean that those additional costs will cause councils to incur penalties which have to be paid for by poll tax payments.

The Government's response to environmental matters during the past 10 years was summed up in one word in last year's report on toxic waste produced by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. The word was "dilatory". Massive gaps in the legislation have remained for 10 years, causing major environmental damage.

Many varied tests on many aspects may be applied to the Bill. I shall confine myself to asking the Secretary of State whether he is satisfied that the following three issues will be resolved following the passage of this measure.

First, on 8 December 1989, a technical report, due to have been published in 1988, appeared from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. It established the background levels of PCBs, furans and dioxins in British soils. For PCBs, the range was between 1·7 and 32 parts per billion. Six of the 78 random sample points in Britain suggested local contamination because the samples were significantly higher than the background level. The highest of those was at ordnance survey grid reference number SN 51350100, which is near Bryntirion hospital, Llanelli. The PCB level is 1,199 parts per billion, rather higher than the maximum background range of 32 parts per billion. Twelve of the 78 sample points were significantly above background levels of dioxins and furans. SN 51350100 has the highest readings of all the sample points in Britain for four dioxins and two furans. Will the Bill contain provisions for establishing the source of local contamination at each of these sites, to assess the environmental or health effects of such contamination and to make the resources available for any necessary remedial action?

In June 1988, the hazardous wastes inspectorate produced its third report. On page 14, it mentions visits that the inspectors made to 15 hospital incinerators in four counties examining the compliance of hospital incinerators with waste management paper No. 25 on clinical waste. It concluded:

> "if the hospitals visited are typical of the national picture then the situation is deplorable. Those seen operate to standards which would not be permitted by a similar operation in the private sector unprotected by Crown immunity."

As small hospital incinerators are still protected by that immunity, will the Bill remove Crown immunity from all hospital incinerators so that the public can have full confidence that all the micro-organisms in clinical waste are safely destroyed by this method of disposal?

HMIP has frequently emphasised the problems associated with landfill waste disposal sites, and I have a number of questions to ask the Minister about them. Will the Bill make it a legal requirement for the waste regulation authorities to conform to the frequency of site visits laid down in the waste management papers issued by the Department? Secondly, will the Bill make it a condition for the issuing of a site licence that the applicant has to demonstrate a certain defined minimum standard of waste management education, training and experience? Thirdly, will the Bill provide for ensuring that waste regulatory officers hold a specified minimum standard of education, training and experience in waste management?

Fourthly, will the Bill make it impossible for any public footpath to cross a landfill site? Fifthly, will it enable a waste disposal authority to refuse to issue a licence when a landfill is proposed on a site of special scientific interest? Sixthly, will the Bill provide funds for research into co-disposal, so that, within the European Community,

Britain will have, for the first time, substantive scientific evidence to show the suitability of this method for the disposal of industrial waste?

Seventhly, will the Bill provide funds for research into safe alternatives to CFCs, so that harmful materials can be banned at the earliest opportunity? Eighthly, will the Bill provide funds for research into cheaper methods of removing all CFCs from refrigerators and freezers, including those present in the insulating material, before these consumer durables are landfilled? Ninthly, will the Bill make funds available for research into new methods of microbiological degradation of PCBs in old closed landfills? Lastly, will the Bill give statutory backing to voluntary groupings of waste regulation authorities to pool their skills and powers so that they can operate consistent and coherent policies?

The Bill is of great public interest, yet there must be serious doubts about the degree to which it meets the needs that have been clearly spelt out in the various reports from the Department of the Environment inspectors——

Mr. Trippier: In view of the questions that the hon. Gentleman has asked me, may I ask him one before he sits down? What is his view on the reorganisation of the Nature Conservancy Council?

Mr. Wardell: The Minister has asked me a question that I have not dealt with at all and taken up some of my valuable time in so doing. As I briefly mentioned, I hope very much that a site licence will be able to be refused by a local authority if a site of special scientific interest is on a proposed landfill site.

It is crucial that the number, quality and morale of members of HMIP are kept up to standard; that is vital to enable its responsibilities to be fulfilled. The proposed increase of 30 in the complement of HMIP, mainly to deal with a newly integrated pollution control regime under part I, is wholly inadequate.

As for access to information, I hope that the Government will alter their view. Under the Bill as drafted it will not be possible for a member of the public to appeal against a decision when reasons have been given in terms of commercial confidentiality for denying him access to the public register.

The Bill has the potential to become a great Act, but before it can, the Secretary of State must be ready to improve it. I sincerely hope that he will.

6.55 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Before I start my speech, I hope that it is not out of order to say that the person whom we miss on the Conservative Benches is our former colleague, John Heddle, whom I know would have been here today. Perhaps I may be allowed to pay a passing tribute to him and to offer our sympthy to his family.

I thought that the speech by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) was dreadful; he did himself and the House no good. I have been looking at the speech by Edith Summerskill, who led for the Labour party on Second Reading of the Clean Air Act 1956, and I commend it to the hon. Member for Dagenham as the way in which a serious and sensible Opposition might present a more constructive approach when we are trying to grapple with environmental problems.

The Clean Air Act was a Government Act, but its godfather was Gerald Nabarro. The Conservative party, Government members and Back Benchers, has a good record on environmental matters. It was the Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) who established the Department of the Environment through their White Paper on 15 October 1970, and the Secretary of State was my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker).

The establishment of the Department of the Environment encompassed transport matters. The White Paper said:

> "It is increasingly accepted that maintaining a decent environment, improving people's living conditions and providing for adequate transport facilities all come together in the planning of development."

Although I find it slightly regrettable that there is little mention of transport in this Bill, I certainly hope that we shall find ways of including transport industries in the definitions in some of the clauses.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's speech to the Town and Country Planning Association on 27 November last year was important, and it set out the essential guidelines for incorporating transport matters in the ambit of the environment. I share his view that we must wholly reassess the criteria for choosing whether to invest in roads or rail if we are to reach the correct environmental decisions while grappling with our transport policy. Environmental considerations must be a priority in transport policy—something that we have never yet achieved in legislation in this country.

The principle in the Bill that the polluter pays is one with which I am sure all hon. Members agree, but will my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside accept the proposition that, if private pleasure and convenience conflict with public health and welfare in environmental matters, the Government must uphold the latter?

The oil companies and manufacturers of motor cars, trucks and buses will resist any suggestion that the transport industries should come within the purview of the Bill. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will stand up to whatever powerful interests may try to oppose what he is attempting to do.

Little attention is paid in the Bill to oil pollution at sea. The rubric to clause 111 refers to

> "Deposits of substances and articles in the sea, etc."

The hon. Member for Dagenham, who unfortunately left the Chamber as soon as he had finished his speech, joined me in voting for a new clause that I tabled in Committee when the Merchant Shipping Bill was being considered in 1979. Its purpose was to make the owner rather than the carrier of the substance—oil at sea—liable for any pollution. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider introducing a provision in clause 111 to cover oil pollution.

As I read the clause, dumping at sea presupposes a deliberate act. We must also try to ensure that accidents do not occur because of inadequate vehicles—the rusty buckets that are still used by certain people as they carry their oil cargoes across the oceans of the world.

I am also interested in clause 63, about which I intervened when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was speaking. The clause refers to smoke, smell and noise from premises. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) that noise is an

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extremely serious form of pollution. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) was sitting beside me when I intervened in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. He told me that under the Theft Act "vehicles" are considered as "premises". Is it the Minister's view that the activities which are outlined in clause 63 encompasses vehicles? Other colleagues have referred to legislation for which they can claim parentage. I mention in passing the Motor Cycle Noise Act 1987, which I understand is now a candidate for European legislation. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell me something about that, though not necessarily this evening.

Air pollution affects us all. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that we could not legislate for the whole of Europe, let alone the whole of the world. I hope, however, that Ministers will draw the European Commission's attention to the fact that, although this country has its air pollution problems, those in other EEC countries are far worse than ours. I have had the opportunity recently to see and smell the atmosphere in Bilbao and Barcelona. If the Government and the Conservative party sincerely adhere to the European cause, we must try to persuade the European Community, and Mr. Delors, to spend more time on environmental matters, particularly air pollution. No one is taking much interest in that at the moment.

As for clause 71, I mention it entirely on my wife's behalf. She has a bee in her bonnet about plastic sacks of fertiliser littering the countryside, particularly those ghastly midnight blue sacks. Will the "Offence of leaving litter", the rubric to clause 71, apply to those ghastly eyesores, plastic sacks of fertiliser? Will proximity to footpaths and other public places be a sufficient means of catching people who insist on littering the countryside with such eyesores? Presumably the Government believe that it is necessary to exclude private property from the Bill. However, a good deal of public property is visible from private property, and vice versa. I hope that consideration will be given to making sure that those who litter the countryside with those wretched sacks are caught under clause 71, either as it stands or as it might be amended.

This is a very important Bill. I hope that the hon. Member for Dagenham will come to recognise that his speech was not worthy of the occasion. Every hon. Member ought to recognise that half a loaf is better than none. The hon. Gentleman's proposition that no loaf is better than half a loaf is not one on which he will carry the rest of the House with him.

7.5 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I do not agree with the criticism of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), but I agree with his wife about blue plastic sacks. There was a lot to be said for the old jute ones. They were almost always returnable and they made for profitable recycling.

I judge the Bill against my background. I was born in Manchester. I was a wartime evacuee to the Ceriog valley in north Wales where I spent my early years on a hill farm. I returned there regularly on holiday until I was about 18. I was struck by that hill farmer's ambition. It was not to make vast profits, but to make a living for himself and his wife and in particular to pass on the farm in good heart to the next generation. His farm was run on that basis. A small number of farmers still apply that principle. What that farmer did on his farm coloured my political thinking.

The present capitalist system fails completely to meet that ideal. That is why I am a democratic Socialist. Every time I returned from north Wales to Manchester, I saw the effects of 200 years of capitalism and the pollution—the sulphurous fumes from coal tips and the rubbish—that it had created. All the rivers around Manchester had been polluted. When bleach works were set up in the 19th century, they leapfrogged each other up the rivers in their search for clean water. All of them were only too happy to pollute the rivers. Smoke and dirt from factory chimneys has polluted Manchester for more than 100 years.

Capitalism is based on the idea that profits must be made. There has to be an alternative to that system. We need something better than a capitalist system based only on profits. It is not only capitalism in the western world that is causing pollution. State capitalism in eastern Europe is just as defective. As soon as the democratic element is taken away and people no longer have the right to know about and debate these matters, major problems are created. We have faced similar problems. Secrecy surrounded the nuclear power industry because of its links with defence, with the result that all sorts of things went on which would never have happened if there had been proper democratic debate.

We have to ask whether the Bill will tame capitalism and we must ensure that it does not replace private capitalism with state capitalism. People need free access to information, the skill to evaluate it and the self-confidence to argue their case. They need to be on an equal footing, so that their decisions cannot be bought or sold. Democratic Socialism offers that alternative. I measure the Bill against that background.

Does the Bill offer us the prospect of handing over this country, and our planet, in good heart to future generations? Does it control the greed of companies? Companies have to make profits to survive, but do they make profits at the expense of somebody else? Does the Bill ensure that people have the necessary knowledge to evaluate what is good for them, the country and the planet? The Bill falls far short of those requirements.

My first criticism is the way that the Government abolished the Greater Manchester council, which had responsibility for waste disposal. Councillor Dennis Fogg, the chairman, and the other members of the new Manchester waste disposal authority and their officials have done their best, but when one reduces the democratic element, one makes it harder for them to be affected.

If we are to tackle the problems of waste disposal in Britain, we have to involve people. Greater Manchester waste disposal authority can get rid of rubbish, but the real question is how to stop creating so much of it. The authority is considering turning rubbish into oil. It has a system for reclaiming tin cans and paper, and there are plenty of bottle banks in Greater Manchester. There are many voluntary schemes to collect paper and aluminium cans. Engine oil is being reclaimed, and refrigerators are being collected. However, unless we go further and convince people that they must stop creating so much waste, we shall not solve the problem.

People must be asked to examine what they buy, and how it is packaged, used and disposed of. We have become

a throwaway society. Only by getting people democratically to debate the issues will we create a society in which we demand that goods are made to last and we will start to cherish them.

The leisure and pleasure industry is, in many ways, as big a polluter as industry. We all have more leisure time, and we must ensure that we do not create the problems that industry used to create.

Many people enjoy keeping pets. As other hon. Members have said, one person's dog is another person's problem with dog excreta. One person's chance to admire the Lake District—as hundreds of thousands of people do each year—becomes somebody else's traffic jam. One person's opportunity to enjoy a run along the Pennine way will cause erosion problems and someone else, perhaps an elderly or disabled person, will have to struggle up a different path.

One may enjoy a drink of Coca Cola on a mountainside, but find that someone else does not take the trouble to take his can back with him. Someone goes rock climbing, puts a hand into a crevice, finds a rusty tin can, and gets a nasty cut. Leisure causes many problems.

I am disappointed by the proposals in the Bill to reorganise the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council. The Bill does not seem to tackle the problems. There should have been a more radical consideration of how to link national parks and conservation and leisure interests in the countryside. The measures in the Bill owe something to Scottish Ministers' desire to make profits out of the countryside.

I have to watch the time, so I shall move on to one issue about which I am particularly concerned—the destruction of peat lands in Britain. It is nice to go to the garden centre, pick up a bag of peat and put it around the flowers. One feels that one is doing one's little bit for greenery, but one is destroying a natural habitat. We must use more compost.

Huge amounts of limestone pavement are being torn up for people's gardens. That is appalling. Right hon. and hon. Members fought hard on wildlife and countryside legislation, and we got assurances from the Government, but nothing has happened.

Let us consider areas in Greater Manchester that have been polluted. For example, there are the problems of methane gas seepage from tips, to which I referred. We must find the resources to clean them up.

There is also the problem of having enough sufficiently qualified staff to enforce the process, because if one does not have the staff, one will not get a solution.

I am disappointed that the Government did not include provisions for proper access to the countryside in the Bill. Time and again we had promises from the Government that they would do that, but they ran away from them. The Government ought to introduce a clear measure to enable people to have access to the countryside.

The Bill merely tinkers at the edges of green issues. It is not a truly green Bill and it will not leave Britain in good heart for the future. Nor will it give the people in Britain the democratic opportunity to understand green issues and to influence them by their decisions. The Bill is a great missed opportunity.

7.15 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): I disagree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who said that his experiences in Manchester had led him to believe that environmental problems were a failure of capitalism. One need only visit eastern Europe to see the failures of Socialism, and to learn the real lesson —not the one given by the hon. Gentleman—that democracy and open government are necessary to prevent environmental deterioration and that there is a link between wealth, economic growth and the ability to do something about the environment. The lack of those factors has caused the failures in eastern Europe. They will be a challenge for the European Community and for Britain, as a member of the Community, although it will be difficult to tackle the problem in the next few years. How do we help eastern Europe to tackle its environmental problems, without subsidising it to pollute further?

I welcome the Bill. As the speeches of other members of the Select Committee on the Environment have made clear and, no doubt, will make clear later in the debate, the Bill has our fingerprints all over it. The Bill must be seen against the background of the Water Act 1989 and the promised White Paper on environmental pollution which is due in the autumn. Step by step, we are moving towards an integrated environmental policy, and I think that that is right. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) that the policy must include energy and transport.

As an environmentalist who has served on the Select Committee for six years, I view today's debate, and other debates on the environment, wrily. That is partly because there has been much attention from the media and politicians on the subject, and I fear that they will move to other issues when the next bandwagon begins to roll. But one must not be too cynical. Any politician who is interested in an issue is pleased when it reaches the top of the political agenda and some attention is focused on problems that might otherwise be neglected.

The attitude of people giving evidence to the Select Committee has changed, and that has been pleasing to see. We have moved on from the complacency of the Central Electricity Generating Board when we first considered acid rain in 1974 to the ready acceptance by nearly all witnesses today that there are serious problems in the environment which need to be tackled nationally and internationally.

What criteria should be used to judge the proposals? The Bill is a hotch-potch, although all the measures should be welcomed. One should judge it against some guiding principles which I hope will influence the White Paper later this year. It is important that there should be an arm's-length relationship between the Government and those who cause pollution. That was the trouble with the water industry. Until recently the Government both owned the polluters and tried to regulate them, and that is never satisfactory.

The National Rivers Authority is a tremendous step in the right direction. The Bill maintains that principle through integrated pollution control, which I welcome. Britain is the first country to set that example and I hope that others will follow.

There is widespread recognition that land, water and air cannot be separated in the way that they are treated, because pollution spills from one to the other. I welcome

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what was said earlier about the staffing of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The unhappy background to the matter has worried the Select Committee more than once. I hope that what I read in newpapers at the weekend about additional funding, partly through the "polluter pays" principle, was a correct interpretation of the Government's intentions. No doubt we shall explore that in Committee.

I am not happy about the reliance on county councils operating as waste disposal authorities, even through companies set up for that purpose. I should prefer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) said earlier, a system involving large regional authorities, which would be freer from the NIMBY syndrome and could consider more strategically the issues of waste disposal.

The logic of the arm's-length relationship should eventually lead the Government to embrace the case for an environmental protection agency, not necessarily in the form of the United States body but in a form that leads steadily to a more important role for HMIP. No doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will say something about that general principle when he replies to the debate.

The "polluter pays" principle is right because its market approach will lead to companies examining their pollution sure in the knowledge that they will have to pay if they do not minimise emissions into the atmosphere, on to land or into water.

Environmental legislation should be performance, not design, based. One difficulty with European legislation is that it is obsessed with one means of securing an end rather than trying to set a target that can be steadily lowered to try to tighten the screws on polluters. The catalytic converter may improve some environmental problems, but it worsens others. It would be far better if EC and national legislation set emission control standards but left industry to develop the technology necessary to achieve them. The reliance in the Bill on best available techniques may eventually become an infectious concept that will get into the European bloodstream, and we may see improved legislation from Europe in due course.

Internationalism should be one principle by which we judge the Bill and other environmental legislation. There is no doubt that one country's pollution causes problems for another country. It is difficult to foresee how we shall legislate at national and international level on the great problems of acid rain, the greenhouse effect and chlorofluorocarbons. That was one of the weaknesses of the inadequate case advanced by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) It is also the reason why many measures do not appear in the Bill but must instead await a more co-ordinated international approach.

Most of the Bill's provisions are welcome. If I had been asked a few months ago what I thought about reorganisation of the Nature Conservancy Council, I should have been inclined to say that I opposed it, but I am happy with the arrangements announced by my right hon. Friend because they will achieve the two most important objectives of those who were worried—to maintain the scientific base and to ensure that what may not be an important environmental issue for each of the constituent countries but is important to Britain as a whole and to European countries is considered. That body is chaired by a very fine man, who is supported by other highly qualified appointments at national level. I very much welcome that.

I am delighted that at long last a ban on straw and stubble burning has been included in legislation. Over the years, I have listened to the National Farmers Union provide excuse after excuse, but most responsible farmers do not burn stubble. In my constituency, despite farmers being told that they needed to burn stubble, we have reached the stage where it is very rare, and in the summer there was practically none. It is not only an environmental problem but a safety problem. It causes accidents on the roads and difficulties and unpleasantness for pedestrians and cyclists. I welcome that provision, although it is long overdue.

This is an excellent Bill. It is only a step towards an environmental policy and environmental legislation of which Britain can be proud, but it will become a model for other countries to follow in years to come. I commend the Bill to the House.

7.25 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I speak not only as a member of a political party but perhaps more as a west highlander, whose region has frequently been the cockpit of controversy on environmental issues in recent years. There is no doubt that those controversies influenced the Government in bringing forward the proposals in part VII. I wish to devote my remarks to the proposals to reorganise the Nature Conservancy Council.

Let me make it quite clear from the outset that I believe in a decentralised—indeed, federal—structure for the NCC, because I believe in the widest possible discussion on and involvement in the matters covered by the Bill.

Although the Government have justified their proposals on the ground of better involvement of local interests, the sad irony is that they did not consult, discuss with or involve anyone before introducing their proposals on the NCC. Their methods have been at odds with their declarations. Consequently, they have managed to arouse a quite spectacular degree of opposition, suspicion and confusion about their plans.

Even those who support decentralisation in principle, as I do, must be leery of the Government's motives. They certainly have not been conspicuous enthusiasts of Scottish devolution in other sectors, so why in this one? Do they want to create a conservation body that more genuinely involves community opinion in Scotland, or are they creating yet another quango stuffed with political placemen that will be subservient to landowning interests, who already carry too much weight within the Scottish Office?

Those are real and disturbing questions, and the Secretary of State's announcement today, although welcome, does not answer them fully. My right hon. and hon. Friends are quite right to withhold their support for Second Reading on that ground, among others.

Having said that, it may be possible, through hard work in Committee, to achieve the generally independent, locally rooted, properly resourced and properly co-ordinated conservation bodies that we should wish to see. I keep an open mind about that, and genuinely hope that some consensus will emerge in Committee on that important issue.

In the time remaining to me, I should like to address myself more directly to bodies outside the House such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Friends of the Earth and others, which have been so outspoken not only on this issue but on general environmental and conservation issues affecting the Highlands and Islands.

If the Government have gone about the reorganisation of the NCC in a clumsy manner liable to arouse justifiable suspicion about their motives, it must also be said that the initial reaction of much of the conservation lobby has been at fault, particularly in the patronising assumption that is too often displayed, and which has already been referred to by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), that forces outside the Highlands and Islands know better than highlanders what is good for them.

Highlanders are all too familiar with that attitude. Two hundred years ago, we were forbidden to speak our own language—we were told that it was for our own good to learn English. One hundred years ago, highlanders were cleared from their homes and packed into emigration vessels to America. Again, we were told that that was for our own good.

Today, high-minded and well-intentioned bodies are again trying to tell us what is good for us. Although we undoubtedly have much to learn from them, I hope that they will appreciate that it is a two-way process and that it is simply not acceptable to dictate solutions to the ordinary people of the Highlands and Islands.

We acknowledge the superior political power and resources of these lobby and interest groups—the RSPB, for example, has more members than the Highlands and Islands have people—but I hope that in turn they will acknowledge the importance of the principle of local democracy and will be prepared to work with the grain of local feeling. Too often, I am sorry to say, the southern-based environmental lobby, including the NCC, has been seen by ordinary highlanders as alien, aloof, insensitive, remote and sadly devoid of any appreciation of the special history and culture of the Highlands and Islands. Too often, it has failed to acknowledge what Frank Fraser Darling so clearly recognised as long ago as the 1940s—that one cannot understand the natural history of the Highlands without comprehending its social and political history, which is exactly why he subtitled his magisterial "West Highland Survey", "A Study in Human Ecology". In protecting the ecology, we must not forget the human.

I feel that sometimes "conservation" can be a misleading term. As Fraser Darling also pointed out, the Highlands and Islands are in many ways a "man-made desert"—the product not of natural processes but of the ill-treatment of nature by man, particularly in the past three centuries and particularly by the great landowners who held unchecked sway and who, unfortunately, are still too influential in the Conservative party. We should be concerned not with the simple preservation of the existing environment but with the enhancement and regeneration not only of its natural resources but, equally important, of its social and cultural communities.

That is why I deplore the almost complete lack of reference in any of the submissions that I have received on this issue and in articles that I have read to the feelings and opinions of the local communities. This appalling blindness among too many of the environmental opinion-formers explains why the stock of so many environmental pressure groups is so low in the Highlands. This lack of mutual understanding is profoundly damaging. It cannot form the pattern for the future if the true interests of areas such as the Highlands are to be safeguarded.

I want to state two principles that should inform thinking and debate on these issues. First, we should take a much broader view of conservation; we should see it as enhancing and regenerating the environment and not simply preserving it, and we should accept that social, economic and cultural issues must all have a part to play in this broader conception, including, apparently, political issues such as the structure of land ownership.

Secondly, we should work to create a genuine green alliance, not between one environmental pressure group and another but between such groups and the local communities whose lives they hope to influence. If these two sides can start to talk to each other, learn from each other and work together, we can at last begin to restore the depleted resources that we have inherited from the malpractice of the past.

7.32 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I should have thought that everything that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) said showed support for a Scottish Nature Conservancy Council, because it would be much nearer his constituency, but it is up to the hon. Gentleman how he votes.

I welcome the Bill. It is a major step forward and a continuation of the programme that the Government launched in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Every clause in the Bill is important, but I want to concentrate on the Nature Conservancy Council, of which I am a member. I attend the United Kingdom council meetings and as many as possible of the Scottish committee meetings. Naturally, I see the English and Welsh papers and those of the committee on science and on birds. Tonight I am speaking for myself.

The NCC has evolved from a small conservancy council allied to the Natural Environment Research Council into a major organisation employing 1,100 people. The chairman and staff have done well, particularly in the urgent work of notifying sites of special scientific interest and implementing the Wildlife and Countryside Act, but that does not mean that we could not do much better.

Many criticisms made of the Bill were made of the Wildlife and Countryside Act—it would not work; the Government got it wrong; the voluntary organisations and the other place were against it; and so on. A positive and constructive Committee stage meant that it turned out to be a pretty effective Act. Of course there are imperfections but, by and large, it is well regarded, and I am sure that we can do the same with this Bill.

For a number of years, I have been advocating change informally within the NCC and last spring I spoke more emphatically at a conference. I included these words in a press release:

> "The NCC was enormously strengthened by the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. It was the first measure of this Government to secure the proper conservation of the habitat of wildlife and marine life. I believe we should work towards developing a separate Scottish NCC with a full scientific staff to back up our Edinburgh headquarters and Regional offices."

I am pleased that we will do just that.

We seem to be becoming a nation that resists every change, almost on principle. I can only believe that some

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of the governing bodies against change this time have acted on first impressions, not on current facts. Perhaps, too, they have been misled by some press releases and statements from Peterborough that gave the impression that the NCC was against the Bill. The majority of those on the council are in favour of the Bill. Many are strongly in favour, especially the Welsh and the Scots, but I emphasise the English committee as well.

Mr. Dalyell: Was this matter ever voted on in the NCC?

Sir Hector Monro: No; the NCC does not operate by voting, but anyone who sits in the council chamber knows exactly who is on one side and who is on another.

Mr. Dalyell: It was not voted on.

Sir Hector Monro: Most sensible councils do not have votes left and right. They decide what is the consensus.

The major points of concern were requests for a co-ordinating scientific committee and for an independent chairman. Both requests have been met by the Government and, dramatically, by the announcements today. I cannot imagine a better person as the chairman-designate than Professor Fred Holliday, an academic and previous chairman of the NCC. He would not have given his name as chairman of the new co-ordinating committee unless he was satisfied that he had the powers, authority and resources needed.

The decision to have Magnus Magnusson as chairman of the Scottish committee was a master stroke, which will be warmly welcomed in Scotland because of his knowledge of its heritage and of conservation. Lord Cranbrook, who is to be the chairman of the English committee, has an outstanding reputation in the other place and throughout the country for conservation. The calibre of those names should dispel the Opposition's criticism of the Government's appointments. It is hard to understand how the Labour party can vote against the Bill when there is such strength of opinion in favour of it.

In Scotland, the Bill has been welcomed—of course, not by every organisation but certainly by a majority. This should not be a political issue. It is one of common sense and improved conservation. I have expressed my disappointment at the lack of enthusiasm from Peterborough. Naturally, the position of the staff had to be safeguarded, and that was quickly confirmed by the Government. I accept that there must be some movement away from Peterborough and some disruption of domestic life, but perhaps the high quality of life in Scotland and Wales will be some compensation.

I have felt some resentment at the statements by some governing bodies and others that Scotland and Wales were not capable of running their own nature conservation organisations even with a strong scientific base and adequate resources. Of course we are capable of doing that. We will play a full part nationally and internationally. Each area will provide effective input either to the co-ordinating committee or directly to the Government, who after all are responsible for the legislation and our international conservation arrangements. The Nature Conservancy Council is an adviser to the Government. It must exercise statutory duties in relation to sites of special scientific interest and other matters but the Government are ultimately responsible for ensuring that its duties are carried out.

Scotland looks forward to having its own scientific base—perhaps in Edinburgh or at Battleby. I am sure that we shall be able to provide a quicker response to some of our perennial problems, such as the flow country, afforestation, fish farming, recreation in the hills, ski-ing and marine nature reserves. The Scottish committee, under Alex Trotter and its director John Francis, has done an excellent job, and I am sure that it will look forward to commissioning further research from the Scottish universities, as well as providing its own scientific back-up.

Conservation officers in Scotland are thin on the ground. The regional officer for the west and south-west of Scotland, for example, is based at Loch Lomond. That is a long way from the Solway, which has an equally important interest in conservation. Having our own base will enable us to have more offices nearer to the people in Scotland and to keep much more sensitively in touch with local affairs. We shall also be able to keep in touch with FWAG, the farm and wildlife advisory group and the conservation groups. The jewel in our crown, the island of Rhum, is administered from Inverness, which is a very long way away. The nearer that we can get in dealing with local matters such as those of which the hon. Member for Western Isles spoke, the better. We should also seek to establish a much closer link with the Red Deer Commission, which will have an important part to play in Scotland in the immediate future.

We must also look to the next Session, when we shall forge a link between the NCC and the Countryside Commission. The Countryside Commission has given a valuable and detailed response to the merger and great credit is due to Roger Carr and his colleagues for their outstanding work at Battleby. We shall be able to remove any existing overlap of responsibilities, and I can see nothing but good from our coming together. With bodies such as the National Trust for Scotland and many enthusiastic governing bodies, the future looks good, and I believe that the developments will be a success. We shall have a heritage and conservation body of remarkable quality. The Countryside Commission has been consulting many people in Scotland about the future of the national parks, and I hope that it will be very cautious in how it proceeds.

I am confident that the Bill is right. Conservation of British wildlife, habitats and landscape will be in good hands, and we may have the best arrangements in the world coupled with the best legislation. The Bill will establish local control but allow for international influence and leadership, and I wish it well.

7.42 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): It is a year ago to the day since I presented the Hedgerows Bill. I presented it on the occasion of the centenary of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and I was on King's Cross station that day to hear the Prime Minister call for the protection of hedgerows as we had lost 120,000 miles of hedgerow in the preceding four decades. I was deeply distressed—as were some Conservative Members—when the Government decided to block the Bill.

Occasionally, though, we have had successes. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark)

managed to steer through the House a Bill to improve the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. He did so in the teeth of hostility from the Department of the Environment, which, in Committee, removed four of the six parts of the Bill and emasculated the fifth. The House of Lords, in its wisdom, improved the Bill by restoring it to the condition in which my hon. Friend had presented it to the House, and I hope that, if we cannot secure the necessary improvements to the present Bill in Committee, they will be secured in the other place.

Two days after the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields was passed, the Government issued a press statement proclaiming that it was a Government Bill. No doubt that has gone down as one of the pieces of evidence that the Government have successfully and consistently promoted the interests of conservation and the environment.

That view was expressed when the NCC headquarters in Peterborough was opened a few years ago. I was greatly honoured to be asked to speak at that opening, along with the Secretary of State, who announced at that gathering that every conservation Bill that had gone through the House in the previous quarter of a century had come from a Conservative Government. Presumably the Government were taking credit for having thought of Bills such as that introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields years before.

I have a high regard for Sir William Wilkinson and the staff of the NCC, and I was therefore horrified by the dismemberment proposals. The present Secretary of State has gone a long way to repair the damage that his predecessor caused when he introduced similar proposals in a rather less well-considered way. The fact remains, however, that in Committee the Minister will have to provide a little more evidence of his commitment. I note, for example, that the last sentence of the statement issued by the NCC on 7 November said that the new committee "must . . . be capable of driving forward nature conservation . . . as a whole".
The committee and all the bodies and individuals concerned will need convincing of that.

I hope that the committee will be able to promote and directly object to private Bills. I know that it has petitioned against private Bills in the past few years. During the past 18 months, we have witnessed the spectacle of private Bills being pushed through with Government majorities. We have watched hon. Members led through the lobbies by a rejoicing Secretary of State—not the present Secretary of State—gleefully dismissing the advice that he had been given by statutory organisations.

I do not want to say much more than that about the nature conservation aspects of the Bill, although I hope that, during the passage of the Bill, something will be done to improve sections 28 and 29 of the 1981 Act and the provisions of that Act relating to species protection.

The Minister will be well aware that my main interest this evening is a matter that is also of grave concern to my constituents. As you will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have 2,711 drums of toxic waste in my constituency at present. The waste came from the United States. It has been in our area for many months. It had to be placed in secure drums, and I am grateful to the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities who was on duty when I saw him in August, for giving orders that it should immediately be securely drummed. I am also grateful to the Minister for the Environment and Countryside for receiving a deputation from my area in September. He will be aware that we have had the waste for a long time now and that there is deep anxiety that it is still here and could be here for many months to come.

There is a particular reason for my anger this evening. Last week, the Minister courteously sent me a note and a copy of the summary report of the American Environmental Protection Agency. The agency had led the Department, which should have known better, to believe that the waste was not toxic because an American statute said that it was not toxic because it was to leave the United States. If it had stayed in the United States, it would have become subject to another American law, which would have said that it was toxic. That means that the waste is not toxic while it is in Britain, but would be toxic if it were in the United States.

If a British firm had done to the United States what that American firm has done to Britain, the American response would have been far more vigorous and positive than ours has been. The American warships would already be sailing up the Humber with marine band playing—that should appeal to the Minister—and guns pointed.

The American attitude really is an outrage, not least because the EPA took its samples at the same time as samples were taken by British Rail and the local authorities in south Yorkshire. The Minister is aware of that. We were aware of the contents of that material last July and I wrote to the American ambassador in August and, as I received no reply, I wrote again in November. Both letters were extremely courteous. At the end of November, I was informed that the EPA was analysing the material, samples of which it had had since July.

I then discovered from the American media that it was not the Americans' fault. The American media reported that the poison was added while the waste was in Wath upon Dearne, a mile from my home. The Minister will be aware that the material at Wath was of the same type as that which did not reach Wath, which has not been touched and is in a British Rail depot near Leeds. I have kept in very close touch with my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) about this matter.

The American authorities are aware that it is a canard to suggest that the American company is not responsible. It is also unacceptable for the American authorities to describe the cocktail of poisons as non-toxic. They cannot deny that the analysis carried out by British scientists is perfectly respectable and accurate. The material was said to be free of harmful impurities when it reached Britain. The analysis found that it contained 4·5 per cent. contaminated matter, including xylene, 7 hydrogen, 23 dioxyroxy-2.2 dimethylbenzofuran and other contaminated material. It is outrageous that the activities of an American company should apparently be endorsed by the American Government.

I have been critical of the British response and of the Department of the Environment. However, the greatest criticism is due to the Foreign Office. I was assured by the Minister of State, Foreign Office, last September that the Foreign Office was pursuing the matter vigorously. A number of checks have been made and no one of any significance or importance in the State Department in Washington has any recollection of representations made on behalf of the British people. If the material had been

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

dumped in Surrey, Sussex or in the more salubrious areas favoured by the Conservative party, perhaps a little more concern would have been shown about it.

As I told the Minister last September, this case illustrates the most inadequate regulations. I remember telling the Minister that I hoped that, when the green Bill was before the House, the appalling loopholes demonstrated by the Wath upon Dearne experience would be closed. I said that I hoped that the Bill would be bipartisan and that we could support it. Unfortunately, the Bill states only that the Minister will take powers to effect regulations. There are no guarantees that the loopholes will be closed so that the dumping to which I have referred will not be repeated in my area or elsewhere. Until there are clear assurances that the present pathetically inadequate regulations will be improved, the House has no right to give automatic support to this Bill.

7.53 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn, Hatfield): The Bill has my enthusiastic support. It is a wide-ranging and far-sighted measure. Given the constraints on time, I shall confine my remarks to the part of the Bill which deals with a problem that is more important than many people realise. It constitutes a stain on Britain's reputation. British lager louts abroad besmirch the proud name of Britain and foreigners acquire a poor image of Britain. When they visit our shores, they find a once green and pleasant land cluttered with muck and litter. The centre of London is a particular disgrace. The streets are not so much paved with gold as with the remains of last night's pizzas. My hon. Friend the Prime Minister reflected the importance of this subject last year by collecting litter in Hyde park.

We are right to be committed to the atmosphere, but the British people are very concerned about their streets, highways and fields. The people of Welwyn and Hatfield in particular believe that it is important for local authorities to be more responsible for clean streets. The people of Welwyn and Hatfield have not had their rubbish collected for months because they have an ill-trained, incompetent, Labour-run authority. The same problem does not exist in Wheathampstead, which is only a few miles down the road. That is a clue for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In Wheathampstead, the local street cleaner and local dustmen know all 7,000 or 8,000 people who live in the town. The people do not want to throw litter into the streets because they respect each other.

People who drop litter are physical polluters. They leave discarded waste in our fields and on our streets. But they are also moral polluters. They encourage others by sending out signals that they do not care. They are irresponsible and give no thought to the effect of their actions. They make the landscape unsightly and create dangers for other people. Some people even throw away toxic waste and medicines, which are a threat to adults and children alike.

The Bill deals with an important part of the problem, but only part of it. That is all that it can do. The Government could help to combat the problem by giving magistrates and the police powers to deal with litter louts. But legal penalties cannot solve the problem; only society as a whole can do that.

People must be taught not to litter. The process is primarily one of education, and that means parents instilling the necessary sense of responsibility in their children. If children litter, the blame lies in part with their parents. Schools, as well as other public bodies, must educate children about the perils of littering and citizens must be vigilant and prepared to tell litter louts to stop. A large part of the problem at the moment is that we turn a blind eye to people who litter our streets. Pressure and public embarrassment are essential to stop them. In short, we all have a part to play.

The Government are doing their bit with this Bill. But we must go beyond that. Magistrates must be prepared to use the powers given to them. It is useless increasing penalties if those penalties are not imposed. The Bill increases the maximum penalty for littering from £400 to £1,000. It may interest hon. Members to know that in 1988 only two people received the maximum sentence which represented 0·1 per cent. of the total number of people who were fined. Yet that was a 100 per cent. increase on the year before, when only one person received the maximum penalty. I hope that a Home Office circular will follow the enactment of the Bill to guide magistrates in making use of their new powers.

Local authorities must also comply with their obligations, not just with the minimum requirements laid down by statute, but with the regulations under which they will be more accountable in the Bill. They must educate people and provide the means by which litter can be collected effectively and easily. There are often too few litter bins and they are often inadequate. Bins are invariably too small and open-topped. Litter overflows and is blown about. Local authorities must engage in extensive rethinking with a greater emphasis on education and on extending the availability of the means for collecting litter.

Local retailers and shopkeepers must also assume a greater responsibility for keeping their frontages litter-free. In particular, fast food retail outlets should realise that they are as responsible as their customers for the discarded food trays and wrappings that litter pavements outside their premises. They should also try to educate their customers and ensure that the street is kept clean. Failure to do that should be actionable. If we cannot get them to do those things voluntarily, let us have litter wardens who could fine offenders on the spot.

Recycling can provide a real, practical solution to pollution problems. For that reason, I welcome the Government's decision to give local authorities clear guidance on the priority that they must attach to recycling, as well as a statutory duty to include provisions for recycling in their waste disposal plans.

The serious national problem of litter can be resolved only by everyone doing something about it. We need to restore a sense of personal and civic pride. The Bill is a move in the right direction, and it sends the necessary message. It is up to all of us to make sure that the message is heard and acted upon. Please note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that before I resume my seat, I am folding my notes and putting them back in my pocket, and not letting them be strewn about the Chamber, as many hon. Members are prone to do. In any event, I hope that I will need to refer to them in Committee.

I support the Bill and recommend it to the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Although it is 8 o'clock, many hon. Members will be disappointed unless other hon. Members can sustain the brevity of their speeches. I appeal to hon. Members to try to keep their speeches brief.

8 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I shall try to follow your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and keep my speech within 10 minutes.

I am somewhat disappointed with the Bill because it does not go as far as one would wish. Opposition Members look forward to the White Paper and hope that the Bill to follow will deal with some omissions. In November last year, before the Bill was published, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that an amendment on straw stubble would be tabled. Today, the Secretary of State said that he would table an amendment to deal with the Nature Conservancy Council and the co-ordinating body. That is an encouraging move in the right direction. The previous Secretary of State was not prepared to listen to sensible proposals. There will be an opportunity in Committee to make important and positive improvements to the Bill.

I sat on the Select Committee that reported on toxic waste. We must remember that the Government have been in office for more than 10 years. It is surprising that more Government action was taken on waste and that more consultation documents went out last year than in the previous nine years. The Minister will not be able to deny that fact. Even before they report, Select Committees at least spur the Government into action.

It is useful to look at the Select Committee's report and the evidence to ascertain why some conclusions were reached. The Select Committee recommended the establishment of 10 national bodies for regulation of waste disposal. County councils gave evidence. It was appalling that three different sets of evidence were given by three political parties and that a fourth version came from council officers. It was not surprising that there was some concern. It is true that some local authorities are extremely good at waste disposal and regulation, but the bad authorities are very bad, and the Committee referred to that point in its report.

The Secretary of State referred to contaminated land. A report on contaminated land will be published within the next month or so. As there are sure to be some useful proposals for the Standing Committee, I hope that the Government will be able to give a speedy response to the report. If they are not able to respond before Report, they will certainly be able to do so before the Bill is considered in another place.

If we are to confer duties on local authorities, we should be sure to give to them the powers and financial resources to enable them to carry out their responsibilities. Hon. Members have said that they doubt whether that will be the case.

I agree with the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) that the public must be educated to stop throwing litter around and that fast-food outlets and others have a responsibility. Many councils have cut cleansing and litter collection services because of the financial restraints that have been imposed on them. The Minister may say that privatisation and competition will enable those services to be carried out more efficiently. I do not wish to go into great detail, but the Bill allows councils to enforce required standards. I have been to some local authority areas where such services are carried out by the private sector. The situation is appalling—there has been no difference. The authorities that are spending money and doing the job themselves, are doing a good job. Opposition Members want local authorities to be provided with sufficient resources to tackle the problem.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) referred to dog fouling. Many hon. Members get letters about that problem and want it to be resolved. Unless there is an enforceable registration scheme, it will be extremely difficult to eliminate problems caused by dogs. There is widespread feeling on the matter. I hope that the new Secretary of State will think again about rejecting the existing power to impose such a scheme.

We must remember the problems of the National Rivers Authority. Hon. Members who debated the Water Bill in Committee doubted whether it would have the resources and powers to do the job that it was established to do. On two occasions, the NRA has told the Select Committee on the Environment that it doubts whether it has the resources to do the job. It is no good passing this Bill without ensuring that the necessary resources are available. I brought a pollution problem in my constituency to the attention of the National Rivers Authority. It said that the power to deal with that problem has been excluded from the Water Act 1989 and that it must use the power of persuasion. We all know the power of persuasion when it comes to dealing with certain problems. It does not work.

Some aspects of the Bill are limited, and do not go as far as Opposition Members would wish. We want properly enforceable powers and adequate resources.

Despite what the Secretary of State said, there is concern about the Nature Conservancy Council. That point has been mentioned by several hon. Members. It is well known that there is hostility to the NCC by certain vested and landed interests in Scotland. Mr. Ian Prestt, the director general of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, said:

"what they want is a body which does not stand up for conservation and cannot press the conservation case."

One of the main battlegrounds between those vested and landed interests and conservationists has been the flow country of Caithness and Sutherland. The Government sold out when they accepted a report of Highland regional council and agreed that at least 100,000 hectares should be afforested. The NCC was opposed to further afforestation. It was overruled and, to add insult to injury, the Secretary of State for Scotland decided to change the rules. In future, the NCC is to be allowed to give its opinion on afforestation only when a site of special scientific interest is directly affected.

That victory for landowners and foresters sowed the seeds of this Bill. Despite what the Secretary of State has said, we are still concerned about protection and conservation because we can already see the dangers. We should like the provisions to be considerably tightened.

In the Government's 1989 document entitled "Environment in Trust", they stated:

"The environment knows no boundaries. Many . . . issues go beyond the borders of individual countries".

That is one reason why we believe that the bodies involved should not be split up. I am not against devolution, but we must look at all the aspects involved with great care to

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

ensure that we achieve conservation and protection measures that work in the interests of the nation as a whole. We are reminded on so many occasions in the House when we are debating different issues that we must look at things on the basis of the national interest and ensure that we protect what we have, whether it be in England, Scotland or Wales.

The Bill may be a step in the right direction, but it is an extremely small step. Many issues will be the subject of interesting and long debate in Committee as we try to strengthen the parts of the Bill that deal with pollution, conservation and the other matters that are of great concern both to hon. Members and to the country as a whole.

8.11 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Unlike the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), with his mealy-mouthed comments, I enthusiastically welcome the Bill, which is an important measure to protect the environment in which we live. Just as the Education Act 1944 stood out as a beacon for many years in education, I believe that this second step in the Government's protection of the environment will stand out as a landmark and a benchmark by which we show our commitment to the environment. As a Government, we do not mouth platitudes about problems and what should be done. This Government are seeking to come up with constructive policies and ideas about the way to tackle the problems of the environment, such as pollution—both industrial and litter—waste disposal and the ruination of our towns and countryside.

I shall concentrate on the anti-litter aspect of the Bill. Serious concern has been expressed throughout the country and within the House this evening about the declining standards of cleanliness in this country. Last year a Department of the Environment poll showed that almost 75 per cent. of the people surveyed were worried about the litter problem, and an FDS Market Research poll has shown that 76 per cent. of the British public think that there is more litter on our streets and in our countryside now than 10 years ago.

Britain is in danger of becoming the dustbin of Europe. Our inner cities and towns are riddled with litter that has been abandoned by thoughtless and selfish litter louts. Our countryside suffers from the dumping of litter and our roads and motorways are ruined by people emptying waste from their motor car as they drive along. Fast-food packaging, crisp bags, disposable drinks containers and cigarette stubs mar our environment. We are a nation that wallows in filth.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for the strong lead that she provided long before other green campaigners jumped on the bandwagon, by identifying the problems and coming up with the constructive measures that the country demands to try to tackle them. It is obvious that the green crusaders are on the warpath. The Bill gives us the power to wage that war successfully.

I particularly welcome clause 72, which extends to all local authorities the powers that Westminster city council took under private legislation to empower its workers to issue fixed penalty tickets to litter louts in its streets. The logical conclusion was that the Government should adopt the contents of my Control of Litter (Fines) Bill of last year, so that all local authorities that have desperately wanted those powers do not have to queue up to introduce private legislation, which takes up time and costs a great deal of money to implement. With one fell swoop, clause 72 gives all local authorities genuine powers to wage war against the litter louts.

However, I make a plea to my right hon. and hon. Friends that they think again about one aspect of the provisions. I believe that the money that will be collected in the magistrates courts from fixed penalty tickets should be given to the local authorities rather than the Treasury being allowed to get its grubby paws on it. I accept that we are not talking about millions of pounds, but if we were to give the local authorities any money gained from fines, it would greatly encourage them to enforce even more vigorously the new powers that they are being given. That money would also help them with the cost of fighting the litter problem.

I know that the stock answer from the Treasury is that over the past 30 years or so, since the Justices of the Peace Act 1949, all fines for offences taken by the courts are given to the Treasury. However, just because something has been done for the past 40 years, does not necessarily mean that now, in the 1990s, it is the correct procedure for us still to follow. It should not be forgotten—I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends are aware of this—that before the 1949 Act, certain moneys from fines were directed towards the local authorities. The Government should seriously reconsider that matter so that we can get back to the old and preferable system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) mentioned increasing the maximum fine for litter offences outside the fixed penalty system. I am sure that, like me, all hon. Members warmly welcome the increase, raising the maximum fine from £400 to £1,000. However, as my hon. Friend correctly identified, there is a problem because at present the imposition of the penalties in the magistrates courts is a joke.

In 1987, just over 1,800 people were brought before the magistrates courts and fined for litter offences. As we have a population in England and Wales of about 50 million, that is a negligible number of people, considering the litter in our country. However, what is even worse is that the average fine imposed on those convicted was a mere £35 of the maximum £400 fine. When the figures are broken down, they show that the average has been bumped up to £35 only because there were a few large fines and that without those large fines the average would have been about £19.

There is little point in increasing the fine to £1,000 unless something is done to impose larger fines in the magistrates courts, so that they act as a deterrent to ensure that people do not commit offences with impunity. Under the old system, offenders were only rarely caught, and even if they were caught, they knew that the punishment dished out by the courts would be pitifully small. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to have a gentle word with our noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, to see whether he can tactfully contact the magistrates courts and point out to them that the law will be changed when this legislation is on the statute book and that the maximum fine will be £1,000.

It is time that the courts reflected the wishes of the country and the Government who have set the penalties

and imposed larger fines on the serious litter louts and on those who throw away their cigarette packets or whatever, so that they know that the Government and the country mean it when we say that we want to stop litter louts. On top of the battery of other powers and the duty that is to be placed on a local authority to keep its area clean, a few hefty fines would soon create a deterrent that would make people think twice about causing pollution.

Education is also important. We can legislate as long and as often as we like, but legislation only creates a deterrent—people do not like to commit offences because they do not like the punishment. People must also be educated. Thirty years ago, children were brought up to respect the police, do what their elders told them, and not to throw litter. There is a lost generation between then and now. The parents of today have never told their children not to drop litter because most of them are dropping litter or emptying their ashtray through their window as they drive along.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the junior Minister at his Department have introduced initiatives in schools—Chelmsford has such initiatives—to make children care about the environment, and to teach them to clean up the playgrounds and the school buildings before they go home and not to throw litter. Soon, children will be teaching their parents not to be litter louts, because those initiatives come too late for one generation of parents—the lost generation—to teach their children.

I warmly welcome the Bill. The hon. Member for Dagenham will come to regret his mealy-mouthed speech. It will be shown to be irrelevant to the achievements that the Bill will make when it comes into force. When the Government introduce more steps in the process, he will also appreciate that this step-by-step approach is designed, once and for all, to go to the heart of the problem and to tackle it realistically, although not overnight.

8.21 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) in his discourse on litter, but I shall follow some of the themes already explored by Scottish colleagues on both sides of the House in debating the future of conservation agencies and the Nature Conservancy Council in the United Kingdom.

We are seeing a strange turnround in the politics of devolution. The official Opposition apparently support the continued centralisation of an agency for the United Kingdom, while the Conservative party—particularly in the person of the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who has knowledge of the internal workings of the NCC—is advocating the devolution of the science base to Scotland and to Wales because this would result in a more effective conservation policy.

I was particularly attracted by the speech of the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) because he touched on the essential link between conservation policy, economic policy and the political structure. It can be summed up on the real meaning of the work ecology. By that, I mean not just the plant, flora and fauna ecology, but social, cultural and political ecology.

The debate on the future of the NCC has been conducted by the environmental lobby on a United Kingdom-wide basis in apparent ignorance of the practical work on the ground, particularly in the part of the world that I have had the privilege to represent for 15 years—Snowdonia national park. The early pioneering work of R. E. Hughes and others in establishing the nature reserves in that geologically valuable and unique area was undertaken entirely on a voluntary basis because the people on the ground—scientists of the National Environment Research Council and subsequently of the NCC—were acceptable to the local farming community.

Similarly, the current director of the NCC in Wales, Professor Tom Pritchard, has continually used voluntary methods to obtain agreements so that the statutory compulsory powers available to the NCC over sites of special scientific interest did not have to be used. On a number of occasions, I and others have been involved in ensuring that agreement was reached between the farming community and the scientific interests so that the people in charge, in the NCC, the national park and other conservation agencies, worked together, alongside the landowners, the tenant farmers and the community.

We cannot have effective conservation or environmental policies without the support of the local community. I heard the Prime Minister make this point when she was opening an exhibition for Survival International. She said that one could not talk about ecological survival without talking also about the survival of the humans who were part of the ecology. If that is true of the more extreme conditions with which Survival International deals, it is certainly true in the highly developed environment and economy of Scotland and Wales.

Those in favour of a centralised body have ignored the active co-ordination between the countryside agencies in Scotland and Wales. The devolution of the Countryside Commission from Cheltenham to Wales and the establishment of the Countryside Council for Wales have been the subject of debate for 10 or 12 years. My predecessor, Mr. William Edwards, tabled amendments to what was then the Countryside Bill. The staff of the NCC committee for Wales and the Countryside Commission have discussed the transfer of powers and co-ordination, not to achieve yet another Welsh quango but to ensure an integrated approach towards conservation, and so that the special contribution and the scientific expertise of the NCC can stand alongside the policies pursued by the Countryside Commission within and outside the national parks.

In Wales, there is genuine, near-universal support, with the exception of the Labour party, for the proposal for the Countryside Council for Wales. We see it as the conclusion of the process of co-ordination, working together and integration on the countryside issue. We look forward to the body developing ecology policies within Wales to strengthen the scientific base in a way that will enable us to contribute more effectively to conservation on the European mainland and elsewhere.

I fail to understand the logic of those who say that, by maintaining a centralised scientific base in Peterborough, we are maintaining a higher level of scientific expertise in the United Kingdom. I know that, for example, Peterborough has had to request geologists to deal with the unique geology of north Wales, and that is absurd. As a result of the reorganisation, it will be possible to maintain a more devolved scientific base closer to the community and to co-ordinate the various bodies more effectively.

[Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas]

Co-ordination does not stop at the Channel. European co-ordination is also important. Representing a mountain area, I am aware that the ecology of large parts of my constituency has much more in common with the alpine ecology of mainland Europe that it has with Peterborough. Therefore, for me it is important that the scientific expertise developed in mountain ecology throughout Europe is available, and that the work in Snowdonia is part of a far more broad-based scientific approach and is not confined to Great Britain or even the United Kingdom. I am pleased that conservation policies in Northern Ireland will be related to what has happened on the Great Britain level through the co-ordinating committee, because there was an anomaly in the relationship between the NCC and Northern Ireland.

All those arguments create controversy which should not be there. We are strengthening the scientific base generally and relating it more closely to the needs of the community. Similarly, the Countryside Council for Wales will provide an opportunity to develop countryside policies in which conservation and environmental considerations are an integral part.

The Minister knows that we support the Government's conservation policy. This is one of the rare occasions when we support the Government. My final plea to the Minister is that the Welsh Office must adopt an integrated policy-making approach. The Scottish Office has taken a lead in that by designating a Minister for rural affairs. I can only echo the hon. Member for Western Isles who talked about the need to integrate an approach which concerns the economic well-being of a community and the ecology and habitat of an area. The Welsh Office has failed to become the territorial Department that it should be, and that probably applies to the Scottish Office, too.

Although responsibilities for forestry, tourism, recreation, national parks, transportation, social policies, housing, agriculture and the Development Board for Rural Wales reside in the Welsh Office, it does not have an identifiable countryside policy. I do not think that the Department of the Environment has one for England either.

I want to see the liberation of England—indeed, I have spent many years arguing for it—from the failure to have a co-ordinated policy. I should like to see the Welsh Office, through the new Countryside Council for Wales, adopting and implementing an integrated countryside policy so that the conflicts between access and conservation are mitigated and, particularly, so that the contribution of hill farming to conservation can be properly recognised and funded. Sheep farmers and others face an incomes crisis. There is an opportunity for the farming community to become more than ever the stewards of the whole countryside and ecology, but they need effective policy and income support to do that.

For the reasons that I have outlined, my party supports the objectives of the Bill. We shall certainly not support the official Opposition amendment tonight because yet again they have failed to see the potential for effective devolution of policy to Wales and Scotland.

8.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I hope that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) will forgive me if I do not pursue the lines and angles that he has introduced into the debate. I do not have his specialised knowledge on those points. I should like to widen the debate. I was most interested in what he said and certainly did not substantially disagree with him on any particular issue.

As a member of the Select Committee on the Environment I find immediate common ground with our Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), and with my hon. Friends the Members for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) who have already spoken. No doubt my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they, too, may find common ground with my points.

The Bill is surely to be warmly welcomed and strongly supported at least in two respects. The propositions relating to integrated pollution control and waste management seek to establish standards clearly in advance of anything that prevails in Europe now, and they are greatly to be welcomed for that. The implications are far-reaching. There is scarcely an industrial process and certainly no waste management process which will not be affected by the proposals.

As there are still restrictions on time I shall confine my remarks to integrated pollution control and waste management. In so far as my comments are critical, it is only in the sense that a good Bill can become even better through work in Committee.

I am not entirely convinced from the Bill, ministerial comment or the consultation process that the Government have fully grasped the enormity of what they are undertaking. We gather from consultation and Government statements that the Government believe that about 3,000 industrial sites may come under integrated pollution control. One can summon two strong witnesses who will challenge that: the Chemical Industries Association and the Confederation of British Industry. Such bodies believe that that is a gross underestimate. The question whether the integrated pollution control mechanism will be suitably qualified and experienced has not yet been answered. Where will the people come from? What will be the numbers? Have the Government fully appreciated the financing and manning required to operate an effective integrated pollution control system?

A second question must be asked about integrated pollution control. The system could easily become a bureaucrats' paradise. In its negotiations with the Government the CBI has tried to make this point something of a reductio ad absurdum, but it is a valid debating point. It argues that an industrial process involving HMIP, the National Rivers Authority, the privatised water utilities, waste regulatory authorities, the Health and Safety Executive and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will result in a confusion of authorities concerned with pollution control. To avoid that there must be one enforcement agency and, arguably, the Bill insufficiently gives that role to HMIP.

The bureaucrats' paradise can be further promoted by the lack of definition within the Bill. One or two hon. Members have already drawn attention to that. One expression which will feature greatly in Committee is "the best available techniques not involving excessive costs." Who defines "best"? Why "techniques", not "technology"? Who decides what costs are excessive? Answers to those questions are not found in the Bill and I hope that they will be found speedily in Committee.

For a long time the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors, the Select Committee on the Environment and the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology have demanded strengthened controls over the generation of waste, it disposal and its continuing control in landfill sites. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green pointed to the fragmented nature of waste management control in the Bill.

Local authorities are to be waste regulatory authorities. There are 173 such authorities in Great Britain and a further 26 in Northern Ireland, making a grand total of 199. In West Germany there are 25 waste regulatory authorities and in Italy 30. There seems to be overkill in the United Kingdom. How can 199 authorities act consistently and coherently? How can 199 authorities each have a full range of scientific, technical and legal skills? The answer is that they cannot, and one does not blame them for that. One day this Government or another Government will have to acknowledge what the Select Committee on the Environment has been saying clearly —that we need to move to regional waste regulatory authorities.

A further point has already featured in the debate and I do not apologise for referring to it again. That is the confusion in relating part I to part II of the Bill. Part I talks about integrated pollution controls controlling pollution caused by the release of substances into air and water and on to land. Part II sets up the WRAs, but most of the substances released into the land will be waste materials. Who will be responsible for those? Will it be the IPC or the WRAs? That confusion could undermine much of the good intention behind the Bill.

With many other hon. Friends I warmly welcome and strongly support the Bill. It is a good one and I believe it could become infinitely better by positive work in Committee.

8.39 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On behalf of my constituents, I welcome the Bill in one respect, as it gives us the opportunity to debate environmental protection. That is a matter of great concern nationally, but it is of particular concern to my constituents who, in recent months, have had a cloud of sulphuric acid pass over them and a paint works explode near a residential area. They are also aware of a growing queue of applications to build waste incinerators in Kirby. Concern about environmental issues in my constituency, therefore, has been heightened. My constituents are well informed and they take a great interest in the subject.

Although I welcome the idea of the Bill, a detailed examination of its proposals reveals that there are two fundamental deficiencies in its approach. One of those deficiencies has been highlighted by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). Clause 6 in part I and clause 64 in part III respectively refer to integrated pollution control and statutory nuisances and clean air. Those parts of the Bill use the phrase which has been repeated today by the Secretary of State and several of his hon. Friends—"not entailing excessive cost". It is a matter of great concern that that phrase is tagged on to some of the protections provided in those parts of the Bill.

If it is left to operators and to manufacturers to decide what is and what is not excessive cost—the Bill is far from clear who will determine that—one can be sure that almost every item of environmental protection required for incinerators, chemical works and other places will be considered excessively costly. That is what will happen unless the Bill is tightened up in Committee.

Another problem at the heart of the Bill relates to clauses 18 and 54, concerning public information. The Bill states that, in cases of commercial confidentiality, the public, local authorities, Members of Parliament and so on will not have access to information. That seems reasonably innocuous, but I suspect that, in the past, many hon. Members, like me, have tried to find out exactly what is going on at a chemical works near or within their constituencies.

If the Secretary of State or any of his Ministers have never tried to find out such information, I recommend the exercise to them. If a firm does not want what it is up to broadcast and if one approaches various responsible authorities, such as the fire authority, the pollution inspectorate, the Health and Safety Executive or the local authority, one is told that the information is commercially sensitive or confidential.

Even now, Members of Parliament and local councillors, never mind local residents, cannot find out what is going on at various factories. When the Government talk about commercial confidentiality, I get extremely worried. After all, this is the Government who decided that we could not know how much it cost to advertise the water privatisation, as it was a matter of commercial confidentiality. They also decided that we could not find out how much money was spent on promoting housing action trusts for the same reason. They used the same argument to prevent us from knowing how much money was spent on publicising and promoting the docklands developments.

It is apparent that commercial confidentiality is erected, and will continue to be erected, as a great barrier against public access to information. People should be allowed to find out what is going on in their area.

I worked for about five years as an engineer in the chemical industry. I know that, if anyone believes that there is something magically secretive about what goes on at most chemical factories, they are living in a dream world. Often, what is going on at a chemical manufacturing plant has more to do with cookery than chemistry, and if any competitor wants to find out, it is fairly easy to do so. A few telephone calls and a few orders will enable the competitor to piece together what is going on.

Firms often claim that they cannot give information because it is commercially sensitive, or a matter of commercial secrecy, and because of the fear of competition. Firms know that it is easy for competitors to discover what is going on. They use that excuse because they do not want local residents, local authorities and others to know that. Unless the argument for commercial

[Mr. George Howarth]

confidentiality as outlined in the Bill is clarified, I, and most members of the public, will be deeply suspicious about its use.

The Bill sets up a sort of framework against which waste management proposals and incineration proposals can be judged. The report of the Select Committee on the Environment on toxic waste and the Department's response to it have shed some light on the problems, the possible answers and some of the available technologies.

The truth of the matter, however—any reasonably competent practising engineer will confirm it—is that none of the technologies available can guarantee that the burning temperature of municipal and medical incinerators can be guaranteed to remain at 1,300 deg C, which is required to kill off dioxins. If that cannot be guaranteed, any local population are right to be deeply suspicious about proposals to build any type of incinerator to burn waste in their backyard. The Bill does not cover that matter in any detail and I do not have any confidence in the Government's intention to get the matter under control.

One of the most feared pollutants is the toxic waste emission of dioxin. A local community is right to believe that it is in danger if an incinerator is built nearby. Unless and until technology is produced, or some more effective method of monitoring is introduced, I shall not countenance the development of the incinerators currently proposed for my area.

Although I welcome the fact that environmental protection is at last the subject of debate and legislation, many areas do not warrant a mention in the Bill. I am bound to say that our reasoned amendment is a good response to the Bill. I shall vote for it, because the Bill leaves too much unsaid and too much uncovered.

8.49 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): The environment can be a large subject—the hole in the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect—or it can be a small subject such as the state of local streets or whether local wildlife in the streets is cared for, and that may mean something as humble as a blackbird or a robin. Often, it is the small things which cause the most annoyance to local people. I shall concentrate on one matter briefly mentioned in the Bill—noise.

Noise comes under the heading of a statutory nuisance. Last summer, which was long and hot, I had more complaints from my constituents about noise than anything else. It seems that when the weather is hot, people like to get outside and party, but the trouble is that they like to do so all through the night. In two roads in my consistuency—Pearl road and Morgan avenue—the residents' lives last summer were made miserable for months on end by one family in each street. Those families had music playing all through the night, friends arriving at 3 am and 4 am, and cars arriving with their radios blaring —*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members, who are laughing, wanted to be constructive, they could come to Walthamstow and beat up those people. They would have had the thanks of my constituents if they had done so.

The present statutory provisions for dealing with noise are not strong enough. The burden is placed on local authorities. Some of these have noise controls, but they tend to be out only on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, not during the week. Therefore, people suffering from noise caused by others have no remedy other than to ring the police, who have no powers because causing such a noise is not a criminal offence.

When I looked at the Bill I was disappointed to see that, once again, the responsibility for trying to deal with this menace is placed on local authorities, but that there is no duty on local authorities to deal with it. When people come to see me at my surgery and say, "Mr. Summerson, the entire street is being kept awake night after night and week after week; we cannot sleep in our front bedrooms but have to go to the back bedrooms because these people come and make such a noise; what are we to do about it?", I say, "Have you rung the police?" They say that they have rung the police, who come and tell those making the noise to keep it quiet and to turn the music down. The police go, and 10 minutes later those people are at it again.

Those who complain would not mind so much if they had to put up with a party on a Saturday night. Nobody minds if the party goes on until 2 am if it happens only once or twice a year, but when it goes on night after night for weeks on end, people feel that there must be a statutory provision to enable them to live their lives in peace and quiet. They cannot do so at the moment, as I have discovered from my own experience.

I have a flat just down the road here in Westminster. A man who lives only a few yards away comes back from the pub drunk. I see him coming back and know what will happen. He will turn up the volume of his music, open his windows and blast the street with it. It can be country and western, Irish national or rock music—I never know what he is going to play, but I know that he will play it until 3 am, 4 am or 5 am. I ring up the police, who arrive looking weary and fed up. They go and have a word with him, and 10 minutes later, when they have gone, the music starts again. I ring up Westminster city council, for which I have the greatest admiration, but on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights, it does not have a noise patrol. That is the problem.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider giving powers to the police so that they can come along, perhaps with a noise meter, and institute criminal proceedings against whoever causes a nuisance.

I shall turn from one nuisance to another. The subject of dog mess has already been mentioned. I see from the memorandum to the Bill that clause 70

"empowers the Secretary of State to include any description of animal droppings in the definition of refuse for this part of the Bill."

The problem is that, until my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that dog mess will be included in the definition of "refuse" in the Bill, dog mess will not be counted as refuse. That could mean that, when the street cleaner comes along and sees the dog mess, he will say that, according to section 70 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, dog mess is not refuse, so he will carefully sweep around it. If he is at all legally minded and looks at his copy of the Environmental Protection Act, that is what he will see.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will see fit to include——

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Summerson: I am sorry: I would give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I am running within the 10-minute time limit.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will include dog mess in the definition of refuse.

I hope that the House will not consider me frivolous, but I hope that my right hon. Friend will also include bird mess within the description of refuse. In my constituency, pigeons nest underneath the bridge where the railway line crosses Wood street. They have done so for years. When someone walks underneath, he or she finds it quite revolting—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) asks, "Why?" If he walked under that bridge——

Mr. Corbyn: I said that it was called guano.

Mr. Summerson: I thought that the hon. Gentleman asked, "Why?" and I was going to recommend that he stood under the bridge for five minutes; then he would find out why it was revolting.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will bear these points in mind and realise that, if he includes bird and animal droppings within the definition of refuse, he will make life a lot happier for those urban dwellers among us.

8.57 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): As many hon. Members want to speak I shall confine my remarks to one part of the Bill—the first part on integrated pollution control. As has been said, since 1976 the principle of integrated pollution control has been accepted as something for which we should work. I am glad to say that it is now to be implemented.

In practice, it is difficult to find people who are expert in all forms of waste control—water waste, solid waste, air pollution and radioactive substances. They are different disciplines, and to find inspectors expert in all of them is like finding professors of chemistry who can also teach physics, biology and computing. The goal is very ambitious.

It is disappointing that integrated pollution control is to be based on the present HMIP which, as several hon. Members have said, is suffering badly from low morale. It is in a shambles; two directors have resigned, and the late Brian Ponsford committed suicide under the stress of the job.

HMIP is grossly understaffed; its 199 members of staff face the enormous task of overseeing air pollution, waste control and radioactive substances. I have studied air pollution carefully over the past three or four months while serving on the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which has been looking into toxic waste and taking a particular interest in Rechem's incinerator in Pontypool

A cowboys' charter seems to regulate air pollution in this country. There have been only nine prosecutions in the past 10 years, so effectively, the law does not operate. The director of the western division on HMIP gave evidence to us in November and I asked him about monitoring Rechem in Pontypool. Its incinerator is the largest in Britain, although there are three other large ones. More than half its trade is in burning imported PCB wastes. As everyone knows, there is serious anxiety in the local community about possible contamination of the neighbourhood by PCBs and dioxins in the flue gases.

HMIP has been visiting the incinerator for sampling only twice a year and it carries out an analysis of the flue gases which looks only for particulates and carbon monoxide. Analysis of PCBs and dioxins is carried out by Rechem itself, and that is appalling. It is do-it-yourself pollution control.

Because of poor staffing levels, HMIP's inspections of premises across Britain have been cut by 40 per cent. in the past four years. On average, industrial premises are sampled once every two years. That contrasts with the NRA, which takes samples at least monthly, and sometimes even weekly or daily, from large industrial premises.

There are only 32 air pollution inspectors in Britain, compared with 1,000 in the Netherlands and 20,000 in the United States. What comes out of chimneys in the form of air pollution is just as important as what pollutes our waterways. The NRA has more than 6,000 members of staff: HMIP a mere 200. It is nonsense to transfer some of the responsibilities of the NRA to HMIP, as this Bill does. HMIP lacks the necessary organisation.

We support and advocate integrated pollution control, but only if it has the necessary resources. I looked through the Bill carefully to discover its financial implications. The budget for the enlarged HMIP will be only £3 million or £4 million a year—peanuts compared with the budgets of the chemical industry which produces the waste. The money will mean an additional 15 members of staff for HMIP. Given those scant resources, how can we expect integrated pollution control to work?

The Government have been in power for 10 years and this, their first Bill on the environment, contains nothing about the greenhouse effect, carbon dioxide emissions, acid rain and other global environmental issues. Too little and too late, the Bill offers very little and very late.

9.4 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I intend to say a few words about the administrative framework of pollution control as outlined in the Bill. I intend also to refer to some of the objectives that should be incorporated in any sensible environmental policy. Before I do so, I should contrast the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment with that of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). I agree with a number of the points made by Opposition Members, but the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham was slightly unfortunate. He criticised the measure without suggesting that parts of it might be good. That may be connected with his party's record during the past 30 to 40 years.

It is relevant that about 48 Acts of Parliament since 1945 have had a large environmental content. Of those, 32 were passed under Conservative Administrations. A mere 15 were passed under Labour Administrations. For every year, therefore, under Governments of the two parties, well over one Act went on to the statute book under a Conservative Government, whereas rather less than one Act went on to the statute book under a Labour Government. Since 1974, Labour Governments have passed five Acts of Parliament, whereas Conservative Governments have passed 11.

This is one of a series of measures that go back for many years, if not decades. I welcome the use of the term "integrated pollution control". That must be the way forward. However, my experience as a member of the

[Mr. Keith Mans]

Select Committee leads me to believe that it is one thing to talk about integrated pollution control but quite another to make it a reality. Some of my hon. Friends have already said that it will be difficult to implement all facets of integrated pollution control.

Although I am happy about integrated pollution control, I am less happy about the job that local authorities will be asked to do. As the collectors and disposers of waste, their record is good. Wyre borough in Lancashire already operates a forward-looking policy for the collection of waste and the clearing up of litter. Its policy is well ahead of what is provided for in the Bill. Many other boroughs and districts will, I believe, take up such a policy with relish.

I am also less happy about the regulatory nature of some of the roles that county councils will have to play. It is not sensible to vest the regulation and disposal of waste in the same authority, however much at arm's length the arrangements between the two may appear to be. There are three main reasons why that is not the right way forward. The first relates to the record of county councils over their waste disposal plans. A waste disposal plan was sent to me recently by a county council. I hasten to add that it was not my own. The covering note provided some fairly specious reasons for taking 15 years to produce the plan. It boiled down to a lack of resources and, most important, the lack of priority that was given to the preparation of the plan. That does not bode well for the regulatory tasks that county councils will have to perform.

Secondly, I have already referred to the fact that the same authority will be both poacher and gamekeeper. Water privatisation means that the Department of the Environment has got rid of those two functions, and it is unfortunate that the poacher-gamekeeper relationship is to continue within the county councils.

Thirdly, I am worried whether the best method to dispose of waste will be used when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said, up to 199 different authorities will be putting forward their own best methods for waste disposal. That is far too many.

The boundaries between county councils are administrative, not natural. However, I agree with my colleagues on the Select Committee on the Environment that we must consider waste disposal in terms of regional authorities based on natural boundaries—river basins. I would like to see a move towards combining the functions of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the National Rivers Authority to create a proper environment protection agency, rather than give responsibility for waste disposal to county councils.

I hope that the White Paper that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will issue later this year will point us towards such a combined function in the future. Provided that such a body were responsible to the Secretary of State, in precisely the same way as the health and safety inspectorate is responsible to the Secretary of State for Employment, there would be an element of accountability. I understand that lack of accountability was a reason for not following that route.

We can see that there will be problems with duplication of effort in the route that we are following. I was pleased to read in the paper today that the problem of different areas of responsibility between the NRA and HMIP has been reconciled. I suspect that there will be problems with the various disposal agencies and the county councils in their regulatory role and their relationship with HMIP.

Several county councils are setting up organisations to deal with the environment, and that is probably laudable. Often, the first thing that they do is communicate with the NRA, which has to explain what the councils should do. Then they often decide to do something slightly different, based on the advice of another set of experts. HMIP is having difficulty recruiting staff, and the scarce numbers of environmental experts should not be used up arguing with each other. One organisation should be responsible for the overall control of pollution, and that would make the best use of the expertise that is available.

A sensible environment policy should include three main objectives—recycling, minimisation of waste and safe waste disposal. Some mention has been made this evening of the need for manufacturing processes that acknowledge the importance of the environment. We should see more of that in the future.

I am pleased about the role of local authorities in the recycling of waste. However, I am slightly disappointed that the Bill is not printed on recycled paper. I am certain that that will be the case in the future.

Safe methods of waste disposal are important. I am convinced that the costs of disposal will have to be increased to meet safety needs, particularly for refrigerators and other items that contain what are considered to be dangerous chemicals.

The Bill is a good one. It is only a step in the right direction, and a considerable amount will need to be done in the future, but the Bill deserves the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House, as it points the way towards integrated pollution control, and it will put us in the forefront of the protection of the environment.

9.14 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In many ways, the Bill is a rather sad affair. It is a response to much pressure from ordinary people who want to live in a decent and clean environment.

The Bill includes a series of pollution control measures, some of which are likely to be effective, but some of which are likely to be ineffective. It does not attempt to address the wider environmental questions of which the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have been speaking over the past few months. It says nothing about the amount of money that may be given to the United Nations environmental programme, nothing about support for international initiatives on the ozone layer, protection of the rain forests and the savannah grasslands, and little about the future of the world's environment, its ecosystems and what contribution the Government will make. For those reasons, its objectives are limited. A further Bill may be necessary, or a statement from the Secretary of State on the resources that will be devoted to those important issues.

If we do not address those major issues, we are heading for a serious climatic and ecological disaster. Indeed, much evidence suggests that it is already occurring. The creation of new deserts where rain forests once stood, the destruction of much of the savannah grassland and the changes in the climatic systems in central and south America and parts of Africa and Asia prove that. The droughts, storms and flooding of the past few years were

not freaks but were part of a climatic change that has occurred as a result of the activities of the human race. Those issues must be addressed in the Bill.

Together with other hon. Members, I support controls on pollution, the principle that the polluter must pay and the right of the public to know who is causing pollution and damage. Emphasis should be placed on who and what is causing waste. It is all very well to speak of the need for controls on litter and of the need for greater recycling, but should we not be examining the need for the production of paper?

In an intervention to the Secretary of State, I did not call for massive censorship of newspapers, but pointed out that we are an incredibly paper-wasteful society. If one buys a sweet in a shop, why must it be wrapped three, four or five times? Why must packaged food in supermarkets be wrapped at least three times and enveloped in a plastic bag that cannot rot because it is not biodegradable? Our approach must acknowledge that, even if we recycle paper, we are still using energy resources. The question should be: is it necessary to manufacture that paper? The same applies to glass and tinned cans for soft drinks, with all the problems of recycling that they pose. I should like to see a system that does not produce waste, that produces not solely for profit or for consumerism, but for the needs of people.

The largest single polluter in this country is the motor car. It produces more carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and other dangerous and noxious gases than almost any industrial process. Cars fitted with catalytic converters produce more carbon dioxide, yet the Department of Transport quite happily accepts that car usage will increase. Indeed, it encourages the use of private cars by underfunding British Rail and regional transport systems and by pursuing an anti-public transport strategy. I ask the Government to adopt a different approach to those matters.

I represent a densely populated inner-city area. The borough of Islington has the least amount of open space of any urban area in the country. What little space we have has been fought for by the people who live in the borough. Many of my constituents live in grossly overcrowded housing. They live in a poor environment, partly because of that overcrowding, partly because of pollution and partly because of the lack of open space. Their worries about the world's environment are the worries of us all. Their worries about access to the countryside and the preservation of the rural and wilder areas and of the planet are our worries, because they rightly demand access to open space.

I hope that when we again discuss environmental protection we shall go much further than the proposals in the Bill and that we shall not miss the great opportunities offered by the Bill to make a serious contribution to the future of the world's environment. The situation becomes more serious day by day. The free enterprise policies that produce solely for waste and for profit and that promote a consumerist mentality rather than one of need are damaging to the environment. I am in no sense defending the centralised economies of eastern Europe. They have polluted the North sea and rivers just as industries in Britain and North America have destroyed rivers, wasted natural resources and ruined people's lives by their form of pollution.

It is not good enough to promote an economic system that produces for waste and to promote environmental controls in western Europe and North America to look after our environment if at the same time we transfer that destruction of the environment to poorer Third-world countries, either by exporting toxic waste and letting those countries get rid of it by whatever means they can, because they are desperate for foreign currency, or by promoting the destruction of the rain forests, through raping those countries to collect debt payments, when they can make them only by destroying all their natural resources.

We live in an age when we have an opportunity to improve our environment and save ourselves from mass destruction through climatic change and environmental disasters. The Bill goes some way towards meeting some of the worries about pollution controls, but it misses the great opportunity which we should grasp and to which the House will have to return repeatedly if we are to contribute towards saving the environment rather than destroying it.

9.22 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): On listening to the contributions to the debate, one might be forgiven for thinking that we have a serious environmental problem in Britain. Nothing could be further from the truth. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) implied that market forces were somehow responsible, that affluence leads to effluence, but that is not so. We need only look at eastern Europe to see that Socialism leads to effluence and that the toxic waste produced by an unregulated but highly subsidised Socialist economy causes pollution problems. There, the air is not fit to breathe, the water is not fit to drink and even carrots grown in allotments are allegedly not fit to be eaten. Those problems are produced not by the capitalist society that we have the good fortune to have, but by Socialism or by the remnants of Socialism even here in our country.

Water pollution, in so far as the water industry has been in the hands of the public sector, is largely the issue about which we complain, but the Government are changing that with their new legislation. The more we bring industries into a capitalist system, the fewer pollution problems we shall have to complain about.

An enormous divergence of issues is subsumed in the Bill. No one could possibly suggest that litter or dog droppings are in the same category as the disposal of industrial waste, global warming or acid rain—there is clearly a great difference in the scale of the problems. One problem is possibly environmental pollution and the other is simply a matter of training people into better habits. A different regime of regulation should be applied to each.

We are well aware of the need to recycle renewable resources such as wood and paper, so we must guard against having another regime of regulation that might make that a less attractive option for the private sector. There are also non-renewable resources, such as oil and coal, and the way in which to protect those resources and to make them last is to price them appropriately. As the resources are used up, they become more expensive and the market finds more economical ways of operating. The way in which to conserve non-renewable resources is through the price mechanism, not through yet more regulation, inspectors and administrative burdens placed on industry.

We must start not where we should like to be, in the utopia of a pre-industrial society, but from where we are now. We must be careful not to construct a regime of regulation that will make it impossible for our industries to

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

continue to develop and grow. That could easily happen. It would not be the first time in our recent history that we had identified a problem and so regulated matters that we had made it worse.

In that regard, I draw the attention of the House to housing. A few decades ago, housing was identified as a problem that needed control and Government intervention and regulation. What has happened? We have made matters ten times worse. We have regulated housing in which people do not want to live, unattractive council estates and more homelessness than we have experienced for a very long time. All of that came out of good intentions and the problem was exacerbated by the imposition of a vast administrative and regulatory regime.

What concerns me about the Bill is the number of new regulatory bodies that it proposes for our industry. I urge the Minister to bear it in mind in Committee that one gains more converts with honey than with vinegar. We must guard against over-regulating our industries and making it difficult for them to produce consumer goods at prices that people can afford, by making it almost impossible for them to conduct their business profitably and sensibly.

We have heard talk during the debate about packaging, but the private sector already has a council that is examining the matter. We do not need more regulation; we just need better co-operation. Private sector organisations are already producing data banks of information on which the better management of raw materials can be based.

Before we start spending taxpayers' money on environmental agencies—part of the Bill's proposals—I urge the Minister to take a good look at what the private sector is already doing and at how the private sector can be helped to regulate itself. Then the measures that we introduce will go with the grain of industry rather than against it. They should be industry-friendly, as well as environment-friendly, and we should ensure that we do not drive our industries into a corner so that they can no longer meet people's expectations. We must remember that when Parliament gets its teeth into what is alleged to be a new problem, it sometimes ends up making things worse.

I view the Bill with caution. I trust that the Minister has a sensible attitude to the beneficial aspects of industrialisation and the private sector, and I hope that in 10 years' time the House will not look back and wonder why we allowed the strangulation of so much of our industrial framework under the guise of protecting ourselves from something that is not nearly as much of a problem as Opposition Members and many environmental agencies would have us believe.

9.28 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) introduced a novel note into the debate. Alone of all the speakers whom we have heard, she believes that environmental pollution is not a problem. She says that if there is a problem, it is all the fault of Socialists and that pollution control is a burden on industry. Perhaps the hon. Lady made an old speech because she had not been made aware that there has been a change of Secretary of State and that the attitude of the current Secretary of State is somewhat different from that of his predecessor. I am sure that the new Secretary of State will update her.

The Bill has one of the grandest titles of any Bill to come before the House for a long time. Its title, "Environmental Protection Bill", is a sweeping statement of intention which no one, except perhaps the hon. Member for Billericay, would want to oppose. For many people, few issues loom larger on the horizon than the need for urgent action now to protect our environment. That need is central to the health and well-being of all of us, and it is crucial to the future of our children.

As the problems are so great and people are aware that the dangers have intensified so much, any Bill with this title is to be welcomed. However, the problem and the sadness is that the Bill's content does not match the aspirations of its title. A Bill to tackle the major environmental problems facing us now must, in simple logic, deal first with the most significant and major threats to our environment.

Ministers have identified and pontificated on the problems. The Prime Minister has referred to the problems of global warming. She has complained that we are adding greenhouse gases to the air at an unprecedented rate, and she has spoken about the scale of the damage. However, the Bill is completely silent about that issue.

In his television interview in "On the Record", the Secretary of State came up with many ideas and comments which showed that he had taken on board the magnitude of many of the problems facing us. He won much praise for his comments, and they induced high hopes among those concerned with these issues. We hoped for the best from the Secretary of State.

However, since the Bill's publication, we have had to revise our expectations and realise that anyone who followed the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) as Secretary of State for the Environment would have produced high expectations. It would be hard for anyone to be more anti-environment than the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, although the hon. Member for Billericay is trying.

This Bill, the first product of the efforts of the new Secretary of State, does not answer the expectations which his reputation has created. It reorganises some aspects of pollution control, concentrates on somewhat gimmicky approaches to litter, and opens the door for competitive tendering for waste disposal. It also reconstructs the Nature Conservancy Council because of certain vested interests, but without proper consultation. Such a Bill could probably have been introduced by the Secretary of State's predecessor; I can think of no worse condemnation than that of the new Secretary of State's green mantle.

The Bill can be described only as an incredible disappointment and wasted opportunity. The Bill has some worthy parts and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said earlier, we will seek to clarify, strengthen and support those parts in Committee. However, the great and glaring gaps in the legislation are staggering.

If I mention some of the areas which should have been covered by the Bill, perhaps the Minister for the Environment and Countryside will take them on board. After all, the Government have promised to table many new clauses and to take up many other issues such as straw burning, Crown immunity and dumping at sea. Perhaps there will be room for more. I fear that the Bill that we are

discussing tonight will bear little resemblance to the final legislation. In that context, I hope that the Government will respond to our constructive amendments in the way that they hope we will respond to theirs.

The Bill should have contained the basic principles of environmental protection. We must quickly adopt the principle of a presumption against pollution. We cannot assume that the environment can always take the pollution that we create.

Before we seek to control pollution, we must seek to prevent it by changing methods and by examining our use of resources. Coupled with that, we must have clearer timetables and targets, not just good intentions. Therefore, it is not enough for the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State to be worried about global warming. The Government have agreed to peg carbon dioxide levels to those that are reached by the year 2000, but they can increase until then. As was said earlier, they should have stabilised them within five years, but they did not because it goes against the grain of 10 years of Thatcherism.

The Secretary of State tells us that we must wait for the White Paper. He forgets that the Government have already had 10 years in which to deal with environmental problems and that a lot more would have been achieved and the problems could have been minimised if there had not been many negative moves by the Government in the past 10 years. I refer to the Government's failure to invest in public transport and their dismal record on energy conservation. In 1986-87, the Energy Efficiency Office budget was £26 million. This year it is £15 million. Next year it will be £12 million. In view of the problems that we face, they are absolutely senseless cuts.

If the Government and the Minister were committed to tackling environmental problems we would not have seen such a drop in spending, nor would we have seen the end of the television campaigns on energy saving, for the first time since 1973. The Government were keen enough to spend taxpayers' money to sell the water industry, but they were not keen enough to use taxpayers' money to promote energy saving. Of course, only last year, the Government rejected the energy conservation duties that the Labour party tried to put into the Electricity Bill. It seems that the Government are keener on privatising the Meteorological Office than they are on introducing legislation to tackle global warming. While that remains the case, the Secretary of State will have a long way to go to deliver the action that is required to justify his reputation.

The Secretary of State wants hon. Members to accept that many things should be left to the White Paper, but, when the White Paper is produced, he will want to consult further. He is in danger of becoming one of the few Tories —if not the only Tory—who hope that the election will not be deferred for too long, or he himself will run out of excuses for not taking action on these problems. We will watch his efforts with interest.

Part I, dealing with integrated pollution control, is accepted in principle by most hon. Members, but there are still some outstanding problems. The Government's proposals concentrate on the control, rather than the prevention, of pollution. I hope that the Secretary of State will accept some of our amendments for strengthening that part of the Bill. The list of processes and substances to be covered by IPC is minimal. Many dangerous chemicals that are listed in other countries are not covered by the legislation. Moreover, existing polluters will not face more stringent controls and will not be considered under IPC until their existing consents come up for renewal. That could be five years away. Opposition Members share many of the concerns about that part of the Bill.

Opposition Members also share the concern of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) about BATNEEC, which, for the uninitiated, is the best available techniques at no extra cost. It begs the question of no extra cost, and it also begs the question whether pollution inspectors should be letting firms off the highest standards simply because of judgments of that kind. Is it the inspectors' job to judge cost, or is it their job to lay down standards? Certainly, laying down standards must come first.

We have seen examples of the old alkali inspectorate acknowledging that different standards of pollution were allowed in different circumstances depending on the size and profitability of a company. I question whether that is the best way to protect the environment. We must, of course, promote best available techniques, but we must not provide large loopholes, which is what seems to be happening.

I remind the Minister of State, who is from the north-west, of what happened in Bolton, where a company manufacturing lead batteries wanted to expand and to build a factory locally. The local authority did not accept the inspectorate's view that the best practicable means had been planned for and entered into an agreement with the company which meant that it provided better standards of pollution protection, even than the inspectorate had accepted. That is an example of what can be done if the principle of pollution prevention comes first. I hope that the Minister will give some credit to that local authority.

Similar arguments can be used about the future of environmental assessments. I hope that we shall come to that matter in Committee.

The other great concern about part I relates to resources. The work of HMIP, which is to supervise the integrated pollution control provision, has received a great deal of comment in the recent past. The latest reports show that the standards and frequency of inspections are falling. The target of 1,070 inspections for radioactive substances was not met. Indeed, HMIP itself states that the target should have been 1,900. Fifty waste disposal authorities should have been visited, but only 20 were. In a letter from the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the right hon. Gentleman admits that in MINIS 10 it is recognised that the targets for HMIP are generally below those of previous years.

Mr. Trippier *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Taylor: I note that the Minister of State is agreeing. The Government's neglect of this area for so long, especially in relation to training, has finally caught up with them. The Bill provides for 15 extra staff for HMIP, but HMIP is unable to police its existing operations. Much of what is wrong with the Bill is typified by that example of resources.

There are many sound principles in the Bill, but the opportunity for their proper implementation has been lost time and time again previously because of a lack of the proper resources. This is causing concern to the local authorities that are keen to take on many of the extra duties of the Bill, but whose confidence in the Secretary of State's willingness to resource them has not been

[Mrs. Taylor]

improved. The Secretary of State's decision not to make a statement to the House this year on the revenue support grant has not increased their confidence.

I turn to another important area of the Bill and to one that the Secretary of State himself mentioned. I refer to freedom of access to environmental information. There now seems to be some agreement in principle that information should be available as much as possible, but that agreement is only stage one. The Bill will have to be amended if it is to provide the raw data throughout that the Secretary of State announced earlier.

There is a problem because the let-out of "commercial confidentiality" will still divide us when we discuss this provision in Committee.

I look forward to the Secretary of State's guidelines, but we want to see where the burden of proof is to lie. Should we really trust the fine words of the Minister when it comes to defining commercial confidentiality in the public interest? After all, it was his Department that refused in a parliamentary question to give the House the cost of the housing action trust study carried out by Coopers and Lybrand. Why? Because of commercial confidentiality. It was his Government who, in answer to a parliamentary question asking about the loss to the Exchequer of the tax concessions on the docklands scheme, refused to tell the taxpayer on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. It was his Government—his very Department—who refused to tell us the cost of advertising for the water nationalisation on grounds of commercial confidentiality. We shall watch the Government's actions on that carefully.

We are short of time, after an interesting debate that has opened up many subjects that we shall want to discuss further in Committee. With the best will in the world, no one could say that the Bill will save us from the dire environmental damage that is being done daily. No one has opposed the intention of the Bill, but no one has spoken about it with much enthusiasm. We all regret the wasted opportunity and the fact that the Secretary of State has missed the chance to show that he will tackle the problems of the environment. We shall try to strengthen the Bill in Committee so as to fill the gap left by the Secretary of State. That is why we have tabled the reasoned amendment.

9.45 pm

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): Contrary to what the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) alleged, I appreciate the fact that, with relatively few exceptions, there has been general support for the principles and provisions of this important Bill. With the notable exception of the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), I welcome the many positive comments made in the debate, especially from the vast majority of my hon. Friends and from Opposition Members such as the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike). I gladly take that as a clear signal that the Bill will be considered constructively and positively in Committee.

It is interesting that hardly any Labour Member referred to the Opposition amendment. Whatever happened to the fourth action programme on the environment or global warming? I admit that the hon. Member for Dagenham found a friend in the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—if he can be considered one of his hon. Friends. That goes to show that even a friend in need can be a blithering nuisance. For the life of me, I cannot think why anyone can vote for an amendment that nobody has thought it important enough to discuss.

Protection and improvement of our shared and fragile environment is a cause that is attracting enormous public interest and support—more now than at any time in the history of this nation. It is right that the House should reflect that awareness and concern in its deliberations. This is a Bill for a cleaner and greener Britain.

Despite the misgivings of the hon. Member for Dagenham, the Bill provides a thorough-going overhaul of our regulatory system for not only protecting but enhancing our environment. It will deliver better accountability, clearer responsibilities and higher standards. Enforcement of environmental controls will become easier and penalties for transgression will be tougher. The power, role and responsibility of individuals and local authorities will be increased. Local authorities will be able to exercise greater powers in the regulation and control of pollution, reflecting the importance of local democracy in the cause of environmental enhancement.

I point out to the right hon. Member for Halton that the new system for cost recovery charging should cover the full cost to local authorities of implementing their new powers. Because public access to environmental information will be increased substantially every individual in Britain will become an environmental watchdog in his own right. These are the central tenets that contribute significantly to the overall impact of the Bill and that will enable us to deliver an effective system to take us through the next decade.

Today's debate has reflected the support that we have received from all interested parties for the new system of integrated pollution control and the tighter controls that local authorities will have over air pollution. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), many people have welcomed our proposals to reform waste disposal to separate ownership from regulation. In view of the reasonable requests of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, about those recalcitrant local authorities which have yet to submit their waste disposal plans, I assure him that I will move an amendment in Committee to meet his concerns. We shall also deal with the code of practice to which he referred in his excellent speech. It will be available for the Committee stage.

Like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I welcome the excellent work discharged by the Royal Commission on environmental protection, genetically modified organisms and integrated pollution control. It grieves me to say that I agreed with the hon. Member for Godon (Mr. Bruce) in his summary of the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham. I agreed, too, with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) when he said that the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham was not worthy of the occasion. I say that it grieves me because I have great regard for the hon. Gentleman, but it is clear to me that on environmental matters he suffers from delusions of adequacy.

The hon. Member for Gordon made the speech that the hon. Member for Dagenham should have made. The hon.

Member for Dagenham completely and utterly misjudged the mood of the House. His main complaint was not about what was in the Bill but what was not. He was worried not about the direction in which the Government were moving but that they were not moving even faster.

I am afraid that my enthusiasm for the refreshing novel approach from the Opposition waned somewhat when I heard the long shopping list of extra items that the hon. Gentleman actually wanted.

I would be staggered if the hon. Gentleman ever missed even a spurious opportunity to demand more money for local authorities, but his list of additional demands grew so long that I fully expected the Labour party's policy review demands for 100 new quangos, 10 regional assemblies and a Ministry for Women to pop up somewhere along the line. Perhaps we shall get that in Committee. I am looking to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) to introduce it.

Mrs. Gorman: I hope that my hon. Friend is not in any way suggesting that women are a pollutant.

Mr. Trippier: I have a high regard for the approach of British women to environmental matters. I am the first to pay them warm tribute and to compliment them on the way in which they have spearheaded the consumer-led reduction in the use of CFCs. I am glad to have this opportunity to put that on the record.

Perhaps in Committee we can examine what the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) meant when he talked about state capitalism, which is a new term used to describe those Governments, if they can be called Governments, in eastern Europe who are being emancipated. It is state capitalism that many of us do not understand, and perhaps we can study it in Committee.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the Bill is not our final word on the environment. As a result of his personal initiative, we shall publish a major White Paper on the environment later this year. I assure the House that every aspect of environmental protection will be fully and comprehensively covered. That will include the environmental protection commission to which my hon. Friends the Members for Hertfordshire, West and Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) referred.

Mr. Dalyell: In a case where there is argument as to what is a Scottish issue and what is an issue for Great Britain—I think particularly of the flow country—who, under the Minister's proposals, decides?

Mr. Trippier: We are going a little wider than Great Britain—we are talking about the United Kingdom, not Great Britain, as I shall make clear later. The issue would be decided by the statutory joint committee which will be set up under the powers of the Bill, the chairman of which, Professor Holliday, was announced today.

The call of the hon. Member for Dagenham for measures to comply especially with the fourth environmental action programme of the European Community and with other international commitments overlooks the fact that many of the clauses ensure compliance with that programme. In several cases, the Bill goes much further.

Part I allows us to implement the large plants directive and to control discharges in line with Community legislation. IPC puts us in the lead in Europe with a philosophy that is attracting much overseas attention. Part II strengthens the licensing provisions that implement EC legislation on waste and the controls on the imports of hazardous waste are stronger than Community legislation. I know that the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) will particularly welcome that.

The proposed new powers and duties on recycling will put us in good stead with forthcoming Community legislation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch said. The control of genetically modified organisms puts us ahead of the game, as do the provisions on public access to information and the provisions, writ large in the Bill, on studying existing chemicals. Those provisions will give us greater powers than those proposed in the draft directive. All that does not look to me as though the Government are ignoring their international obligations—quite the opposite. The same is true of the commitments that we have made outside the Bill.

Mr. George Howarth: How will the provisions on commercial confidentiality facilitate public information?

Mr. Trippier: I am delighted to repeat the assurance that my right hon. Friend gave. We shall be rigorous, not only in Committee but, given our responsibility as Ministers, to ensure that commercial confidentiality is not used as an excuse for keeping information which is vital to the public off the copies of registers to be held in every town hall.

I have referred to what the Bill does, but we are not just talking about the Bill. We have already signed the Montreal protocol and the Noordwijk declaration. Given the fact that the previous Labour Government spent five years in office without even implementing part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, I find it impossible to stomach the strictures and allegations of delays made by the hon. Member for Dagenham.

I am still amazed at Opposition Members criticising our proposals to devolve responsibilities for conservation to new bodies in Scotland, England and Wales. It seems that it is the policy of the Labour party to foist new Parliaments on the people of Scotland and Wales, but not to trust them to run and staff their own nature conservation agencies. I remind the House that the NCC had a raw deal under the previous Labour Government. We inherited expenditure on the NCC to the tune of £8 million; next year that expenditure will be more than £45 million.

The Bill embodies our absolute commitment to secure a substantial and permanent reduction in the national scandal of litter which disfigures our streets, desecrates our public places and debases many areas of otherwise spectacular beauty. That was the principal message of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) asked me about future responsibility for litter on and at the side of motorways. That will be the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who is reviewing the frequency of litter clearance in those black spots.

There are still far too many people who do not realise that dropping litter is an anti-social, filthy and personally degrading act. Some local authorities are doing their utmost to tackle litter. The Bill will ensure that they all do so. It will bring nearer the day when those who pollute and litter, and those who suffer as a consequence will know that the British people will no longer tolerate abuse of their environment. We have a responsibility to harness whatever skills we have and pass on to our children not

[Mr. Trippier]

only higher living standards and a better quality of life, but a purer, cleaner and safer environment. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 202, Noes 282.

Division No. 35] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy

Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambaSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Mactarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Maude, Hon Francis
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Environmental Protection Bill *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Environmental Protection Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any administrative or other expenses incurred by any Minister of the Crown in consequence of the provisions of that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): It would be churlish not to acknowledge, having listened carefully to the Secretary of State's opening speech, that—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Will hon. Members who are not staying for the money resolution debate kindly leave quietly, please?

Mr. Dalyell: It would be churlish not to acknowledge that the Secretary of State has made a genuine effort to meet the concerns of hon. Members who have been anxious for many months about the scientific integrity of the Nature Conservancy Council.

However, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, when he said that he had met all the wishes of the NCC, he was inadvertently a trifle misleading? He answered that question on the basis of its current requests, but its prime request was for no alteration in the first place. He answered its letter on the basis that he was going to split the NCC between Wales, Scotland and England, anyway. So, do not let us think that he has given us the best of all possible worlds.

The money resolution affords the opportunity for specific questions. First, I ask the Secretary of State to look at clause 101 of the Bill, and I am indebted to Sir John Burnett, the former principal of Edinburgh university and the vice-chairman of the NCC, for pointing this out to me. Subsection (4) of clause 101 says:

"The Secretary of State may give the Councils, or any of them, directions of a general or specific character with regard to the discharge of any of their nature conservation functions other than those conferred on them by section 102(1)(a) below."

I understand that it is the first time that the words "specific character" have been included in such legislation. Could either the Secretary of State or the Minister short-circuit our proceedings by explaining why this should be so? Why have those words suddenly been introduced into legislation, when they have never appeared before in that form?

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will reply.

Mr. Dalyell: I take it that the Under-Secretary will reply to that.

Secondly, how will the existing ongoing national programmes be maintained? I am thinking of the geological conservation review, and the marine conservation review. Will they be managed as a whole, and if not who will manage them?

Hon. Members who are veterans of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, such as the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), know what blood and sweat went into the establishment of the principle of the marine nature reserves. Skomer is on its way and the Scilly Isles and Lundy have made progress, but one could hope for faster progress. Under the present proposals, who will manage them? I ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland: will the Scottish section be responsible? That is an important and practical question.

Thirdly, will the Minister say a little more about the role of the technical unit? Hon. Members should know that that is not a straightforward question. Ministers brought over an eminent scientist from Australia to be the NCC's chief scientist, but he returned to Australia. I have drawn the conclusion that he found that his job specification was not quite that for which he had been lured from down under.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Chris Patten): I have the doctor's permission to make available to the hon. Gentleman, or to anyone else who would like to see it, the letter that he wrote explaining why he was returning to Australia, in which he makes it clear that he was not prompted by decisions taken on the reorganisation. I can make that available to the hon. Gentleman, or my hon. Friend the Minister can read it out in extenso when he replies to the debate.

Mr. Dalyell: I should be happy to see it. I may have talked to Dr. Bridgewater some time before the decision was made, but I received the impression that he was profoundly unhappy.

Fourthly, how can it be decided what is a Scottish or a United Kingdom issue? I was corrected by the Minister for referring to it as a "GB" issue. Amid the noise, I understood that that would be decided by an independent committee, but there may be two differences of opinion. I suspect that St. Andrew's house would tell the rest of the United Kingdom to keep out of the flow country of Caithness issue. The authorities, having received more letters on the flow country from "south of Bolton", as they put it, may think that it is a United Kingdom issue. I should like to know a little more about who will decide what is what on the flow issue.

Fifthly, there will be three scientific assessors to the joint committee. Will they simply advise, and why should they not be given full membership, which would give them more authority? If they are to be effective, they should be given full membership rather than simply remain as advisors.

Other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall refer briefly to a briefing paper that has been sent to several hon. Members by Angus Stirling, who is director-general of the National Trust. Under the heading, "The need for a scientific base of the highest calibre", he says:

"It is the Trust's strong view that national research programmes and monitoring, together with matters like impact assessment and control of pollution, marine nature conservation and the meeting of our international obligations can only be conducted on a fully integrated Great Britain basis."

Do the Government claim that they have met fully all the requests that they have received from several bodies for a fully integrated Great Britain basis? I do not know the

answer to that question. I concede to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland that hitherto the National Trust for Scotland has taken a different view. He knows that Lester Bosley and his colleagues have taken a different view. I told them of my criticisms. which were kindly answered by the Secretary of State during the debate on the Loyal Address.

What is the response to the NCC's own evidence? On clause 103(2), the NCC stated:

"It is vital that the discharge of nature conservation functions relating to Great Britain as a whole, and international matters, should be undertaken competently and also that common standards should be established and maintained by the Councils. However, the provisions which clause 103(2) makes in relation to the discharge of certain such functions by a Joint Committee appear to be deficient. In particular:

—there is no specific obligation on the Councils to establish a Joint Committee".

Under the Bill, apparently there is no specific obligation. According to the comment by the Secretary of State, a joint committee will be set up. Presumably there are consequential changes in the legislation.

The NCC went on to state:

"the Committee is given no express power to carry out the functions set out in 103(2), although there is an implied power".

Do the parliamentary draftsmen agree with that view? The NCC continued:

"there is no specific obligation on the Councils to refer work to the Committee or any duty on the Committee to carry out work which is referred to it".

Do the Government's lawyers accept that view? I hope that Ministers will get some advice from their advisers on those questions, preferably before Committee. The NCC stated:

"there is no provision for the Joint Committee to appoint a Chairman".

Presumably that point is now covered.

As for the choice of Lord Cranbrook as chairman, some of us have been admirers of a succession of House of Lords reports. We think that, given his Borneo experience and our personal knowledge of Lord Cranbrook, he is an excellent choice. A relative of mine who worked on a committee chaired by Magnus Magnusson and was a member of one of his previous committees, thinks that Magnus Magnusson is a good chairman. I make no complaint about the appointments, but we are curious about the chairmen's powers.

The NCC stated:

"there is no provision for the Committee to appoint officers, or to have officers appointed to it; so, consequently, there is no provision for the Committee to appoint (or have appointed to it) a Chief Officer or Accounting Officer. It is unclear who is responsible for sums expended by the Committee".

We are considering the money resolution, so I wonder whether that point can be clarified. The NCC continued:

"there is no duty on the Committee or the Councils to report on the discharge of duties by the Committtee.

It is far from clear how the Joint Committee could undertake any of its functions under the proposed legal provisions."

Do Ministers think that they have overcome those objections?

10.27 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am pleased that the Secretary of State for the Environment has remained in the Chamber for the debate on the money resolution. I raised the issue of opencasting on another occasion. I should have thought that when the Government introduce a so-called green, environmentally friendly Bill, that theme would run through the whole of the Government's legislation. Tomorrow the House will debate the Report and Third Reading stages of the Coal Industry Bill, which contains something that is unfriendly to the environment. The Government, supported by the Secretary of State for the Environment, have introduced a Bill that increases the opencast mining that can take place under certain licences from 25,000 tonnes to——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member will not anticipate tomorrow's debates. We are dealing with the money resolution on the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mr. Skinner: I think that you will understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that allowing the Coal Industry Bill to pass will mean that certain moneys will be expended. I am drawing a parallel. We are debating the money resolution. It is a complete contradiction to allow that increase from 25,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes when the Secretary of State claimed today that this so-called environmentally friendly Bill would protect the environment.

It is all very well the House making noises about protecting the green belt in Tory-held constituencies in the south. Hon. Members must remember that there are green belts in the north, the midlands, Scotland and Wales, and we want them protected, too. In increasing the licensed tonnages for opencast mining, I hope that the Government will bear it in mind that their policies should be consistent.

I remind the Secretary of State—I do this deliberately—that one of his first acts as a so-called green Minister when he took office a few months ago was to allow an opencast operation at Clowne and Barlborough in my constituency, which the previous Secretary of State, "old fag ash", who was not well known for defending the environment, had prevented. Let us put it this way: an inquiry held that the opencast operation could only take place for 11 seconds a day. The present Secretary of State had had the job for about 48 hours when he overturned that decision, which his predecessor had allowed to remain in force for nearly two years.

I am not happy about certain aspects of the Bill because I do not think that it gives a fair crack of the whip to constituencies where opencasting can take place on a massive scale. Opencasting will leave large areas despoiled for many many years. We all know the story. They start with opencasting. They get a mining licence, then another one, and then another. They say, "It will only be for three or four years," but it turns out to be for five or 10 years and more. Those people make a large amount of money extracting opencast coal and leave a great big hole in the ground. They they say, "Hello. We've got a big hole here; we'll fill it and make some more money." And there are ships hanging round outside every estuary in Britain waiting to dump their toxic waste.

I want the Minister or one of his Ministerial allies to tell us that we shall not have toxic waste dumped in holes in areas where opencasting takes place just so that those who make money from getting out the coal can make even more money. I suspect that that is what will happen. The Government will make general abstract noises about the environment. The Prime Minister and all the rest will be making environmentally friendly noises to Terry Wogan

[Mr. Skinner]

and the media while at the same time these acts of violence will be committed against our countryside. I want some assurances.

In our constituencies not so many years ago——

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Our?

Mr. Skinner: In the Bolsover constituency. It is not mine. I am not like some hon. Members who come here and say, "In my constituency" and refer to "my Asians" and "my" this and "my" that. Constituencies do not belong to Members of Parliament. We are ships that pass in the night.

We had an experience in my constituency that we do not want to be repeated. Some opencasting took place in the Morton area. Then there was an explosion at Bolsover Coalite and they wanted to get rid of some dioxin, one of the most toxic poisons that has ever been invented. They dumped it in the hole, and the people of Morton have been complaining ever since. We do not want that repeated. If the Bill is to mean anything at all, it should make sure that private enterprise cannot perpetrate acts of that nature.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) has an opencast operation in his constituency, which borders on mine. It is called Smotherfly, and it started more than 10 years ago. The local community was told by environmentally friendly British Coal and the Opencast Executive, "It will not take long—a couple of years," but it is still going on. The owners want to expand and dump.

If the Government mean business, they should stop the incursion into the green belt in British coalfield areas. If it is all right for the green belts to be protected in the south, it is right and proper that the same should apply to the north, the midlands and elsewhere. I hope that the Minister can reassure us about that during our debates. If he can do that, he will help communities that have suffered blight, in some cases for centuries, and prevent such incursions in future.

10.35 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I have a great deal of sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). However, I suspect that it will be nuclear waste that will be dumped in those opencast holes, not toxic. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover will recall that after a statement about the dumping of nuclear waste, one Conservative Member after another rose to claim that such dumping was safe and wonderful. However, when it was announced that such dumping might occur in their constituencies, they said, "No, not here; anywhere but here." Some of us suspect that mines were closed deliberately so that nuclear waste could be placed in them.

It is right that we should scrutinise the Bill's money implications quite closely. The Bill states that the costs will, in many areas, be minimal. However, the environmental problems that the Bill seeks to address are by no means minimal.

In his opening remarks the Secretary of State said that the Bill would not be the last word on green issues. I hope that it is not the last word. It is certainly the first word on environmental protection in the past ten and a half years of this Government. The Government have just about got beyond aardvark, one of the first words in the dictionary, and are moving on to aasvogel. By the way, an aasvogel is a vulture.

The Government owe allegiance to capitalists and polluting big businesses. They are paying allegiance to the vultures which prey on the public purse through the pollution that they cause. The big businesses can pay, but they will not pay for pollution prevention measures or for compensation to people who suffer from their pollution. They will not pay to clean up their pollution. They will not pay because, quite simply, profits come first. The effects of the Bill on the public purse will be more than minimal. There must be public regulation and tough enforcement of the law and the Bill is lacking in that respect.

The Secretary of State referred to litter and the Bill refers to the costs to local authorities of litter control as minimal. I suspect that that will not be the case. We are all concerned about litter. However, we have only had gimmicks from the Government. Reference has been made to the Prime Minister picking up litter in Hyde park. Yet it was her entourage—and Denis in particular—who were screwing up the paper and throwing it on to the ground in the first place for her to pick up. Then there was the wonderful gimmick of Richard Branson and his Virgin litter soldiers. Mr. Branson and his mates did not do much of a job in that respect. I hope that the Bill will not be another litter gimmick.

Although this is the first Environmental Protection Bill, nearly 50 Acts of Parliament in the past decade have restricted money to local authorities. Millions of pounds have been cut from local authorities' budgets for street cleaning and refuse collection. The Government's gimmicks are a cover-up for that. I suspect that the Government are about to perpetrate yet another gimmick. We shall see about that.

Part IX refers to waste disposal regulations and states that there will be an additional 15 staff in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and that

> "There will be a minimal increase in costs falling on local authorities . . . arising from increased controls over the trade in wastes."

Again, the word "minimal" appears in the Bill.

The regulations for safe waste disposal are inadequate. Although there is a duty of care, making producers of waste responsible for the safe disposal of waste at all stages, the same cannot apply to foreign producers—foreign cowboys—who send toxic waste across the high seas.

We should adopt the clear principle that countries should deal with their own toxic waste. If they cannot do that, we should provide the technology to enable them to do so instead of bringing it to this country. The United Kingdom should not take other countries' dangerous and toxic waste, but we shall continue to do so under the provisions of the Bill. There will not be a minimal cost if an accident arises from the importation of toxic waste. Even policing costs will not be minimal.

There is an important implication, and I should like the Minister to deal with it, if he would care to listen to the point that I am raising about waste regulations. He is still not listening. I shall make the point in the hope that somebody else is listening, because I want to know the Government's position on waste regulation. I refer to the single market in 1992. Many people are saying that boundaries will not matter in the single market and that, therefore, waste can come to Britain from France, Italy

and Germany. Will waste be imported without restriction in 1992? The Government owe hon. Members a duty to make their position clear. Each country must deal with its own toxic waste.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that this is a serious matter and that as an indication of the Government's lacklustre indifference to these issues, they have not made a statement on the rabies case at Rouen? That case was discovered on Friday and is a possible precursor to the spread of rabies to this country, which is only one of two rabies-free countries in the Common Market. If the Government were not prepared to take any action on that dreadful disease, they will clearly not take any action on toxic waste or other toxic waste and other environmental polluters.

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In responding to that point, I hope that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will be able to persuade me that it is relevant to the money resolution.

Mr. Cohen: The importation of toxic waste is relevant because the explanatory and financial memorandum states that the cost to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution will be minimal. I will not deal with the point about rabies, as it was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). However, if there is an accident or if toxic waste becomes a trade across the borders of the United Kingdom, the cost will not be minimal.

Last summer, there was the Karin B scandal. The Bill has not tackled that properly. We need a clear statement that the Royal Navy will escort all such ships away. They should not be allowed anywhere near this country, and if they dump in or pollute the seas even outside the borders of the territorial waters of our coastline, the Royal Navy should arrest the skippers. Although the companies responsible for those ships should be penalised under British law, the Bill does not state that that will happen. The Government should take a stronger line on that.

Mr. Trippier: I know the hon. Gentleman well enough to know that he would not in any way wish to mislead the House, but that precise point is adequately covered in the Bill. As I made clear in my reply on Second Reading, the Secretary of State has unilateral powers that go further than those that have been proposed by the European Community on the importation of hazardous wastes. That is enshrined in the legislation. We have met that precise point. The Karin B example that the hon. Gentleman has given is entirely met by the provisions.

Mr. Cohen: I take the Minister's point. I know that those unilateral powers are available, but I want the Government to give a clear and categorical message to any group or company that in such a situation they will be dealt with in the way that I have suggested—the skipper will be arrested, the Navy will go in and see them off and the companies will be penalised. When the Minister replies, I should like him to give some assurances on that point. As I have said, I take the Minister's point about the Bill's unilateral powers, which I should like to see implemented.

The Minister also referred to businesses pleading commercial confidentiality to avoid providing information to the public. Again, the money resolution states that the inspectorate of pollution will have a "minimal" increase in costs. If big polluting businesses thwart the inspectorate of pollution and the public will, the costs will not be minimal as the inspectorate tries to get the information that it should. That huge loophole can be related to the now privatised water companies. If any scandal of water pollution caused by the water companies were to be made public, it could affect that company's share price. Is that supposed to be the commercial confidentiality that would enable a water company not to tell the public the truth —that it has poisoned its local people, for example? That would be appalling. The public interest should come before that sort of thing. The public have the right to know in those circumstances.

I hope that the Minister will address that point because the notions of "commercially sensitive" and "commercial confidentiality" are much too wide. I hope that in Committee "commercial confidentiality" will be strictly defined and limited to avoid it being used as an excuse to thwart the public interest.

My remaining point relates to water pollution and to drinking water in London. Again, the financial effects of the Bill state that the costs of the inspectorate of pollution will be "minimal". According to some of the articles that I shall mention, the costs of cleaning up our supply of drinking water will not be "minimal" by any stretch of the imagination. If the EEC directive on drinking water and bathing beaches were implemented, the costs would certainly not be "minimal".

I refer the Minister to the secret tests that have been carried out at the River Lea, which were reported in *The Guardian* on Saturday. The article stated that tests for over 100 different chemicals were carried out in the water at Deephams sewage treatment works. No safe level has been set for those chemicals in the first place. The Bill does not set safe levels for different types of dangerous and toxic chemicals that can be found in the water supply. The article stated that the chemicals come from factories and businesses that have been encouraged to discharge their waste into the sewage system. Some of the chemicals that have been tested are listed as dangerous by the European Community and the World Health Organisation, but many have not even been tested.

All this has serious implications that should be taken into account in our consideration of the Bill and the money resolution. There should be a legal obligation for wider and more regular testing. There is no legal obligation to test for these dangerous chemicals in London's drinking water. If there were, it would result in more than a minimal cost. All the results of such tests should be made public, as should the results of the tests going on now, because the public have a right to know. I am afraid that privatisation has made the water industry even more tight-lipped about giving the public information.

In the autumn issue of *Earth Matters*, there was an excellent article by Andrew Lees, entitled "The Troubled Thames", in which he says that, despite the low-quality standards of what can be discharged into the Thames,

"60 of the 400 sewage treatment works operated by Thames Water broke the law in 1988-89 because they discharged substandard effluents."

He referred to a point that has not yet been mentioned when he said that on 5 July 1986, large volumes of untreated sewage were discharged into the River Thames. This resulted in the deoxygenation of miles of the river and

[Mr. Cohen]

the deaths of millions of fish and much organic life. There has been a cover-up of that terrible incident. It will cost money to put that right, so the Bill should address the problem.

Thames Water put a bubbler barge into the Thames —something that cost £3 million. That did not prevent pollution. It was only intensive care for the river, once the damage had been done. Andrew Lees argues that to stop such an incident occurring again, interceptor sewers are needed. The ones on the Thames were built in 1874, and are not adequate, so more are needed. Even Thames Water acknowledges that, but it would cost hundreds of millions of pounds to protect the water standards.

That is not the minimal cost suggested by the money resolution and the Bill. That is a lot of money, but it can be put against the multi-million-pound property boom in docklands and elsewhere, which is overloading the system. Money from that should be put into protecting the quality of London water and improving the treatment of sewage, but the Government got nothing for that from the developers. That is another aspect of the Bill that will cost more than a minimal amount in years to come, and with which the Government should be dealing.

The National Rivers Authority has no legal powers to require factory owners, developers or farmers to invest in pollution prevention measures, or ways to avoid spillage. All this is serious, because the Thames provides drinking water for 6 million Londoners, and pollution must be prevented. Nothing in the Bill will improve the standard of drinking water and the state of the Thames, or prevent pollution of it, or provide a new sewerage system.

The Minister said that this is not the last word in green issues. I think that it is more like the first word. It has got past aardvark, which is the first word in the dictionary. I just hope that we get more effective environmental protection measures before we reach abaddon, because that means hell, and we do not want environmental hell.

10.54 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I shall not take many moments, but I must raise a matter with the Secretary of State. It relates to the money resolution.

I have a problem in Ashfield. The Secretary of State does not have it in Bath, the Minister has not got it in Rossendale and the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has not got it in Macclesfield. I have a pollution problem and I want to know whether there is enough money around to deal with it. I raised the problem in the Committee considering the Coal Industry Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) knows. He mentioned Smotherfly opencast working. A massive chemical works has been there since the late 1800s. The opencast executive is planning to transfer toxic waste through a beautiful little village called Jacksdale. I have just recently moved there in preparation for retirement. Now it wants to dump all this toxic waste in that beautiful little village. Millionaires come up from the south to build properties there because it is so beautiful. It looks over the beautiful county of Derbyshire.

Mr. Skinner: It is Lawrence land.

Mr. Haynes: It is Lawrence land. The Minister hates Lawrence land. That is what it is all about.

Millionaires come up to have a look and spend thousands of pounds on their properties. Beautiful mansions, they are.

Mr. Skinner: And lovers' lanes.

Mr. Haynes: Yes, and lovers' lanes too. But we have ordinary folk living there, too, and they have a problem. Many ex-miners——

Mr. Bob Hayward (Kingswood): Are they going down lovers' lanes too?

Mr. Haynes: No, they are not. They are living out their retirement. The hon. Gentleman is outside the Chamber, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and cannot make a speech.

We have many ex-miners living out their retirement there, yet the waste will be dumped right in the village. I have had a word with the new Minister for the Environment and Countryside. He did not want to know when he was the coal Minister, but now he is the environment Minister and he has some responsibility for Jacksdale.

I suggest that the Secretary of State brings his Minister to have a look at our problem. The local authority is trying to deal with it, but does not have enough money, equipment or bodies to solve the problem that that organisation is creating for the local people. I hope that the Secretary of State, the Minister and the Under-Secretary of State have taken that on board. All three can come if they like. They do not have the problem themselves, but we have it. The people are playing hell at my surgeries on Saturday mornings. They want to see some action.

It is the Secretary of State's responsibility. He is covered in green, he says. He is worried about the ozone layer and pollution. We have pollution in my constituency and I want him to come and deal with it and, at the same time, find the necessary finance for the local authority to deal with the problem. He cannot solve it. He can only issue instructions and provide the cash. The local authority has to do the work and for that it needs the bodies and the equipment. I hope that the Secretary of State and his Ministers have taken that point on board.

10.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): It has been a wide-ranging debate. If at times I have had difficulty linking the points raised to the money resolution, I shall nevertheless endeavour to answer them, and I shall certainly write to hon. Gentlemen if I cannot cover their points.

I am sorry to hear of the pollution problem of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). I would not want in any way to blight his retirement plans, and I shall look into the problem when I return to the Department.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked about the joint statutory committee for the future Nature Conservancy Councils.

I am aware that the chairman of the NCC has expressed general reservations about our plans. Other NCC members have expressed other opinions. For instance, the chairman of the English advisory committee has written to support generally our plans, and the same is true of the Welsh Committee.

I assure the hon. Member for Linlithgow that the joint statutory committee will have a strong science base. It will

be able to research and to report on environmental issues affecting Great Britain. Where appropriate, it will be able to regard the United Kingdom as a single habitat. Obviously——

It being three-quarters of an hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

Question agreed to.

Environmental Protection Bill

[Ways and Means]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Environmental Protection Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the imposition of charges in connection with any authorisations, licences, consents or registrations required by that Act or any Act amended by that Act; and

(b) the payment of any sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

11 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is this debatable?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Yes, it is.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not want to take up the time of the House, although I understand that this debate is open-ended. I just want to give the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment the opportunity to finish what he was saying in answer to the questions I had previously asked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must remind the House and the hon. Gentleman that this is an extremely narrow motion relating purely to fees and charges. Nothing else is in order on the ways and means resolution.

Mr. Dalyell: My questions, as always, were narrow—no one could say that they were not. Therefore, I believe that they were so narrow as to be in order. I am sure that the Minister's answer will be equally narrow.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): Mindful of your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not stray out of order. I must write to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about the points that he has raised, unless he has specific points relating to the charges under the Bill.

Mr. Dalyell: The specific question on money is, who will decide what is a United Kingdom issue and what is a Scottish issue? That question relates to charges as the charges will be carried in one respect by the Scottish Office and in another respect by who knows? Perhaps they will be carried by the joint statutory committee. To whom does that committee respond? Is it to the Secretary of State for the Environment?

On the narrow issue of charges my question is linked to the lack of responsibility. Where does the responsibility lie ultimately when there is a difference of opinion, as there will be, about the flow country? That was one of the cases——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I find it difficult to relate what the hon. Gentleman is saying with the ways and means resolution, which deals with fees and charges payable under certain clauses of the Bill. It would be out of order to extend the debate beyond that.

Mr. Dalyell: I am not for abusing the procedure of the House. I therefore hope that the Minister will take note of my questions and answer them, as he has promised, by letter.

Question put and agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

COMMUNITY DRIVING LICENCE

That the draft Driving Licences (Community Driving Licence) Regulations 1989, which were laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (Standing Committees on European Community documents).

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS DURING TRANSPORT

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7871/89 relating to the protection of animals during transport; and supports the Government intention to negotiate satisfactory welfare safeguards.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Ronald Davidson

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

11.4 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to bring this case to the attention of the House. A grave miscarriage of justice has led to horrific circumstances and insecurity for one of my constituents —Mrs. Molly Davidson of 5 Enderby crescent, Mansfield. Her husband Ronald died of an asbestos-related disease, contracted through his employment in the mining industry. His widow has been denied justice because of a wrong decision by a medical appeals tribunal.

The background of the case is as follows. My constituent's deceased husband, Ronald Davidson, was 58 years old when he died at 4.40 am on 23 July 1987 in a hospital in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. He had worked in the mining industry locally straight from school and had continuous employment with British Coal for 43 years, working as an electrical engineer at Crown Farm colliery, Mansfield, until being made redundant in 1986. His death, when it came, was not prolonged and was totally unexpected by his family because of its suddenness. It occurred after a short but debilitating illness lasting less than four months.

Before his illness, Mr. Davidson had always been a comparatively fit man, particularly for someone who had worked underground in the mining industry for so long. He was an active man who fully enjoyed a healthy family life—a factor which many friends and relatives have confirmed to me.

The House should be made aware that in respect of this case and the subsequent support claims by Mr. Davidson's widow for compensation and benefit, a number of delays and mistakes have occurred. Considerable delays took place in the processing of the claim. My constituent experienced delays at the start of the process when, after making a claim for industrial death benefit, on advice from various knowledgeable sources, she made a posthumous claim for disablement benefit which required her to act on her late husband's behalf. The Minister is aware that the local office did not ask Mrs. Davidson to do this until 9 September 1987.

After the form was completed, it was referred to the Sheffield medical board centre for respiratory diseases for certification of death and level of suffering caused, and here again delays ensued. The board sought a consultant pathologist's opinion and it took from October 1987 until January 1988. More delays transpired because the adjudication officer in charge had not been asked to give a decision on the claim for death benefit. An answer to the decision was not given to my constituent until April 1988. It arrived then only because of the swift action of the Minister whom I contacted to intervene on behalf of my constituent, and I am extremely grateful for that.

Even so, this means that Mr. Davidson's widow—my constituent—had to wait from July until April of the following year to be told of the decision. That is extremely unacceptable in the circumstances.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am dealing with the case of a chap who used to work with me in the shipyards and who died of asbestosis. When he died, the inquest found that his death was caused

by asbestosis. His widow took a common law case against the firms for which he had worked. As a result of the case taking so long and the traumatic effect of her husband's death, his widow died before the claim was settled. The widow's son got in touch with me after being told by solicitors acting on the family's behalf that because the man's dependant—his widow—had died, the eventual damages would be lower.

I mention this case because my hon. Friend made the point about the length of time some cases take. It is unfortunate that firms which are negligent in protecting their workers, and whose employees contract asbestosis, should get away with this primarily because of the length of time that it takes to settle a claim, and the fact that the dependant dies. I am dealing with such a case and I understand my hon. Friend's concern about the length of time that such cases can take.

Mr. Meale: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. He has my sympathy for the case in his constituency.

Next, I want to raise the decision of the panel that dealt with the case. I found it inaccurate and disturbing, putting into question the sacrosanct nature of post mortem results and coroners' inquest decisions. Ronald Davidson died on 23 July 1987. He was first admitted to hospital in Mansfield on 6 April 1987 because of shortness of breath, a symptom of a few weeks' duration, and a pain in the right side of the chest. Later, in June, he was admitted to the city hospital, examined and found to have a malignant tumour. Soon after being discharged from hospital, he fell at home and was taken to hospital, where he had an operation for a fracture found to have been caused by a tumour deposit in the bone, spread there by the bloodstream. Following the operation, he continued to deteriorate and he died on 23 July.

The post mortem examination subsequently carried out showed what the pathologist consultant, a Mr. P. J. Stocks, considered to be compatible with a malignant tumour of mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer. A microscopic examination was also carried out, and it confirmed this diagnosis.

However, on hearing the result of the board's deliberations on this case, and being disturbed by its outcome, my constituent's representative, a Mr. Baker, again contacted the consultant pathologist who had carried out the autopsy, to ask again about his diagnosis of mesothelioma. The consultant's reply, in summary, stated that his impression was that the illness was indeed the cause of death. He arrived at that impression from information that he had been given that Mr. Davidson had a history of exposure to asbestos at work, a factor subsequently confirmed to him by reports compiled since the person's death.

The report gathered on Mr. Davidson at his workplace showed conclusively that—contrary to statements made in the examination held by the board and in paragraph 7 of the Secretary of State's own observations, completed on 17 March 1988:

"The late Mr. Davidson's exposure to asbestos was minimal and sporadic and occurred while working as a chargehand electrical engineer at Mansfield Colliery over a period of some 43 years"—

this is a gross underestimation of his exposure to the deadly substance.

For instance, the report shows that he regularly came into contact with asbestos while at work——

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): This is similar to many cases in the mining industry. The local consultant makes a decision about asbestosis or pneumoconiosis and then the panel in Sheffield seems to be a law unto itself. The law must be changed; when post mortems are carried out on these people and their lungs are inspected, they are found to be 60 or 70 per cent. gone. These people suffer, while the panel makes the wrong decisions. The cause of illness is established only after people die. We must do something about the many people who suffer from this sort of problem.

Mr. Meale: My hon. Friend is right. Inquiries into incidents at work involving asbestos show how grossly underestimated the problem was in this case. First, between 1946 and 1951 my constituent worked in an area heavily contaminated with asbestos at Mansfield colliery, during the installation of new electrical winding equipment. Secondly, during 1951 and 1953, my constituent was involved in work connected with the removal of old steam winding and turbine generator gear at the same colliery, including work in confined spaces while substantial amounts of asbestos lagging was removed from the site. Thirdly, he was regularly involved in the removal and installation of cables inducts which also housed pipes insulated with asbestos.

Fourthly, as an electrical engineer, Mr. Davidson carried out regular maintenance on machinery, checking brake interlock switches, etc. Many haulage and conveyer brakes and clutches have asbestos-based linings that deposit dust on mechanisms, around which my constituent worked. Fifthly, again in his employment he regularly jointed electrical cable, some of which was of the double wire, armoured-cable type that was packed with asbestos string wool. Undoubtedly he regularly handled that substance. Sixthly, he would have been exposed regularly to asbestos fibres when handling asbestos seals and insulation on electrical heaters, resisters and electric fires. Seventhly, he was exposed before his redundancy to asbestos fibres when carrying out maintenance on arc chutes used on electrical switchgear at the colliery in which he worked.

Finally, as a miner Mr. Davidson would have used the pithead baths every day of his working life, which were insulated with asbestos-based materials. That may have caused contamination on many occasions, due to the replacement of pipes and electrics with which my constituent may have been involved, and/or their insulation.

As these factors have not, I believe, been fully taken into account, I appeal to the Minister to ask the tribunal to look again at this case or to allow it to go before the commissioner. My reason for such a request is explained by the clear scientific evidence that a single fibre of asbestos can cause cancers and asbestosis more than 20 or 30 years after being inhaled. Further, it is known that the deadly asbestos-related disease, mesothelioma, which affected my constituent can develop more than six years after exposure.

So dangerous is the substance that Professor Irving Selikoff of Mount Sinai medical centre in New York, acknowledged to be the world's leading asbestos expert, said recently:

"just one day's exposure to asbestos could lead to cancer and asbestosis."

He also warned that it is so poisonous a substance that

[Mr. Meale]

clothing contaminated at work can similarly put the home, and anyone who lives within it, at risk and in extreme danger.

Another reason for my disquiet in this case concerns the medical diagnosis of the consultant who was engaged by the board to review the case. To say the least, he seems to have approached his task on a "prove it isn't" basis. Since he was employed by the board, he seems to have adopted a doubting attitude from an early stage towards the findings of the local hospital, the post mortem and the inquest findings. In his letter of 4 November 1987, which I have in my possession, to Dr. Rahman of the medical board in Sheffield, he stated:

"I have noted that there is a malignant tumour involving the pleura and peripheral lung tissue. I am not absolutely certain that it is a mesothelioma, as in some areas it could be a peripheral adenocarcinoma. Before coming to a final conclusion, I think that it is important to examine sections of the tumour stained by Diatase PSA method. As you have commented in your letter, this stain had not been carried out. The block of tumour which you mentioned in your letter was not, in fact, included in your parcel. Could I therefore ask you to send me several paraffin embedded blocks of the tumour, so that I may carry out the stain."

What he seems to be saying is, "I'm not sure about the findings of the family doctor, hospital, pathologist and coroner but need to have more time to experiment and test another theory I've got."

What I want to know from the Minister is whether we are after the truth or the theory of an individual. If it is the latter, I think that the structure is wrong, especially as no mention has ever been made in the findings of whether the diagnosis is absolute, or even whether it would be possible for both mesothelioma and adenocarcinoma to be present at the same time. I have been informed by experts that that is possible.

Either way, the outcome of the decision is that opinions differ. Therefore, I ask again whether the Minister is willing to take another look at the case, particularly as opinion is divided and inconclusive. A third independent opinion should be sought. If not, the whole basis of pathologists' reports and coroners' decisions at inquests hangs in the balance.

Finally, a widow in my constituency who has lost her husband has been told by the family doctor that he believes that asbestos was the cause, a fact that was substantiated by a pathologist at an autopsy after a vigorous examination and by a coroner at an inquest. The cause of death on the death certificate was stated to be malignant mesothelioma.

I beg, urge and appeal to the Minister to use her influence to sort the matter out. She may wish to know that provision is open to her as a Minister in a number of ways. One way is to adopt the method advised in the Department of Social Security's guide on reviews and appeals, which states:

"A decision made by an MAT can be set aside if it appears to the Tribunal just to do so, . . . on the grounds that it is in the interests of justice".

I believe that, taking into account all the unnecessary delays, mistakes and contradictory views in this case, the Minister can, using her special authority, ensure that justice can prevail for this poor widow, who has already suffered for long enough.

10.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on raising this important matter in an Adjournment debate and I also thank his hon. Friends for their contribution.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to give the background to social security procedure in this area, and to explain the details of Mr. Davidson's case. I am also glad to have the chance to express my sympathy to Mrs. Davidson and her family, particularly because of the delayed and distressing circumstances that have surrounded consideration of the case.

I should like first to explain the general procedures as they applied in 1987 for claims where the cause of death was thought to be one of the prescribed respiratory diseases. With the exception of matters relating to adjudication, some of those procedures have changed since the abolition of industrial death benefit for deaths occurring after 10 April 1988.

Claims for industrial death benefit were determined solely by the lay statutory authorities, in the first instance, the adjudication officer. He had to determine whether the deceased had one of the prescribed diseases and if so, whether death was due to the effects of that disease. In reaching a decision, he could seek medical advice from an independent medical authority called the special medical board, which is made up of specially qualified medical practitioners, who have a wide experience in respiratory diseases.

I must stress at this point that the board's advice on cause of death did not constitute a decision but formed one of the pieces of evidence on which the adjudication officer based his decision. To help the special medical board determine the cause of death, it was able to carry out examinations on the thoracic organs of the deceased person, and it also received copies of any coroner's or pathologist's reports following the post mortem.

When notification of a death, thought to be due to a prescribed respiratory disease, is received by the Department, action is taken immediately to alert the special medical board so that arrangements can be made for an examination of the thoracic organs. At this stage, there may or may not have been a claim for industrial death benefit. Where no claim was made, but the special medical board considered death was due to a prescribed respiratory disease, the Department invited a claim for industrial death benefit and a posthumous claim for industrial disablement benefit.

When a claim for industrial disablement benefit is received, the adjudication officer refers the question of whether the deceased was suffering from a prescribed respiratory disease to the special medical board. That reference, unlike that on a claim for industrial death benefit, is for statutory decision by the board. If a disease is positively diagnosed, the medical adjudicators assess any resulting disablement.

The adjudication officer is bound by the decision of the special medical board, which will gather whatever information it requires and consider any evidence supplied by the claimant before giving its decision. When claims for industrial death benefit and industrial injuries disablement benefit were to be determined at the same time by the adjudication officer, he invariably awaited the statutory

decision of the medical authority on industrial injuries disablement benefit before determining industrial death benefit entitlement.

Questions determined by the adjudication officer on whether entitlement to benefit exists and, if so, how much is payable, carry a right of appeal to the social security appeal tribunal. Where the adjudication officer's decision is based on a statutory decision given by the special medical board and its decision causes dissatisfaction, the appeal rights lie with the medical appeal tribunal, which is the final arbiter of the medical aspect of a claim for disablement benefit. There is a further right of appeal to the social security commissioner from decisions of the social security appeal tribunal and the medical appeal tribunal, but only on the ground that the decision given was wrong in law. I shall return to that point because it was specifically raised by the hon. Member for Mansfield.

I shall set out the sequence of events regarding Mrs. Davidson's claims for industrial death benefit and industrial injuries disablement benefit. Before he died, Mr. Davidson was submitting medical certificates to the Department of Social Security, which showed his incapacity as hypertension and coronary artery disease. He was receiving invalidity benefit and mobility allowance at the time of his death.

Sadly, Mr. Davidson died on 23 July 1987. A post mortem examination was carried out and the subsequent post mortem report listed malignant mesothelioma as the cause of death. The Nottingham coroner then issued a death certificate.

Mesothelioma is an asbestos-related disease that can be contracted by the inhalation of asbestos dust. It has a long latent period, so exposure to asbestos may have taken place many years before the disease develops and can be diagnosed.

Mr. Davidson had worked as a chargehand electrical engineer at Mansfield colliery for 43 years, during which time he had been exposed to asbestos. I assure the hon. Gentleman that that was accepted by the adjudicating authorities. In August 1987, following his death, Mrs. Davidson claimed industrial death benefit and industrial injuries disablement benefit. The basis of the claim was that her husband had been in contact with asbestos dust and that death had been certified as due to mesothelioma.

After making inquiries of British Coal, the adjudication officer accepted that Mr. Davidson had been employed in a job where he had been exposed to asbestos dust. The diagnosis of diffuse mesothelioma then had to be established.

Mr. Davidson's death was notified to the Sheffield medical boarding centre (respiratory desease) on 26 August 1987, and two doctors from the Sheffield MBC, specially qualified medical practitioners, examined the thoracic organs. They established that a carcinoma of the lung had been diagnosed three months before Mr. Davidson died. The pathologist had diagnosed a pleural mesothelioma after the post mortem. The specially qualified medical practitioners considered that it was advisable to have expert opinion on the nature of the tumour because it is impossible to distinguish between a mesothelioma and adenocarcinoma of the lung—another form of cancer—using the naked eye. Indeed, distinguishing between those two conditions, even using a microscope, may be very difficult.

The board therefore consulted an expert of international repute on the pathology of industrial lung disease. I labour that point for the benefit of the hon. Member for Mansfield, who understandably is anxious about the difference in diagnosis between the two medical opinions. That expert was a consultant pathologist, a professor of forensic medicine and a Home Office pathologist. After extensive tests, with which I shall deal later and which included the sectioning and staining that the hon. Member mentioned, he concluded that the tumour was an adenocarcinoma and not a mesothelioma.

The special medical board, acting in an advisory capacity, completed its report on 15 January 1988, concluding, on the balance of probabilities, that the cause of death was carcinomatosis, due to an adenocarcinoma in the lung, rather than that the tumour was a mesothelioma.

The same medical board, consisting of the two specially qualified adjudicating medical practitioners who had examined the thoracic organs, then considered the claim for industrial injuries disablement benefit. They considered all the available medical evidence, including the post mortem examination—I stress that that was taken into account—their own findings, the report from the consultant pathologist and the case notes and X-rays from Mansfield general hospital. It is important to make that point. They concluded that the patient had not been suffering from a prescribed disease or from a consequence of a prescribed disease.

An appeal against the decision of the medical board, dated 17 March 1988, was considered by a medical appeal tribunal on 25 January 1989. The hon. Gentleman was right to point out that a long time passed between those two events.

The claimant, Mrs. Davidson, and her son and daughter were present together with a representative of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. The tribunal was told that Mr. Davidson has worked for 43 years in the coal-mining industry, had been in good health until 1986, had had a clear X-ray in 1985, and that his final illness began just over three months before he died. Post mortem examination confirmed the presence of a malignant tumour of the pleura.

The post mortem report described the appearance of the tumour. Histology showed these to be entirely in keeping with a malignant mesothelioma. Naked-eye examination of thoracic organs usually confirms the presence of a tumour, but the actual nature of the tumour is usually not diagnosable without microscopic examination of representative microscopic sections of lung tissue. That may require special staining or other techniques. Those tests had of course been carried out thoroughly by the special expert, the consultant pathologist.

The tribunal considered all the submissions and examined all the scheduled evidence. It considered that the absence of any asbestos-related changes in the lungs and the chest X-ray in 1985, the absence of pain until the terminal stages and the short time between onset and death favoured the diagnosis of adenocarcinoma made by the consultant pathologist. In its view, it was more probable than not that Mr. Davidson died from adenocarcinoma and not mesothelioma.

The hon. Member for Mansfield has clearly and compassionately expressed the details of this extremely distressing case. I have already said that the distressing nature of the case will have been accentuated by the long period between Mr. Davidson's death and the decision. I have tried to explain how the special medical board came to its conclusions.

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

The hon. Gentleman may like to note that I am unable to alter the decision of the independent statutory authorities, but appeals or reviews may be made in cases such as this. The medical appeal tribunal's decision of 25 January 1989 can be appealed against, to the social security commissioner, on a point of law. The commissioner would have to give his leave to such an appeal, because it would be out of time.

The medical appeal tribunal's decision can also be reviewed at any time by a special medical board under section 110(1) of the Social Security Act 1975 as modified by regulation 67 of the Social Security Adjudication Regulations 1986. That avenue of review depends on the statutory medical authority being satisfied by fresh evidence that the tribunal's decision was given in ignorance of a material fact or was based on a mistake as to a material fact, although I should explain that a new opinion on the cause of death would not necessarily constitute "fresh evidence".

I know that the hon. Gentleman will be disappointed by my inability to change the decisions made on Mrs. Davidson's claims for benefit, but I hope that I have explained that they received the correct and fullest consideration by the adjudication authorities. I should like once again to take this opportunity to express my sympathy for Mrs. Davidson and her family and to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the way in which he has brought this matter to the attention of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

UNITED MEDICAL AND DENTAL SCHOOLS BILL *[Lords]*
Considered; to be read the Third time.

BROMLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL (CRYSTAL PALACE) BILL

Motion made,

That the proceedings of 7th December 1989 on consideration of the Bromley London Borough Council (Crystal Palace) Bill be null and void.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

1. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the development of tourism in the north of England; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): Ministers from my Department have, on a number of occasions, met representatives from the tourism industry in the north of England, and have received correspondence on a wide range of issues affecting tourism in the area.

Mr. Amos: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but may I ask him two questions? First, will he use his best endeavours to bring about greater co-ordination and a clearer sense of direction for the many agencies in Northumberland that promote tourism? Secondly, will he urgently hold discussions with colleagues in the Department of Transport to bring about a more sensible and flexible policy on signposting? People cannot visit places of interest or use accommodation if they do not know that they exist. In a county as dispersed as Northumberland, it is important that people have that information.

Mr. Nicholls: I shall certainly draw that point to the attention of my noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for tourism, who will share my hon. Friend's concern. I am aware of my hon. Friend's long-standing interest in the issue. I come from an area that relies heavily on tourism, so I have considerable personal sympathy with him. I take his point on board.

Mr. Beith: Why have Ministers denied section 4 grants for tourism in Northumberland? Does the Under-Secretary of State realise how difficult it is to promote tourism in such an attractive area in competition with much better funded promotion on the Scottish side of the border?

Mr. Nicholls: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman asked that question; I should have thought that he would already be aware of the answer. If he looks at the figures, he will find that the contribution that section 4 grants made to the tourist industry in Northumbria was minuscule. Other forms of grant and assistance are available to tourism in the area. The industry is so successful that it does not need to be maintained on the back of public subsidy.

Mr. Gregory: Does my hon. Friend agree that the growth in tourism would be faster in the north of England, particularly in York, if there were more flights from overseas direct to the north? If overseas flights went direct to Manchester and other northern airports, tourists could be channelled directly to York and other tourist areas in the north.

Mr. Nicholls: I am sure that my hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Transport links are of much importance. The Government's attitude is that local authority airports have a real role to play by taking their share of traffic. I accept what was implicit in my hon. Friend's question—that road transport also has a significant part to play. In that context, my hon. Friend will have been heartened by the proposals in the transport White Paper. I accept his point.

Mr. Radice: Does not the success of tourism in the northern region owe much to the efforts of the Northumbria tourist board and local councils? Would it not be far fairer if we received some of the support that other areas, such as Scotland and Wales, receive? We should then be on a level playing field. Should not the Government take action on that?

Mr. Nicholls: No, or the Government would have done so. I accept that the hon. Gentleman and others hold that view. The position in Wales and Scotland is different—the hon. Gentleman will find a fair amount of support for this among Labour Members—and cannot always be equated to that in England. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales believed that section 4 should be retained in accordance with how they saw tourism developing. The evidence is that section 4 made a small contribution to tourism in England. The prosperity of the tourist industry in the hon. Gentleman's area owes more to factors other than merely section 4.

Job clubs

2. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the pilot project in job clubs designed for people with severe literacy and language problems.

The Minster of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Tim Eggar): My right hon. Friend announced on 22 November last year a pilot programme of 15 job clubs that give extra help to people with severe literacy difficulties or with very limited command of English. All 15 pilots are now in operation. There will be a review of results achieved in late spring this year.

Mr. Bowis: I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that a significant number of people with language and literacy difficulties cannot benefit from the job markets without this form of assistance. I welcome the work of the job clubs and of the series of pilot schemes. However, will my hon. Friend assure me that once the review has been carried out, the good practice in those schemes will be spread to other parts of the country, including south London?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is right to praise the contribution that has been made by the job clubs. More than 200,000 people have found jobs as a result of taking part in the job club scheme. I assure my hon. Friend that if the pilot projects go well, we shall consider extending them to other parts of the country.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister assure the House that his Department will work closely with the Department of Education and Science in this matter? He will have seen in today's papers the reports of the campaign, which is headed by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, for improving literacy throughout the country. Millions of people are unable to play a full part in society because they cannot read or write adequately. We need a co-ordinated campaign across the Departments. Will the Minister ensure that it is a departmental priority this year?

Mr. Eggar: I assure the hon. Gentleman that my Department is well aware of the problems of literacy. For that reason, we teamed up with the Department of Education and Science and with the BBC to launch a major new remote learning literacy scheme, and there are several other initiatives on that front. I shall be happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman about what we are doing in that area.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend agree that the adult illiteracy to which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred is a result of trendy and silly education policies, which have now been discredited? Does my hon. Friend recognise that in a constituency such as mine, which is approaching full employment, the small number of adult illiterates and young people leaving school whose literacy is not adequate have become unemployable, which is a tragedy for them and for the country? Does he agree that we should do everything that we can to reduce that problem?

Mr. Eggar: Certainly, I agree with my hon. Friend on that point and that is why we have the job clubs' pilot project on literacy. If my hon. Friend has specific suggestions for her area, I hope that she will tell me about them.

Mr. McLeish: No one would dispute the need for a modern employment service to be sensitive to issues such as literacy, numeracy and language. Is the Minister aware that that idea emerged from an internal strategy document from the Department of Employment, which also suggested that benefit sanctions would be applied to job clubs, to employment training and to restart? Will the Minister reassure the House that there will be no attempt to use the measures contained in the Employment Act 1988 to designate those schemes as training, or to use the actively seeking work regulations of the Social Security Act 1989 to bring more pressure on people to adopt such programmes? Does he accept that in this day and age, when there are still almost 400,000 people who have been unemployed for more than two years, there is a need for positive consideration, rather than punishment and coercion?

Mr. Eggar: The Government's schemes are designed to assist people to get back to work. That is why we have an extensive employment training provision, why we continue to seek to make it as flexible as possible and why we are giving increasing priority to literacy and numeracy skills. Together with the training and enterprise councils, we shall continue to seek ways to enhance people's capability to find jobs.

Mr. Rathbone: Will the pilot project embrace those who are suffering from dyslexia? If the pilot project turns out correctly, will my hon. Friend ensure that it embraces such people?

Mr. Eggar: I am sure that the pilot project will cover people who suffer from dyslexia and I am delighted that my hon. Friend has drawn attention to the problem. I had an Adjournment debate on the subject myself, back in 1981.

Disabled People

4. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to improve the working of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944.

9. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what additional measures he will introduce to enable disabled persons to participate fully in the work force.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): My Department already maintains a comprehensive network of services to help people with disabilities find and retain jobs. Measures to encourage the employment of more people with disabilities and the operation of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 are among the matters being considered in our current review of services for people with disabilities.

Ms. Ruddock: Given the low level of enforcement of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act and the low morale in the disability advisory service, is it not time that the Secretary of State learnt from other countries such as West Germany, where the 6 per cent. quota is vigorously enforced, unlike the quota in this country?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Lady's allegations of low morale. She asked about West Germany. There are many differences between the approach taken there and the approach that we take in this country, and the basis on which comparisons are made is frequently misleading. All those matters will be taken into account in our review and I hope to publish a consultative document shortly.

Mr. Corbett: In the review, will the Secretary of State consider extending the number of sheltered industrial units to enable the severely disabled, with reduced work output, to work alongside their able-bodied colleagues, but to get a subsidy via his Department from a sponsor organisation? Does he accept that that could improve the job prospects for about 370,000 registered disabled?

Mr. Howard: The part played by sheltered industrial units is certainly among the matters being considered in the review, and I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is taken into account.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that it is a pleasure to see him at the Dispatch Box in his new role? Will he ensure that employers throughout the United Kingdom, particularly in areas such as mine, which now has virtually full employment, are made aware of the very good record of job loyalty that the disabled bring to their employment? That is an asset to employers when the labour situation is tight.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words of welcome. I entirely agree with his observation. People with disabilities have a great deal to offer employers and it is important that employers should have full regard to their potential.

Mr. Thurnham: May I give a warm welcome to my right hon. and learned Old Petrian Friend in his new responsibilities? Will he confirm that he will continue to increase the number of disabled persons being helped into jobs, and assist in the rapid introduction of the proposed new disability employment credit?

Mr Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. The Government's record of encouraging and helping disabled people into jobs is excellent and we want to ensure that it continues and improves further.

Mr Ashley: Is the Secretary of State aware that the good intentions expressed in his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) run counter to the statements in his Department's internal review, which said that work for disabled people had little status and less priority in the employment service? Is he aware that his own Department does not know how many employers have completed their employment policy questionnaire and that two thirds of Britain's disabled persons have no job? May we have a changed attitude from the right hon. and learned Gentleman in his new job, to which I also welcome him?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I shall look into the matter of the questionnaire, but the general matters that lie behind his question are at the heart of the review that is currently under way.

Ballots

5. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the code of practice for trade union ballots for industrial action.

Mr. Nicholls: Following representations on the draft published at the end of 1988, a modified draft of the code of practice has now been laid before Parliament. The draft code deals with a matter of great importance—the conduct of union ballots on industrial action. The next step is to move approval resolutions in each House.

Mr. Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that that is an encouraging reply? Does he accept that it is absolutely essential that any union that does not accept the need for a proper ballot, under the terms of the code of practice, should risk legal action being taken against it?

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Many of the contributions that were made to the code of practice were drawn from the best practice of certain trade unions. Any union that is prepared to conduct its ballots fairly and democratically will find the code of great assistance.

Mr. John Evans: Will the Minister confirm that more than 90 per cent. of the ballots that have been held since the passage of the Trade Union Act 1984 have confirmed the unions' positions? Will he guarantee that the so-called code of practice is not just a back-door attempt to make ballots and official industrial disputes more difficult?

Mr. Nicholls: No, as I said, many of the ideas contained in the balloting code have been drawn from the best practice of better unions. Nothing in the code should cause any concern to any union if it wants to conduct itself fairly and democratically.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is rather strange that the provision on workplace ballots that were passed by the House were attacked at every stage by Opposition Members and by trade unions but that, today, they appear to be in favour of what has worked well to bring industrial peace to this country?

Mr. Nicholls: That is certainly what we are asked to believe. When the Labour party poses as the champion of individual liberties, I find it about as convincing as the idea of a piranha turning vegetarian.

Training and Enterprise Councils

6. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress being made to establish training and enterprise councils.

14. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many proposals have been made to the national task force for the establishment of training and enterprise councils; and how many have been accepted for development funding.

Mr. Howard: I am able to announce today that a further seven training and enterprise councils have been awarded development funding. That brings the total number of TECs to 51, just 10 months after the initiative was first launched.

Mr. Jones: I join other hon. Members in welcoming the Secretary of State to his new position. Does he agree that a major concern about setting up councils in rural areas is that their members may lack the necessary breadth of expertise to make them a success? Few industrialists have direct experience of in-house training in rural areas. Does the Secretary of State agree that, in rural areas, it is necessary to fund bodies that bring together not only industrialists but careers teachers, technical colleges,

universities and training agencies to identify potential skill shortages in rural areas and to begin to tackle the job at that end?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I agree that all the organisations to which he referred have a part to play in the TEC initiative. One of the great advantages of that initiative is that it is able to draw on local circumstances and adjust programmes to take full account of local needs.

Mr. Paice: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the results that he has described demonstrate that we are way ahead of target and that we shall achieve TEC coverage of most of the United Kingdom much earlier than was originally anticipated? Does he agree also that the results clearly demonstrate the truth that has been known by business for a long time is being learnt by our schools and is about to be learnt in the National Health Service—that if one delegates responsibility to the people who can use it properly, one will get not only better interest and commitment but far better results?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We expect the whole network to be in place by the end of this year, about two years ahead of schedule. The establishment of TECs is the most exciting training initiative that we have ever seen. I hope that the TECs will receive a warm welcome on both sides of the House.

Mr. Cousins: Will the Minister advance the commencement of the Tyneside TEC by six weeks, to allow a Confederation of British Industry initiative in Cruddas park in Newcastle to continue? That initiative was run into the ground because not one local employer agreed to employ people on Government programmes in Cruddas park. Will the Secretary of State go to Newcastle, start the TEC six weeks early, and make sure that we can find one local employer who will participate in that initiative?

Mr. Howard: I hope to visit Newcastle as soon as is convenient and I shall look into the point that the hon. Gentleman raised.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I know that my right hon. and learned Friend is concerned about the quality of the membership of the TECs, but does he agree that we might be being a little too restrictive, because a senior director of a major national company, who may not be the chief executive of that company, can have more to offer a TEC than, say, the managing director of a much smaller commercial enterprise. Should we not be a little more flexible than we are at present?

Mr. Howard: I understand the concern that lies behind my hon. Friend's question, but the success of the TECs owes a great deal to the fact that it is the chief executives, or their equivalents, of the companies concerned who are members of the TEC boards. That lends the TECs an extra impetus that they would not otherwise have and that is why we attach so much importance to the participation of chief executive officers of companies.

Mr. Blair: I welcome the new Secretary of State, but does he agree that his first priority must be to deal with Britain's lamentable record on training and skills? In that connection, when his own Department's survey shows that one in five employers do not themselves train but poach trained staff from others and when half Britain's work force in any one year will not receive any training at all, what powers will the new training and enterprise councils have to prevent the bad employers from exploiting the good?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, but I am sorry that he should have prefaced his question with routine party political criticism of the type in which he engaged. I hope that he will work with the Government to ensure that the TEC initiative succeeds, as it shows every sign of succeeding, and that it achieves great progress in dealing, among other things, with the problem that he identified.

Tourism

7. **Mr. Bright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage increase in the number of visitors to the United Kingdom in 1989; and what was the figure for 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The latest estimate for 1989 is that, during the first 10 months of the year, there were 14·9 million visitors to the United Kingdom, 9 per cent. more than in the same period of 1988. In 1988 as a whole there were 15·8 million visitors to the United Kingdom, 1 per cent. more than in 1987.

Mr. Bright: Obviously, the trend is encouraging, but apart from ensuring that people use airports such as Luton and Manchester and avoid the sometimes cattle-like conditions that they have to experience at Gatwick and Heathrow, will my hon. Friend encourage the industry and, indeed, the planning authorities to provide value-for-money accommodation around the countryside, such as we often see in America, which is one of the things that tourists are looking for, instead of the high-priced hotels that they are sometimes pushed into at the moment?

Mr. Nicholls: I am sure that my hon. Friend is entirely right to draw our attention to the importance of an initially favourable impression when one lands at an airport. I know that my noble Friend the Minister responsible for tourism shares that view. My hon. Friend is aware of the attitude that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport takes in pursuing the liberalisation of air routes, to try to bring more people into the country. I entirely accept what my hon. Friend says. Without being complacent, there are good grounds for saying that the industry is taking those points on board, especially in relation to accommodation.

Mr. Pike: Would not we get better tourism in the regions and thereby increase tourism to this country if we not only developed more direct access to our regional airports, but ensured that the regions can benefit fully from the Channel tunnel project? Does the Minister agree that we must not get second best for the regions, but first best, with public investment in the railway network to meet that need?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman touches quite properly on the role that transport plays in this matter. He also referred to the Channel tunnel. It is expected that about 15 million people will use the Channel tunnel in the first year. I fully accept that that has consequences for the

regions and the road network. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the recent White Paper on road transport, he will find a great deal there to encourage him.

Sir John Stokes: Does not my hon. Friend agree that while, clearly, we should welcome tourists to this country, tourism is ruining large areas of the world? Must we not take care to preserve our English countryside and heritage as much as possible as well as welcoming newcomers?

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is entirely right to point out that inevitably there is a conflict between the proper exploitation of tourist areas and making sure that our heritage is not destroyed in the process. I should not go so far as to take my hon. Friend's apocalyptic view of the matter but he is right that the danger must be borne in mind.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister agree that tourism can provide a valuable source of income for the balance of payments? Is he aware that during the past five or six years, the amount under "invisible" items in the balance of payments has fallen from £700 million a month to £100 million a month and that tourism has a part to play in that? Is it not a scandal that the Government have reached the point where they make the invisibles invisible?

Mr. Nicholls: The only thing that is invisible is the hon. Gentleman's ability to understand the facts. It is an entirely false formula to subtract domestic tourism from outgoing tourism. The fact that tourism overseas is increasing at such a rate and that people can afford to go abroad for their holidays shows the economic prosperity of the country. I say that in the certain knowledge that were the hon. Gentleman's party to attain office, that prosperity would disappear completely.

Youth Access

8. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the youth access initiative.

Mr. Eggar: I am pleased with the progress of this initiative, which is at the pilot stage. It seeks to develop partnerships between business and education specifically to take young people who would normally not continue their education after the age of 16, through further education and into higher education.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend agree that with the demographic time bomb ticking away, it is vital that young people have early access to industry? Will he confirm that the Training Agency will provide an additional £200,000 to the initiative, which should be welcomed?

Mr. Eggar: I readily confirm that to my hon. Friend. The pilot schemes are important. They will follow the line that we established with the technical and vocational education initiative, training and enterprise councils and higher education. All those schemes designed to bring together education, training and work experience.

Ms. Armstrong: Does the Minister recognise that in the past 10 years the level of skills that our young people attained has been much lower than before? Does he recognise that we must pay attention to the quality of training opportunities for our young people and that we have a long way to go before we come anywhere near meeting the potential of young people and the country's need for trained personnel for the future?

Mr. Eggar: It is common ground that we need to improve the quality of our training and skills. It is important that employers and employees combine with the Government and the voluntary agencies to raise the level of skills throughout the country during the next decade. That is a major challenge to us all.

Mr. Fatchett: How far does the Minister feel responsible for the fact that during the past 10 years the level of skills among young people here has deteriorated in comparison with the skills of West German and French youngsters? He does not need to take my word for that because that is the conclusion of the Confederation of British Industry report on education and training.

Mr. Eggar: I readily take responsibility for the Government's excellent youth training scheme which later developed into youth training and for the formation of the training and enterprise councils. All those schemes will have a tremendous beneficial impact on our levels of skills and training in the 1990s.

Construction Inspectors

10. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for increasing the number of Health and Safety Executive construction inspectors.

Mr. Howard: The Health and Safety Executive has exceeded its objective of having 100 inspectors regularly engaged on the inspection of construction activities nationally by 1990. That number will be maintained. The House has no plans to increase the number in 1990, but the position will be kept under review.

Ms. Mowlam: As we have had a 22 per cent. increase in the number of fatal and major accidents in the past eight years, does the Secretary of State consider that the target of 100 inspectors is adequate?

Mr. Howard: One must look at the figures in perspective. There has been a substantial decrease in the number of fatal accidents in the construction industry. In the 10 years ending March 1988 there were 1,195 fatalities compared with 1,968 during the previous 10 years. The objective was set by the HSE and I have no reason to gainsay it.

Mr. Ward: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the key to safety on construction sites is good training in site safety practices and good supervision by enlightened and progressive firms?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and he will know that we are awaiting the results of the consultation document that was issued by the Health and Safety Commission proposing new regulations on the management of health and safety on sites.

Mr. Leighton: I, too, add my welcome to the Secretary of State. I am sure that he will not want to underestimate the seriousness of the situation in the construction industry where about 150 people are killed and tens of thousands injured every year. That is on a rising trend, perhaps because of the number of sub-contractors, many of whom ignore safety regulations, and because there are only a

little more than 100 inspectors for nearly 700,000 employees. There are very few prosecutions because there are not enough inspectors to bring them and, when they are brought, the penalties are derisory. What is the right hon. and learned Gentleman doing to increase the number of inspectors and to see that the penalties are an effective deterrent?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Employment Select Committee for his kind words of welcome. There has been an increasing number of prosecutions and the hon. Gentleman will know that the HSE is increasingly seeking to persuade the courts that such matters should be dealt with in the Crown courts where the court's ability to make decisions and to levy punishments that are more in keeping with the offences is much more widely available.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that there has been an increase of about 10 per cent. in the number of health and safety inspectors working on construction sites in the past two years? Do vacancies still exist in different parts of the country and, if so, what does that tell us about the level of pay that those inspectors enjoy?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend's figure for the increase is correct and the number of inspectors on inspection of construction activities is now more than the complement that the HSE has set.

Mr. Heffer: As there have been six deaths on this side of the Channel tunnel and only one death on the French side during its construction, will the Secretary of State pay special attention to the health and safety of those who are working on the tunnel? Will there be an increase in the number of health and safety inspectors on this side of the Channel?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point which requires attention. He will be aware that the latest unfortunate incident is being investigated by the HSE and we should wait and see what emerges from that investigation.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is the Secretary of State aware that when the Under-Secretary of State was challenged about the Government's scandalous record in terms of death and injuries on construction sites, he said that people on building sites had the right to walk out if a site was unsafe, in effect asking them to take unofficial action? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House clearly whether the Employment Bill's provision on unofficial action will make it easier or more difficult for union officials to take such unofficial action on unsafe construction sites?

Mr. Howard: As I recall my hon. Friend's words, his point was that employees have an important role in drawing breaches of the safety regulations to the attention of the HSE. That is an important contribution which employees can make, and I hope that they play their full part in drawing such breaches to the attention of the executive.

Labour Statistics (Leicester)

11. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement regarding the current level of unemployment in the city of Leicester.

Mr. Eggar: In November 1989 there were 9,629 unemployed claimants in the local authority area of Leicester, a fall of 1,902 or 16·5 per cent. over the last 12 months.

Mr. Janner: Is the Minister aware that over the past 12 months the hosiery and knitwear industries in Leicester have lost 4,000 jobs and that the Government's research programme cannot possibly save them because it will be too late to do so? Will the Government announce some help for the knitwear and hosiery industries in my constituency in view of the growing unemployment in those vital industries that have long been traditional and important to the city?

Mr. Eggar: I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the points made by the hon. and learned Gentleman. I know that similar points were made during last Friday's debate.

Mr Ashby: Does not my hon. Friend agree that although his reply is good news, that is despite the fact that the loony Left-wing Leicester council policies encourage unemployment in Leicester?

Mr. Eggar: I quite understand my hon. Friend's concerns about Leicester council's policy. Clearly, anything that adds to the costs for employees and employers in Leicester is likely to lead to unnecessary job losses.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Is the Minister aware that in many parts of the city of Leicester, unemployment is in excess of 25 per cent. and still increasing, and that it will increase further as local industry is facing increased pressure because of high interest rates? In the light of that, will he put pressure on his colleagues who are in charge of economic affairs to ensure that interest rates decline as quickly as possible?

Mr. Eggar: I am slightly surprised by the hon. Gentleman. Why does he have to write down his own local area in Leicester? Unemployment has fallen sharply in Leicester, as it has elsewhere in the east midlands. Why does he not point out that, rather than the problems of the industries?

Labour Statistics

12. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the change in the unemployment rate in the United Kingdom in 1989 and in other major industrialised countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Between January and September 1989, the latest comparable date, the rate of unemployment has fallen faster in the United Kingdom than in any other major industrialised country. With permission I will publish a full comparison in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Greenway: Is not that a matter for great congratulation for this Government? Is it not a fact that

the Delors social charter certainly would not have improved employment in this country? Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that even in boroughs such as Ealing, in which the Left-wing Labour council has both doubled the industrial rates and is thoroughly anti-business, jobs have increased as a result of Government policies?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, particularly in what he said about the social charter. However, the improvement in employment rates that he identified is not limited to Ealing. I hope that we shall see the principal Opposition spokesman on employment, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) rise to his feet to welcome the 50 per cent. fall in unemployment that has occurred in his constituency in the past three years.

Mr. Cryer: Is not any fall in unemployment a fall from the peak created by this Government? When does the Secretary of State expect unemployment to fall to the 1979 level? Does he think that there is any connection between the £20 billion balance of trade deficit achieved by the Government—another peak—and the 2 million jobs lost in manufacturing industries since 1979?

Mr. Howard: I never cease to be amazed at the devotion shown by Opposition Members to jobs that existed in loss-making firms which offered no security either to the workers or the firms. The 2·75 million extra jobs that have been created in this country since 1983 are in firms that make profits and are secure for the long term.

Mr. Holt: As the resurgence in economic activity in Cleveland is a major contributor to the better figures that my right hon. and learned Friend has in front of him, will he find five minutes to write to Cleveland county council to tell it to accept the figures and the truth instead of asking its research and intelligence department to try and concoct false ones because it does not like the good news from Teesside?

Mr. Howard: I look forward to spending at least five minutes discussing that matter with my hon. Friend, so that we ensure that my letter correctly represents the facts.

Mr. Salmond: How can there be any further progress in reducing unemployment when the United Kingdom's whole economy is restrained because of overheating in one part of it? Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman read the research published in the current issue of the "Fraser of Allander Quarterly Economic Commentary", which reveals that manufacturing industry outside the south-east will suffer most from the Government's policy of high interest rates? Will he make respresentations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to help give businesses in Scotland, the north and Wales a chance to achieve economic recovery?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's analysis. Industry and employment throughout the country have benefited from the framework created by Government policies.

Following is the information:

International comparison of unemployment rates (OECD Standarised Unemployment Rates)

	January	*September*	*Change (per cent.)*
Italy	11·1	[2]11·3	0·2
Norway	[1]4·8	[3]5·0	0·2
Netherlands	9·4	n/a	n/a
Japan	2·3	2·2	−0·1
France	9·7	9·5	−0·2
Canada	7·5	7·3	−0·2
Germany	5·7	5·5	−0·2
United States	5·4	5·2	−0·2
Sweden	1·5	1·3	−0·2
Portugal	[1]5·2	[3]4·9	−0·3
Finland	3·7	[4]3·4	−0·3
Belgium	9·3	8·9	−0·4
Spain	[1]17·7	[3]17·0	−0·7
Australia	6·8	6·0	−0·8
United Kingdom	7·1	6·0	−1·1
OECD total	6·4	[4][5]6·1	−0·3
Major seven	5·8	[5]5·6	−0·2
EEC	9·3	[3]8·9	−0·4

[1] February.
[2] April.
[3] May.
[4] August.
[5] Estimated.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings today.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to maximise the advantages and opportunities for Britain in the developing European Community is for Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament to work more closely together in future, not grow further apart?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the Procedure Committee has some proposals to make on that matter, and its report will be debated in this House in due course. It is most important to work together in such a way that Europe is open for trade and is not protectionist, and that it operates in such a way that the rights of this House—the sovereign and oldest House of Parliament in the European Community—are well and truly respected.

Mr. Battle: Why are the Government continuing to allow the dumping of industrial toxic waste into the North sea, despite comments made during last night's Second Reading of the Environmental Protection Bill, international assurances, and the protests made by the rest of Europe? Will the Government continue blatantly to disregard international agreements and the environmental health of the North sea?

The Prime Minister: I have checked the law and the reports, and they confirm that we agreed to phase out dumping of industrial waste into the North sea by the end

of 1989, except where there was no practicable land disposal option—which requires a great deal of planning permission and investment. But then we have to show to the satisfaction of the Oslo Commission that waste dumped at sea will not cause harm. That is being done, so we are not infringing any of our legal responsibilities.

Q2. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Farmers in my constituency believe that there is a contradiction in the attitude adopted by the European Commission, which wants to see greater progress made towards monetary union but is nevertheless prepared to reduce the gap between the real and notional value of the green pound by only one third. How can there be a single European market for agriculture when that crippling disadvantage for British farmers is so lightly dismissed by Brussels bureaucrats?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, farm price differences are due to the arrangements for green currency. We agreed to phase out the green currencies by the end of 1992, which will be of great benefit to our farmers, and we must hold our partners to that agreement. Meanwhile, the Commission's current proposals will reduce the gap by one third, which is a step in the right direction. Whether or not that goes far enough is a matter for negotiation in the coming months.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall telling the House last year that, under the present Government, there is no incomes policy? Why did she change her mind?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is not correct. Under this Government, it is for the private sector to determine its pay levels and for the Government, as an employer, to determine their pay levels.

Mr. Kinnock: I wish to jog the Prime Minister's memory by quoting from *Hansard*. She said:

"Under this Government there is no incomes . . . policy."
—[*Official Report*, 16 February 1989; Vol. 147, c. 482.]

Perhaps she can explain why she has two incomes policies in the public sector—one for the top paid, above the rate of inflation, and one for the remainder, below the rate of inflation. Why does she not come clean and admit that, even though it would mean swallowing her own words?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman does not understand what an incomes policy is. If he did, he would know that there is no incomes policy under this Government. It is for the private sector to determine pay arrangements in relation to productivity and bearing in mind the need to keep prices competitive. It is for the Government, in the public sector, to determine the rate of pay for those who come directly under our employment. To do that, we have observed the recommendations of the pay review bodies for those people who do not go on strike. We have observed the many negotiating arrangements. The position is much more complex than the right hon. Gentleman understands.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: If the NHS management bows to industrial action by the ambulance men and decide to raise the offer, what message would that convey to the 84 per cent. of NHS workers who, last year, settled their pay claims through the usual negotiating machinery?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. The pay claim that is being resolved now should have been settled last spring or early summer. That pay round was settled at 6·5 to 6·8 per cent. by some 84 per cent. of NHS employees including nurses, administrative and clerical grades, senior managers, ancillary staff, building trade operatives and medical laboratory scientific officers. They all settled at the right time for between 6·5 and 6·8 per cent. It would be unfair if, because the ambulance workers did not settle and have gone on strike and disrupted some of their work, they were to receive more than those who settled and did not strike.

Q3. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Michie: I am here. Will the Prime Minister admit to the shabby Government policy that restricts ambulance crews having a decent living wage, while around her she has highly-paid colleagues who make more moonlighting than they earn as Members of Parliament? Is it not time that she cleaned up this sleaze Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for calling attention to his place. I am used to answering Sheffield questions from that area. I do not agree with him. As he is aware, the ambulance men have had a revised offer costing another £6 million this year, which varies between 9 and 16·3 per cent., according to where they work and their qualifications, and for a period of 18 months. That is a good offer. It is 16·3 per cent. for those with more qualifications because we want more ambulance men with more medical qualifications. I hope that they will return to the relevant Whitley council and accept the offer.

Mr. Aitken: When my right hon. Friend speaks of the need to preserve the right of this sovereign Parliament, is she fully aware of the disadvantage under which we are working because of the flow of documents from Europe? Is she further aware that during the past 12 months the European Commission sent this House 765 legislative documents consisting of 10,000 pages? That is an impossible total for the House to carry over and above its existing domestic legislation. Surely we need to reform our procedures as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that there is an enormous amount of extra work involved in properly scrutinising the many documents that come before us. I hope that the report of the Select Committee on Procedure will soon be debated in the House and I hope that when all the arrangements are in place for 1992 that stream of directives will be infinitely less. As I have said frequently in the House, we have to remember that no other Parliament in the European Community is as central to the life of a nation as this one, and that is not surprising, because we are the oldest sovereign Parliament in the Community.

Q4. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Does the right hon. Lady agree with President Gorbachev when he says that the people of Lithuania have an absolute right to independence if they so choose? Does she know about today's opinion poll in Scotland, in which the Conservatives have gone down to 16 per cent.—a level at which they would be almost wiped out in the House—which adds to their annihilation at a European level? When the Scottish people say yes to self-government what will be the Prime Minister's reply?

The Prime Minister: It is for Mr. Gorbachev to make his views clear, which he does very competently. Expenditure per head in Scotland is 23 per cent. above the United Kingdom average, so Scotland does very well out of the Government. When the time comes, it will be for Scotland to consider whether it wants to throw over those advantages for something less.

Q5. **Mr. Bendall:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bendall: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, under the block services grant, Redbridge will suffer? The national change is about 11 per cent., but in Redbridge we shall get 6·7 per cent., which is a shortfall of 4·3 per cent. Will my right hon. Friend comment on that?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that I recognise all of my hon. Friend's figures. Redbridge will do well from the proposed grant settlements, and it will receive 27 per cent. more income from the Government grant and business rates in the coming year than it received this year from those sources. Many hon. Members would be very pleased with such a settlement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Six thousand people are unemployed in my constituency, and more than one third have been unemployed for more than a year. What will the right hon. Lady do about unemployment in Britain?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will take advantage of the new employment training arrangements which are very successful. He will be aware that it is vitally important that we train people for new jobs, and that we do not necessarily try to keep the old ones. That is why we have set up the new training and enterprise councils which I hope will give training and jobs to more of his constituents. It would also help if they welcomed private enterprise and co-operated to keep costs down.

Q6. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the system for compensating people who are affected by road and rail developments leaves something to be desired? Does she agree that if we did as the French do—more than compensate people who are affected—we might find that we cut out some of the delays that we face when building the roads and railways that we so badly need, and in the long run we might save a great deal of money?

The Prime Minister: I know that the viewpoint put by my hon. Friend is popular as a way to get things done more quickly. He will be aware that we compensate people with the full market value at the moment, and there are certain other disturbance costs granted to people who have to move. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is considering whether we need to give more compensation, but that would mean legislation in a new Bill. Perhaps, if we come to that conclusion, there will be time in the next Session.

Q7. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Barnes: Does the Prime Minister agree that health visitors are a vital part of the community health service, particularly in their role of screening families to identify vulnerable young children? Will she join me in condemning the action of the Greenwich health authority, which has curtailed the service severely?

The Prime Minister: I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the health visitors, and to the vital part that they play as they go around performing their duties. I uphold their service in every respect, but it is not for me to make a judgment that must properly be made by Greenwich council when it weighs expenditure on one service against expenditure on another. The hon. Lady must not provoke me to make a judgment that I should not make because I am not in possession of the full facts.

Leyland Bus Plant (Lancashire)

3.30 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the proposed decision by the chairman of Volvo Truck and Bus to sack 400 workers in the Leyland bus plant in Lancashire, near my constituency."

I was shocked and disgusted when the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the current chairman of the Conservative party, failed yesterday at the Dispatch Box to give any indication of the Government's resolve to prevent Volvo Truck and Bus from betraying the Leyland-Daf Buses work force, thus further weakening the industrial base of the economy of the north-west.

Two years ago, the Government promoted the sale of Leyland-Daf Buses to a new foreign owner, with a fanfare of optimism and promises of new investment, job opportunities and long-term security. Yet, without either a warning from the company or any note of caution or regret from the Government, bus production in Lancashire is being put at risk and the production of all bus chassis is to be ended. How can a company such as Leyland, with a worldwide reputation for quality, be so cynically undermined by a boardroom decision made outside the United Kingdom but affecting the entire British manufacturing base?

Under the present Government, British manufacturing industry is being bought wholesale by foreign companies, and is being closed down on the Government's whim. The Government, in the guise of the Minister for Roads and Traffic—the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins)—the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, must take full responsibility for allowing the present situation to develop.

Labour Members in the north-west are demanding action from the Government to prevent the Volvo corporation from imposing its two-week deadline on the work force. They must come up with a scheme to prevent the closure of the plant. It is an outrage that the workers should be put under such strain at such an important time, and the guarantees given two years ago should be recognised and implemented by both the Government and the Volvo corporation. Suspending the redundancies is not enough; they must be withdrawn immediately, and a commitment must be given that the 400 jobs in Lancashire will be retained.

Finally, let me thank the editor and staff of the *Lancashire Evening Post* for joining in the campaign on behalf of the work force.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The application was made to me.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announcement that nearly 400 redundancies are to take place at Leyland Daf Buses."

As the House knows, under Standing Order No. 20 I must announce my decision without giving my reasons to the House. I listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman said. As he knows, I have to decide whether his application should take precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I regret that the matter that he has raised does not meet the requirements of the Standing Order, and that I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you to give guidance on the subject of the declaration of interests by hon. Members? In last night's television programme "World in Action", a number of Members, whom I have no intention of naming, were said to have commercial interests outside the House which they had not declared. I believe that that programme raised matters which concern the reputation of the House.

We have said—as you have said, Mr. Speaker—that this is an honourable House. It must be said that undoubtedly a number of people who watched that programme last night must be wondering how those with commercial interests, who in many respects are just lobbyists paid for by companies, can raise on the Floor of the House of Commons, at Question Time or on other occasions, matters in which they have a direct financial interest. That would not be allowed in a local authority. Indeed, the traditions——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Winnick: I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, whether the standards which undoubtedly exist in local government, and which I believe to be right, should not apply in the House of Commons.

It was said last night that it was not necesary to declare an interest at Question Time. If you come to the conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that the reputation of the House is being abused because Members are exploiting that loophole by not declaring their interests at Question Time, when in fact they have a direct financial or commercial interest, may I ask you to rule that they do so?

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is it on the same point, because I can help the House by giving clear guidance?

Mr. Howarth: My point of order concerns the same matter, Mr. Speaker, and I think I can be of assistance. In view of the sanctimonious nonsense that is traditionally spoken by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), whom nobody would employ to do anything, may I express the hope that, in taking this matter into account, you will bear in mind that many Opposition Members are nakedly sponsored by trade unions and who spend their entire time using the House in furtherance of their trade union interests?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall not allow this to develop into a debate. Let me give clear guidance, because the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) asked for that.

I made it clear yesterday that these are matters in the first instance for the Select Committee on Members' Interests under Standing Order No. 128. That Committee considers any specific complaints made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests. The Committee also considers any proposals made by Members or others as to the form and contents of the Register of Members' Interests.

The Committee is currently examining the whole question of outside lobbyists and their relations with Members. I cannot comment from the Chair on allegations of non-compliance with the rules for registration. Any information that Members or others have relevant to these issues should be sent to the Committee and not debated across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On a matter of clarification relating to lobbyists, would you agree that that word would cover any body which is involved in lobbying Members of Parliament? If so, it must embrace trade unions and other bodies which actively lobby all of us. I hope that that will be borne in mind.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The system of being lobbied in the House is of long standing.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance? You will be aware that in a highly dynamic situation which was developing during the course of the day today, I tried to raise through the usual means the question of the dumping fly ash in the North sea off the north-east. I was advised by your office that one reason why the issue could not be raised was that, because three people had been arrested, the matter was considered to be sub judice.

This is a matter of some puzzlement to me. People are frequently arrested in relation to demonstrations about matters of public concern and are not necessarily subsequently charged, or there may not be a case to answer. The point on which I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, is whether we are to assume that when anybody is arrested in the course of some matter of public concern, we are prevented from raising it in the House. If so, that seems to be creating a precedent.

Mr. Speaker: I can give the hon. Gentleman guidance on that matter. He sought to raise the matter in an application under Standing Order No. 20 asking for a debate which would take precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. My office gave him the guidance that that would not be in order because the men concerned—I think they were all men—had been arrested, and clearly it would not be in order to have a debate on the subject. The hon. Gentleman can put down a question regarding the disposal of ash; that would be a completely different matter.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance? The Register of Members' Interests shows that about 90 per cent. of Labour Members are sponsored by trade unions in their constituencies. The Register of Members' Interests states that many of them are under something called the Hastings agreement, which, as far as I can tell, seems to be that the unions pay for all those goods and services in their constituencies which other Members of Parliament have to pay for themselves out of their taxed income. I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of guidance: is it not right that hon. Members who receive vast benefits from various trade unions should declare the exact amount that they are receiving, because they are receiving it in kind?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already made the position absolutely clear to the House. It is a matter for the Select Committee on Members' Interests.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): But it is not true.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may take exception to what has been said, but it is not a matter of order for me. If any such abuse is alleged it should be taken to the Select Committee.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I pursue just a little further the matter that my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) raised with you? The House is aware that, if a legal process is in action, you exercise the sub judice rule across all our business, whether it is a debate or an application under Standing Order No. 20. I think I am right in saying that that has never before happened on arrest.

As a matter of law, someone is innocent until proved guilty and certainly is not regarded as apprehended until he is charged. May I ask you to reflect on the matter generally? It affects not only the issue that my hon. Friend raised about dumping in the North sea, but all our business. Could you rule either today or tomorrow whether, between arrest and charge, a matter is not sub judice, as is the traditional understanding as a matter of law?

Mr. Speaker: I have made the matter absolutely clear. It is not a suitable subject for an application under Standing Order No. 20. If we had applications under Standing Order No. 20 every time anyone was arrested, we should never get any business done. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made a specific request under Standing Order No. 20 to discuss those arrests. I passed the message to him that that would not be appropriate. If he would like to discuss the matter with me, I should be happy to do so.

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I beg your indulgence to explain to the House that the Hastings agreement is an agreement between the trades unions and the local Labour party relating only to a percentage of the money paid for an election? None of us receives any personal remuneration whatsoever. Therefore, it is a total lie for hon. Gentlemen to suggest otherwise.

Hon. Members: Withdraw!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the House would be well advised to wait until the Select Committee has carefully considered the matter, which I have already said is before it. Doubtless there will then be a debate in which all these matters will be in order. We should not deal with it this afternoon, on a day when we have very heavy business before us.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

BILLS PRESENTED

Toxic and Hazardous Substances (Miscellaneous Provisions)

Mr. Ian McCartney presented a Bill to protect the general public in the purchase and application of toxic and hazardous substances within the home environment; to provide a code of conduct for use by consumers and contractors; to set up a register of proscribed substances; and for other purposes. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 January and to be printed. [Bill 52.]

Registration of Commercial Lobbying Interests

Mr. Bob Cryer, supported by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. Pat Wall, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Dave Nellist, Mr. Eric S. Heffer and Mr. John Hughes, presented a Bill to provide a public register of organisations who carry out the lobbying of Parliament for commercial gain and the disclosure of expenditure by such organisations; and for connected purposes. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 January and to be printed. [Bill 53.]

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. [Hon. Members: "Declare your interest."] I always have done. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is intolerable to have this pointing across the Chamber. The point of order is to me. I must hear it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Have you seen early-day motion 290, which questions the right of members of the press lobby to publish information on the proceedings of the House? Have you read the motion, Mr. Speaker? While it refers to me, it then

"calls upon the Select Committee on the Televising of the House to review the terms upon which the Chamber and committees are televised to seek to prevent further similar uses of the proceedings of the House."

The motion is similar to asking the Services Committee to prevent newspapers from publishing the proceedings of Parliament, which in itself means that there are 43 hon. Members who think that they have the right to require *The Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Independent* and every national newspaper to refrain from publishing information which they believe should be in the public domain.

The motion is an attempt to censor the House of Commons and to censor hon. Members because we are raising issues relating to the private interests of Members of Parliament, an issue of great public concern.

Mr. Speaker: The early-day motion is on the Order Paper. The matter cannot be debated now. It was not drawn to my attention when it was put down.

Ten-minute rule motion——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very heavy day ahead of us. I will take the point of order if it is on a completely different matter, but not on the question of Members' interests.

Mr. Bennett: It is on the circulation of the Register. The programme to which the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) referred was very one-sided. It referred only to Conservative Members. Could you arrange, Mr. Speaker, for a copy of the Register of Members' Interests to be sent to Granada Television so that it may see, for

instance, that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has three adviserships? No mention was made of Labour Members who are advisers and consultants.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I saw the programme. It was in the light of it that I made my statement this afternoon.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on the same matter?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, it is.

Mr. Speaker: I am not hearing it, in that case.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on a genuinely different matter?

Mr. Skinner: It is as vital as some of those that you have had from the Tories.

Mr. Speaker: I will only hear it if it is on a different matter.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Speaker: What I said was, is it on a different matter?

Mr. Skinner: It is a genuine point of order. If those Tories can——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: We have every right to——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must sit down. Ten-minute rule motion, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am not hearing it.

Mr. Skinner: It is on a different matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is seeking to abuse the procedures of the House. I ask the hon. Gentleman to sit down.

Mr. Skinner: It is on a different matter.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. Gentleman to sit down.

Mr. Skinner: Those Tories——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In that case, I now order the hon. Gentleman to sit down.

Elimination of Poverty in Retirement

3.48 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require local authorities and health authorities to monitor the condition of their retired population; to eliminate standing charges on gas, electricity and water; to exempt pensioners from licence charges and telephone rental; to extend pensioners' concessionary fare schemes; to make provision for the calculation of old-age pensions by reference to average earnings; and to appoint a Minister with responsibility for retired people.

This is the seventh occasion on which such a Bill has been introduced. I introduce it because the plight of elderly people is growing poverty, growing misery and a growing fear that they will not be able to make ends meet and that they will lead a lonely and miserable life. It is up to the House to address the problem urgently and to introduce a comprehensive measure, said as this Bill, which would eliminate the poverty that causes the problem.

The state old-age pension in Britain is the lowest of any European industrial country. The proportion is getting worse compared to the rest of Europe. That is compounded by cuts in social services provision by local authorities and by cuts in health provision. It is further compounded by the steadily increasing cost of gas, electricity, water and telephones, all of which have been privatised since the Government took office, and all of which are charging considerably more for what is often an inferior service.

The life expectancy of elderly people in this country is becoming lower that that of those in other industrial countries with which it is reasonable to make a comparison. I am glad that, so far, we have not had a cold winter, but should there be one, once again the horror of deaths from hypothermia will occur, not because there is insufficent capacity to heat old people's homes but because the cost of heating is far too high. The Bill includes a series of measures to eliminate much of the poverty from which elderly people suffer.

In 1980, the Government broke the link between the state old-age pension and the level of average earnings, which was a disgraceful and shameful act. That link should be restored, and the Bill aims to do so immediately. If it were restored in April 1990, the state old-age pension would be £13·10 a week higher for single people ands £20·70 a week higher for a pensioner couple. Pensioners have been robbed of that money since the earnings link was broken in 1980. That scandal must be put right.

The Government claim—indeed, their strategy is based on this idea—that an increasing number of people will subscribe to occupational or private pension schemes. That may suit the god of the market economy—indeed, it probably satisfies those many people who are making much money out of it—but the reality is that only half of all pensioners have any income from occupational or private pension schemes. That is a small figure, and only one third of women pensioners have any income from private pensions. The majority of old people rely on the state old-age pension and other state benefits for which they may be eligible, which is why the Bill is timely and important.

The proportion of the state old-age pension compared with the level of average earnings has steadily declined, and is now at its lowest level for over 20 years. From April

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

1990, as a percentage of male industrial earnings, the state old-age pension for a single person is merely 16 per cent., which is a disgraceful figure. Many people in work find that figure disgraceful, and the enormous and growing active pensioners movement is campaigning hard for an entirely different deal for the state old-age pension and pensioners in general. It campaigned before the first world war to get the state old-age pension introduced.

Elderly and retired people have always faced an uphill struggle, which is why I am introducing the Bill.

A Minister should be appointed with responsibility to co-ordinate policy for the retired population and for old-age pensioners. That Minister would report annually to Parliament on the condition, health, life expectancy and average income of old people, which would offer an annual opportunity to focus on their plight.

The Bill would require local authorities and local health authorities to produce an annual report on the services that they offer old people in their communities, what provisions they make and the conditions from which pensioners suffer, be they housing, lack of health facilities, domiciliary care, or any other concerns. Those who receive meals on wheels and other care are least able to protest about them. When cuts are made, they often suffer terribly, but in silence.

The Bill would abolish standing charges on gas, electricity and water for pensioner households. The unit cost of gas, electricity and water is considerably higher for low-consuming pensioner households than for other people. The Bill would also do what other hon. Members most notably my hon. Friend for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), have tried to do—to end the scandal of pensioners having to pay for a television licence—and it would stop them having to pay telephone rental charges. For them, a telephone is not a luxury, but a necessity so that they can maintain contact with friends and relatives.

The Bill would also protect the concessionary fare schemes in some parts of the country. They do not exist through the action of the Government—indeed, the local authorities that introduced the schemes were often penalised for doing so. The Bill would protect the existing schemes and would seek to introduce a national scheme to allow concessionary travel schemes for elderly people throughout the country. Old people deserve and should have that right of mobility.

The Bill also seeks to re-establish the link between the state old-age pension and average earnings. Each April, the state old-age pension would be increased in line with average earnings. The Bill would include provisions to give old people what the National Pensioners Convention demands—a state old-age pension equal to half the average industrial earnings for a pensioner couple and to one third for a single person. That would be a big increase and would do much to right many of the injustices and wrongs that pensioners face.

The treatment of pensioners is bad and wrong. Pensioners are suffering seriously from the changes in the social security system, and the cuts in local government expenditure and local health authority expenditure. Old people are in a difficult position. They may not be as ambulant as they were when younger, or able to protest as loudly as those in work or as younger members of the population. They are the least able to mount a major protest. Despite that, the National Pensioners Convention and all the local pensioners' organisations are daily demanding justice for old people. If a measure of the quality of a civilisation is how well it treats its old people, this civilisation is sadly and badly wanting and the misery of many elderly people is a scandal. I hope that the House will do what it can to redress that imbalance and to right that wrong by passing the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Chris Smith, Mr. David Winnick, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Bernie Grant, Mr. Frank Cook, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Tony Banks and Mr. Bill Michie.

ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN RETIREMENT

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn accordingly presented a Bill to require local authorities and health authorities to monitor the condition of their retired population; to eliminate standing charges on gas, electricity and water; to exempt pensioners from licence charges and telephone rental; to extend pensioners' concessionary fare schemes; to make provision for the calculation of old age pensions by reference to average earnings; and to appoint a Minister with responsibility for retired people: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 23 February and to be printed. [Bill 54.]

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is there a mechanism whereby we can put on record the fact that, while my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) was introducing his important Bill, only four Conservative Members were present on the Back Benches? That is a blue snub for grey power.

Mr. Speaker: It seems that that point is on the record.

Orders of the Day

Coal Industry Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are about to debate the Coal Industry Bill on Report and on Third Reading. Clause 4 deals with the increase in opencast excavation from 25,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes, which means that a lot of money is involved in opencast mining. Will you state, Mr. Speaker, that if any Tory Member is about to line his pockets because he has interests in opencast mining or in private mining, which is also to be increased, he should declare his interest? It is high time that such people were prevented from voting on these matters.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is stating the obvious. He knows perfectly well that any hon. Member who has an interest and who participates in a debate should declare that interest.

New Clause 1

DEFINITION OF ACCUMULATED GROUP DEFICIT

'For the purposes of this Act the "accumulated group deficit" shall include

(1) sums owed by the Corporation to the Treasury or the Bank of England,

(2) sums owed by the Corporation to banks and other financial institutions,

(3) sufficient sums to cover all outstanding claims on the Corporation for compensation for coal mining subsidence damage,

(4) such additional sums as the Corporation would have been liable for if the recommendations contained in the Report of the Subsidence Compensation Review Committee on the Report and Compensation System for Coal Mining Subsidence Damage had been enacted before 30th March 1990.'.—*[Mr. Dobson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.59 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

When the Coal Industry Bill was published, many people were disappointed that it did not include proposals to improve the arrangements for compensating people for damage caused to their homes by mining subsidence. To be fair, it was not just Labour Members who were disappointed; even some of the Tory Members involved expressed their disappointment that the opportunity had been missed. We are all at a loss to know why such proposals were not included.

No hon. Member was as disappointed, however, as the people who live in areas that are severely affected by mining subsidence, and probably the most disappointed of all were the people who live in the Nottingham coalfield, where the problem is particularly bad. People living in such areas suffer damage to their homes. Their children suffer damage to their schools, and other public buildings, too, are damaged. There is damage to water pipes, gas pipes, and sewers, and farmers' land is damaged by breaks in the drainage system.

The Government say that they really cannot find any place in their legislative programme for provisions to improve the compensation system. They have also said that they cannot offer an improvement in that system in this Bill—for some reason or another, it is not considered appropriate. The former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, who has now moved on to the Department of the Environment, said that the Bill was a subsidy Bill, not a subsidence Bill, although he attributed that bon mot originally to one of his colleagues.

It is strange to hear that this is only a subsidy Bill because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) pointed out, it provides for a tenfold increase in the size of private opencast workings, with all the environmental damage and dangers to health that they bring with them. It also provides for a fivefold increase in the number of miners who may be employed underground in private mines, which are at least four times as dangerous as the mines of British Coal.

The Government managed to draft a Bill to cope with those non-subsidy issues, both of which will have adverse effects on the coalfield communities—on the miners going below ground and on the people living above ground and facing the damage that opencasting usually brings with it. One might have thought that the Government would make some effort to introduce an offsetting provision to help the coalfield communities. They should have sorted out the problem of compensation scheme once and for all, and the Bill could have given them the opportunity to do that.

I can think of only one explanation for their different approach: presumably, those in favour of bigger opencast mines and those in favour of increasing the number of miners going down terribly dangerous private pits must have made private representations to the Government. They include Tory supporters such as Taylor Woodrow, Costain and Wimpey, which will undoubtedly make money out of the changes.

They are the only people who can have advocated the changes. There have been no official reports proposing them. There has been no long series of official inquiries into the problems of opencasting. There is little evidence of any pressure from hon. Members to increase the size of opencast workings. If there has been any pressure, it has been to try to persuade the Government to reduce the size of those workings.

We have a strange difficulty, it seems, over subsidence. Great efforts have been made in the House to get the compensation scheme improved and made the law of the land. I shall describe the various stages in the development of proposals to improve the scheme since the Government came to office. In September 1981, the Commission on Energy and the Environment made certain proposals about improving the compensation scheme. Its report contained a chapter on subsidence and recommended improvements.

It took the Government until May 1983, almost two years later, to publish a response to that report. They did not show much urgency at the time. They can say that, shortly before they published their response, they set up the Waddilove committee to report on the compensation system for coal mining subsidence damage. Fair do's to the committee—it got on with its job. A year later, in May 1984, it produced a thorough report with 65 specific recommendations.

The Government received that report in 1984. No one could accuse them of being in a rush to judgment on it, because they did not produce their response until October 1987. That meant that they took almost three weeks to

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

consider each recommendation in the report. It took them another year before they produced a consultation document on what they themselves proposed to do to improve the compensation scheme. They produced it in April 1988.

When will the Government introduce a proper statutory compensation scheme? Other hon. Members have also asked that question. I have been checking what has happened in the House since the Waddilove report was produced. There have been dozens of written questions, seven or eight oral questions, no fewer than four private Members' Bills, early-day motions, Select Committee inquiries, and debates about this topic. This difficult topic has also been mentioned in a large number of general debates.

I have a computer printout listing all the times when mining subsidence has been raised since the Waddilove committee reported. It goes on and on. It contains page after page of hon. Members trying to represent their constituents to make sure that something is done. Unfortunately, the only people who are not doing anything are the Government. On several occasions, successive Ministers have said that a Bill to change the law will be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Many Conservative Members would like to see such a Bill. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a statutory compensation scheme would require several more clauses and would be quite complicated? The Government's objective is to get this Bill through Parliament at the earliest possible stage. Of course, a further Bill will have to come forward at another time.

Mr. Dobson: Several comments are to be made in response to the hon. Gentleman's reasonable point. If they had wanted, during this Session, the Government could have introduced a separate Bill on subsidence. Instead, they have decided to introduce Bills that kick lumps off the National Health Service and other Bills on matters of apparent high priority for the Prime Minister. It is clear that subsidence is not a high priority for the Prime Minister. Even so, it would have been possible to introduce into the Bill provisions which would allow the establishment of a statutory compensation scheme.

Although Opposition Members have criticised the Bill and, because of its threat to miners' lives, voted against it on Second Reading, we responsibly made sure that it got out of Committee quickly and that it will quickly be considered on Report, because it is necessary that the large sums that British Coal requires must be available by the end of March. Equally, even now, if the Secretary of State undertakes to introduce substantial changes to the Bill in the House of Lords to include subsidence, we will guarantee that we will not use that decision to obstruct the passage of this Bill or the passage of proper measures to improve subsidence compensation.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley West and Penistone): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to me, because my constituency has been devastated by mining subsidence, and over the years we have been pressing the Government for some new compensation and for a new look at things. We suspect that the Government are holding their fire purely and simply for the privatisation of mines. However, would it not be sensible for the Government to bring in new legislation before that happens, if it is likely to happen, so that they can have something on the statute book to alleviate the fears of the many people who think that the Government are playing fast and loose and hard and fast until the mines are privatised?

Mr. Dobson: I know that those fears are shared by a considerable number of people living in those areas that are severely affected by mining subsidence. My hon. Friend is right—logically, the Government should have introduced something on subsidence in the Bill, as my hon. Friend knows, because much of the rest of the Bill is intended as a paving stone for privatisation. People are concerned about what will happen and that the provisions for subsidence will be pushed further and further back and that we will then be told by the Government that it would be unfair to impose those awful burdens on a privatised coal industry. That may be what is happening. It is certainly what many people fear may be happening.

For more than five years, the promise to do something about the compensation scheme has not been fulfilled. People living in the areas affected by subsidence are getting restless about the delays, and there is no reason why we should blame them. From time to time, Ministers have said that it is all right, because British Coal has already implemented over half the recommendations of the Waddilove committee. So it has—and all credit to British Coal—but British Coal cannot change the law. It cannot introduce a statutory compensation scheme. Only Governments can change the law. When Ministers say that British Coal has done its stuff, they are highlighting the fact that everybody else has done their stuff as well, and that only the Government have not responded and done their job properly. It is now up to the Government to settle this problem because it severely affects thousands of people.

There are conflicting estimates of the number of people involved, but the lowest estimate that I could find—I suppose that it is understandable that it is the lowest, because it is British Coal's estimate in its last report—is that over 25,000 valid claims may lie against British Coal. However, there are many higher estimates, especially in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. As I have said, in fairness to British Coal and to the House and because I do not want to exaggerate, I have chosen the lowest estimate that I have been able to find. Others go well above double that figure.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): I do not want to dispute what my hon. Friend has said, but is he aware that Mansfield district council and other councils in my area sent a questionnaire to every house locally and received 33,000 or more answers from tenants and owner-occupiers who said that their houses had been affected by subsidence? So my hon. Friend's estimate might be rather low.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend has taken literally the next line of what I intended saying. It is certainly true that there have been much higher estimates, including estimates covering the affected districts in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

It is necessary to emphasise to people who are not familiar with the problems of subsidence just what effects it can have, in this case, just on people's homes, and

leaving out major public buildings and such things. The Commission on Energy and the Environment has classified subsidence damage, starting with the lowest classification of "very slight" or "negligible", which includes hair cracks in the plaster, isolated slight fractures in the building that are not visible outside.

As most people will know, no house-proud family likes even hairline cracks in the internal plaster. Indeed, if most hon. Members were faced with hairline cracks in the internal plaster of their front rooms or whatever they like to call them, they would want something done about it. They would want it put right as quickly as possible, to the highest possible standard. However, that is not necessarily available here.

4.15 pm

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is right about this House. I think that he was talking about the houses of hon. Members. There was a classic example of the Government's attitude recently in the Houses of Parliament. Although the damage was not done by mining subsidence, it was significant that, when a little bit of plaster fell from the ceiling of the House of Lords, all hell broke loose. As a result, a string of architects longer than the so-called dole queue went running into the House of Lords to find a remedy. The ceiling was then propped up for 12 months or more. The estimate for the total cost of putting that matter right was over £250,000.

That shows the double standard that operates in the country. If there is a hairline crack in the House of Lords or elsewhere in the Houses of Parliament, the Government will go to any lengths to put the matter right. When it comes to sorting out the problems of an elderly pensioner in my constituency or in the constituencies of my hon. Friends, the Government hold things up year after year. The same is true of Bolsover church. We have battled for several years to have the subsidence damage put right. The Government know how to operate double standards when it comes to subsidence.

Mr. Dobson: I recall my hon. Friend raising the matter of damage to Bolsover church several times in the House. I wonder how swiftly the Government would respond if hairline cracks appeared in the new ornamental gates at the end of Downing street. I bet they would not have to negotiate with the Coal Board to put the gates right.

The next category to which the Commission referred was slight damage. This was:

"Several slight fractures showing inside the buildings. Doors and windows may stick slightly. Repairs to decoration probably necessary."

Again, we would not put up with such damage in our own homes, at least not voluntarily.

The next category is described as appreciable damage. It includes

"Slight fractures showing on the outside of building (or one main fracture). Doors and windows sticking."—

not "slightly" this time—

"Service pipes may fracture".

We then go on to severe damage. Service pipes are not simply fractured but disrupted. This class of damage also includes

"Open fracture requiring rebonding and allowing weather into the structure. Window and door frames distorted, floors sloping noticeably, walls leaning or bulging noticeably. Some loss of bearing in beams. If compressive damage, overlapping of roof joints and lifting of brickwork".

That is not the end of it. We go on to very severe damage. The classification starts:

"As above but worse, and requiring partial or complete rebuilding. Roof and floor beams lose bearing and walls lean badly and need shoring up. Windows broken with distortion. Severe slopes of floors. If compressive damage,"—

instead of stretching—

"severe buckling and bulging of the roofs and walls."

Mr. Ashton: And then the dog refuses to go into the house.

Mr. Dobson: Yes. This is a serious matter. Damage is done to the homes of people who, like most of us, take pride in their homes. Stress is caused as the damage happens and people wonder how it is happening, whether it will get worse, and how long it will go on. Then they suffer disturbance while the damage is put right, if they finally come to an agreement with the Coal Board.

Some friends of mine who are reasonably well-off—they are both doctors who live on the edge of Nottingham—had to move out of their home for almost four months because such extensive work was required to put their home into reasonable nick and allow them to live in the manner to which they were, rightly, accustomed. Many other people are forced to leave their homes for similar periods. They are people who probably cannot afford it as well as my friends could and who cannot easily find alternative accommodation. The matter is serious for the people involved.

It is stressful when one's house is cracking and buckling. It is stressful if one has to stay in it while work is being done. It is probably equally stressful to move into somewhere smaller while work is being done.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Great distress is also caused to people whose properties may not have been blighted by subsidence but whose properties have been rendered valueless when neighbouring properties have been so affected. One day, a person may have a property worth £40,000 or £50,000 and the next day nothing.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend is right. Blight affects whole areas as well as individuals. Only a half-wit would buy an undamaged house in a row where others are damaged until it was known that the subsidence had stopped or that work would be done to make the houses safe.

Such stress is harmful for the people concerned. That is all the more reason why we should work to remove any unnecessary stress which, in the current system, is the gratuitous problem of having to have a great barney with British Coal in order to get things put right. That is why not just those directly affected but people living in areas that are generally affected by mining subsidence join us in believing that the time for action has come. That is why we have tabled new clause 1.

Subsidence is a problem in many coalfields, but it applies particularly in Nottinghamshire. I do not know what the Nottingham miners have done to upset the Government. The Bill provides for redundancy money which will help to put Nottingham miners out of jobs and it provides for bigger private opencast workings. About a fortnight ago, the House passed the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill to increase the coal-handling plant on Humberside so that cheap, slave-labour, foreign coal could compete with the Nottingham miners' product.

[Mr. Dobson]

Moreover, in the past few days we have discovered that at least two gas-fired power stations are to be built at Killingholme on Humberside near the Nottinghamshire coalfield. They are about to receive the Secretary of State's consent.

In view of all that, one would have thought that the Government would have done something to compensate the Nottingham miners for all that is happening to Nottinghamshire and to the other coalfields. Surely we should act now. The Opposition will co-operate in any way with a new Bill or the additional clauses to this Bill in order to implement the Waddilove proposals. They are good and sound proposals, which have been discussed long enough. People understand them and want them enacted. That is the reason for the new clause.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I want to associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), particularly on subsidence. No one who has lived in Nottinghamshire all his life and who has been involved in the coal industry in many ways during that time—as I have—could be happy with the overall situation on subsidence. Many hon. Members will have dealt with difficult subsidence cases, and one reason why I gave evidence to the Waddilove committee was my concern for individuals who must take on a major industry such as British Coal with few resources to do so.

A problem arose when agents working in Nottinghamshire took on many cases at a time when cash compensation was available. The coal board paid out a lot of money for subsidence which, in many cases, was not used for the job for which it was intended. That is one reason why I have suggested that if anyone receives cash compensation, which is now much harder to get, it should be entered on the deeds or in the Land Registry so that any subsequent purchaser knows that a claim has been made and cash has been paid and so that a surveyor can ensure that the money has been used in the way that it should have been. I feel that there should be repairs rather than cash compensation, except when there is a tilted floor or something of that sort with which it would be better to live, with compensation, instead of pulling the house down.

This all adds up to the case for more urgent consideration of the subject. Clause 4 on opencasting strengthens my belief that one reason why we have relatively low-cost coal is the forebearance of those who suffer when it is extracted. This is true of deep mine pits, through subsidence, and opencast mines, through the long-term problems which are created for the community when companies rip the hell out of the local hillsides. In my constituency, brand new green belt land is affected.

It is time for us to look seriously at the problem. We try to protect the villages of Kent because individuals might suffer in the public interest when a valuable link is placed at the end of the Channel tunnel. I have no objection to such protection, but for many years, those of us who represent mining areas have had the short end of the stick. Nobody has thought through the fact that many people will suffer.

The people who work in the industry have tended to say, "If we work in it, we have to suffer by it." However, that attitude has long since gone. It is time to look at the recommendations of the Waddilove committee. The Country Landowners Association was part of the united industry working party which consisted of the National Farmers' Union, the Building Societies Association, the Confederation of British Industry, the Law Society, the British Property Federation and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. It met my right hon. Friend's predecessor to put pressure for action on the Waddilove committee which reported in 1984. The Government did not say anything until 1987—by anyone's standards that was a hell of a long time to consider the issue.

Those organisations pressed for various sensible actions in terms of legislative reforms, independent arbitration and standards of repair. When repairs are done, there are constant disagreements about their standard. The organisations pressed the committee about the contractors used. Sometimes, the Coal Board, through no fault of its own, might be slow in appointing a contractor. There is no reason why, with proper safeguards, the people affected should not appoint their own contractors to do the work under proper supervision. The onus of proof should be on the coal board to show that the damage is not caused by subsidence, rather than on the individual to prove that it was subsidence damage. A great deal could be done for administrative improvements in terms of claims, limitations of claims and notification of areas of work.

I do not want my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to imagine that this is a party political matter. It is not. Those of us who represent, and have represented for some time, mining areas, feel that the time is right to look at compensation for those affected. My simple view is that there are many cases in which the public interest overrides the individual's interest. That is the case with roads and many other things. However, it is then right that the public interest should thoroughly compensate those private individuals who lose something—often quite dramatically—for the sake of the general interest. That applies not just to mining subsidence, but to other issues.

If my right hon. Friend is not prepared to accept new clause 1, it would be helpful if he would give a clear indication of what he is prepared to do, through legislation, regulation or whatever, to bring about the Waddilove committee's sensible recommendations and respond to the promises made by his predecessor when he met the committee.

Mr. Lofthouse: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) agrees that mining subsidence affects areas other than those that he specifically mentioned, in Nottinghamshire. I assure him and the House that the problem exists also in west and south Yorkshire. It certainly does in my area.

Like the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), I gave evidence to the Waddilove committee, both written and oral. Like him, I and many others believe that its recommendations would prompt a greater response than we have seen to date. The situation in Nottingham has only been made worse by delay.

4.30 pm

I recall going to Nottingham with members of the Select Committee to take evidence of the problems there, which had been highlighted by Ian MacGregor's evidence to the Select Committee in 1986, when he emphasised the colossal volume of funds contained in British Coal's estimates and which has been paid out in Nottingham. That set the alarm bells ringing.

There is no doubt that, through neglect, inefficiency and corruption on the part of certain British Coal officers—and people were found guilty of corruption and sent to prison—the policy in force at that time began to grind to a standstill and British Coal started tidying up its act. No one could grumble at that, because those responsible for corruption paid the right penalty. However, that was of little comfort to people in Nottinghamshire and in west and south Yorkshire who were treated differently from the way in which they had been hitherto.

If the Secretary of State presents the new Bill of which mention was made earlier by the hon. Member for Broxtowe, I hope that he will take into account the fact that the average individual in a mining community desperately needs independent professional advice before reaching any settlement with British Coal. In the past, many people accepted settlements that were far from adequate because of their lack of professional knowledge. I hope that any such Bill would provide for the cost of such professional advice to be met by British Coal.

I do not take away from anything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, but one needs to live in a mining community to appreciate the problems that it faces. The Flowers commission report of 1981 acknowledged that there is little peace to be had in mining communities. People living in them dare not go to sleep at night because of the cracks and creaking that they hear. In my own area, housing estates have been demolished, and houses in the immediate vicinity have lost a tremendous amount of their value overnight. In many cases, the recompense offered has been far from adequate.

Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House are always remarking that the Government take notice of any Select Committee report, but I have yet to be convinced that that is so. The report of the 1987 Select Committee recommended that the Government should respond speedily to Waddilove's recommendations. It commented:

> "Any system of compensation which is developed from the Waddilove Report should be so framed as to apply equally to BC and any present or future competitors".

I hope that any future Bill will offer protection in the event that—God forbid—British Coal is ever privatised. The Select Committee also said:

> "We regret the delay and we hope that the promised publication of the White Paper on Waddilove will be earlier rather than later in the current Session."

That was in 1986-87, but there has still been little response. I hope that the Secretary of State, although he has not long been in his present job, will rapidly provide a Bill to protect people who have suffered from the terrible conditions in the mining communities for too long.

Dr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The major part of the Bill is concerned with grants to British Coal. While they are necessary to enable the restructuring of British Coal, I remind the House that that level of Government support was not available to the 7,000 constituents of mine, or to many thousands of other hon. Members' constituents, who were made redundant when their industries had to face the fundamental challenges of the market place.

The Government have been generous to British Coal but, as many hon. Members have said, it is disappointing that, while the Bill gives further massive grants and subsidies to British Coal, it does nothing to relieve the plight of the victims of coal-mining subsidence. A great deal of injustice is felt.

Many hon. Members—including my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), who unfortunately cannot take part in the debte—have campaigned long and hard for reform. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) said, a united industry working party has been formed, with representatives of the Confederation of British Industry, the Country Landowners' Association, the Law Society, the British Property Federation, the Building Societies Association, insurance companies, the National Farmers Union and other groups, all of which are concerned to ensure that the Government take action on coal-mining subsidence.

I took representatives of those bodies to see the former Minister, and they sought to persuade him to take action. They are bitterly disappointed that, to date, no action has been taken. The Minister was extremely polite and listened sympathetically, but regrettably he did not act. The case is overwhelming. With the present rules, vast amounts of subsidence damage are neither compensated for nor repaired. British Coal regularly denies liability for damage that it knows it has caused, by relying on the infamous statute of limitations. In effect, it is saying, "We know that your property has been damaged and that we have caused the damage. We know that Parliament has passed laws requiring us to repair the damage or to compensate you, but we think that we can use the statute of limitations to get out of our responsibilities. We are going to do that and leave you to repair the damage that we have caused."

Why does British Coal refuse independent adjudication on the extent of damage, on whether damage has been caused by subsidence, on delay, on consequential losses and on whether repair or compensation is appropriate? Why is British Coal continually allowed to act as offender, judge and jury? The reason is simple: because the Government—in spite of the recommendations of the Waddilove committee—continue to allow it to do just that.

The Government are proposing further massive handouts to British Coal, so it is only fair that those handouts are linked to a fairer deal for the victims of British coal-mining, as was recommended by the Waddilove committee in 1983. The Government must acknowledge that they have had six years to act, but they are still saying that the time is not right. I cannot accept that, while the Government can find the time and money to deal with the restructuring of British Coal, they cannot find the much smaller amount that is necessary to deal with this continuing problem. I fervently hope that the Secretary of State will tell the House that action will be taken quickly.

Mr. Ashton: If there had been an earthquake in Britain similar to the one in San Francisco last year, or if the San Andreas fault disaster had happened in Nottinghamshire, and overnight 33,000 houses had suffered enormous damage and become unsafe and schools, hospitals and factories had been affected, there would have been uproar. There would have been an outcry and television stations would have set up fund-raising collections. The Government would have rushed in immediately with aid, and it would have been classed as a national disaster.

[Mr. Ashton]

However, because subsidence has occurred gradually over the years, and has been assimilated at local level, the problem has been swept under the carpet.

What happened after the gale in the south of England in October 1987? In one night, millions of trees were felled, damaging cars and houses. The insurance companies paid out, and the Government rushed in emergency aid. A tremendous amount of help was given to people in the home counties at that time because many prominent Tory voters and Conservative Members lived there. We should compare that reaction to the reaction to subsidence in coal-mining areas, where nothing has been done.

Barlow Clowes is another example. Again, the affluent middle class were affected—people who know how to lobby Members of Parliament, write letters, form pressure groups and employ solicitors. They acted as a group and they got compensation.

The farmers got compensation when eggs were affected by salmonella. That was classed as a national disaster and the cash was found immediately, and action was taken to keep them sweet.

The pre-1973 war widows were another anomaly, but hon. Members got to their feet. There was a tremendous backlash and the money was found.

If there is an overnight disaster, it seems that the cash can be found. In every Budget there is a 2 per cent. contingency fund. If expenditure in the Budget is £160 billion or £170 billion, 2 per cent. of that is allowed for the contingency fund, and if there is any sort of emergency, the Chancellor says that it is covered by the contingency fund. However, that 2 per cent. is never used for things such as subsidence. Action is continually postponed.

I have no doubt that the cash will be found for the Channel tunnel. When British Rail is told that it has to put the track to Dover underground, to go under the vale of Kent, because otherwise it will upset lots of Tory voters, the money will be found.

Coal-mining areas suffer from the blight of subsidence, and the Government have not even a register. The Department of Energy does not know how many houses are affected by the problem, or how much it will cost to restore them. It has no information.

The problem has been left to the local district councils. The council in Mansfield set up a seminar, and people came from Ashfield, Bolsover, north-east Derbyshire and Newark, which are all areas where people have suffered chronically from subsidence. At the seminar they decided that, as nobody else would help them they had better help themselves and find out the information. Professor P. L. Clarke, a highly qualified professor from Nottingham university, was paid to send out a simple questionnaire to every household, as the electoral register forms are sent out.

As hon. Members know, a phenomenal amount of bumph comes through our doors and it is difficult to get people to fill in forms. It probably leads to a lower response to questionnaires than one would expect, yet 33,000 households in those half dozen district council areas said that they had suffered from the effects of subsidence caused by British Coal.

The Government have encouraged people to become owner-occupiers, and I do not deplore that. Sometimes, it seems that they are going the long way round, because of the high interest rates, but surely it is Government policy to encourage people to buy houses. What happens then? They allow a massive accident blight to spread across a neighbourhood and they offer no promises about compensation.

Thousands of people have followed Government advice and bought their council houses, and then they have suffered from subsidence. They put in a claim to British Coal, but it says that it is sorry, but will not pay compensation because it paid it to the council 10 or 15 years ago. The council says that it received the compensation and sold the affected house at a cheaper price.

People followed the Prime Minister's advice and bought their houses, and now they are lumbered with perhaps a £10,000 mortgage on a house that they cannot sell because it is worthless, and no good to anybody. Some people may say that they should not have followed Government advice. What protection do the Government offer those unfortunate people, who were encouraged to buy council houses and found that they had bought a pup? The response from the Department of Energy has been nil—it has promised to consider the matter.

One could argue that subsidence is an act of God. For example, Worksop and Warsop, in my constituency, both have coal mines underneath them. Worksop is hardly touched by subsidence because it is built on sand, but Warsop, which is seven miles away, is built on rock and there is a great deal of subsidence there. It is mere chance. People do not have a choice about where they live.

4.45 pm

Another problem is trying to attract new industry to the area. Pits are closing, and they have land that would be ideal for industrial development. Often, the land is at the foot of a slag heap, which has been grassed over and the surrounding environment may not be very nice, but many industries are environmentally unattractive, and they could go to such places. However, if one mentions subsidence, they run a mile. Who would invest £2 million in a new factory when, if one walks down the street, one sees cracks in the sides of houses, leaning chimneys and doors that do not shut, and one sees that people are continually protesting and demanding action, but getting nothing done?

The areas affected by subsidence often have high unemployment of between 9 and 15 per cent.—in my constituency, unemployment is 17 per cent. There are good men, who are willing to work shifts and to do physically unattractive hard work. They would be happy to do almost any job. They are used to noise, dirt and heavy lorries. But industry will not come in to the area because no one will build a factory on a site if the building will have cracks in the walls within six months, and the machinery inside will not work.

Many parts of my constituency have suffered for more than a century. One could make a D. H. Lawrence film in Warsop—"Sons and Lovers", perhaps—because the terraced houses are still there. Most of my constituency is beautiful, but in Warsop vale, less than 10 yards away from the bedrooms where people sleep, coal trains chunter past every 20 minutes. People work shifts. There is always the noise of the klaxon horns from the pits, heavy lorries, hooters and safety warnings. Those people have suffered from noise all their lives.

What happens when the pits close? People think, "Thank God. We might get a bit of peace." But the pavements are broken, the water that comes down off the slag heaps does not run away properly in the gutters and the street lighting is bad. The environment is lousy. There are playing fields with dips and holes among the kids' swings. The price of houses there is so low that it is a miracle that people buy and sell them. They like living in the area because they grew up there and they are happy.

Subsidence is a massive problem that nobody seems to want to sort out.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Relatively modern housing can be affected by subsidence. The semi-detached house in which I live tilts so much that the drainpipe at one corner is useless, as the water runs in the opposition direction. A new drainpipe will now have to be built at the other end.

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend is right. I have been asked to visit houses where newly installed central heating does not work because the pump will not drive the hot water round; the owners, meanwhile, are still saddled with the debt that they incurred in installing the system.

Can anyone imagine the anger and frustration experienced by women who find that after they have decorated the house, the wall cracks, the wallpaper will not stick or the fitted carpet suddenly becomes an inch too short because a gap has appeared in the wall? It can be dangerous: people sit looking at their walls and asking themselves whether the damn things are going to fall in on them. Often they cannot get the council to condemn their house and rehouse them, because almost all the houses have been sold off and the council has very few left to let. It has to keep one or two, but it knows that, once it rehouses one victim of subsidence, 500 more will want to be rehoused.

Meanwhile, the insurance companies are engaging in one of the biggest rip-offs that we have seen for some years. When people follow the Government's advice and apply for a mortgage so that they can become owner-occupiers, the Halifax and the other building societies say, "Yes, we will lend you £10,000, but you must pay insurance." So they pay the insurance— and then a crack appears and the garden wall falls down.

Getting insurance companies to pay out for subsidence is a terrible job, and I think that it is time that some of those people went to see the insurance ombudsman, as I have advised them to do. Alternatively, they could all band together, as the Barlow Clowes victims did, and announce that they are going to bang the insurance companies and building societies into court. The building societies compel them to pay insurance year in, year out, but as soon as there is a problem, the insurance companies do not want to know—or else point to the small print that says that occupiers must pay 10 times the cost of the annual insurance on the house. In other words, if the annual insurance is £300, they must put up the first £3,000.

People in such circumstances obtain no help from the building societies, which back the insurance companies, so they ask their Members of Parliament to take up their case. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) has a magnificent record in this regard, and I heartily congratulate him on his ceaseless campaign. He and his local council have managed to persuade the television companies to broadcast programmes about the problem, and in the two years for which my hon. Friend has been in the House it has received more attention than ever before.

One of the difficulties, however, is the need for secrecy. It is in the interests of tenants to keep such problems quiet in case they decide to sell their house. They come to our surgeries and say, "I am sorry, Mr. Ashton"—or Mr. Meale, as the case may be—"but you must not tell anyone about the problem. You will not put it in the newspaper, will you? If it gets around that XYZ road has a problem, no one living in that road will ever sell a house again." So they fill the walls with Polyfilla or apply Anaglypta. Such conspiracies of silence will do nothing to solve the problem. When we mention it, people say that they have heard nothing about it before, because newspapers and television do not shout about it as they have done about Barlow Clowes, foot-and-mouth disease or the Channel tunnel.

The problem affects about 30,000 houses within a 10 or 15-mile radius of my constituency. A succession of Ministers have said that they sympathise and intend to act —that they will produce another report. British Coal has shed tears and offered tea and sympathy. Nothing is ever done, however. The insurance companies take no action, no cash is ever found and the Government simply hope that the problem can be swept under the carpet and will eventually go away. But we do not intend to let it go away: we shall continue to raise it whenever the opportunity arises until we see some action.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) for his kind comments about our activities in the north Nottinghamshire area, but I must add that it has been a joint effort, involving not only him and me but my hon. Friends the Members for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes)—as well as the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Woodcock).

The House should accept the new clause. The problem of subsidence is nothing short of a national scandal. Home owners, not only in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire but in other coalfield areas such as Yorkshire, Scotland, the north-east and Wales, face tremendous difficulties. I pay tribute to the Channel 4 "Dispatches" documentary, entitled "In the Coalhole", screened just before Christmas, which discussed those difficulties in detail.

I also commend the local press, especially in Nottinghamshire—the *Evening Post (Nottingham)* the *CHAD* in Mansfield, the *Nottingham Recorder* and the *Nottingham Observer*—which have not ceased to publicise the issue. Over the past two or three years, the BBC and Yorkshire and Central Television have also featured it several times. Only now, largely because of the Channel 4 programme, is it being seen for what it is—a national scandal.

I met the Minister privately yesterday, along with another hon. Member, to discuss the matter, but it is difficult for hon. Members on either side of the House to realise the extent of the suffering involved. Not only people's homes but the security of their lives is being put at risk. Only those who represent coal-mining areas know exactly what is involved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) said that the survey carried out by local

[Mr. Alan Meale]

authorities in north Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire produced 33,000 responses. In fact, there were 54,000, 33,500 of which referred to damaged properties. Some of our constituents have experienced severe health problems owing to stress, and many have had to consult their doctors. In my constituency, a school, a hospital and many other public buildings have had to close.

As "Dispatches" pointed out, Trent Water has estimated that it is owed approximately £25 million for the repair of damage to properties in Nottinghamshire, although it has not been keen to publicise the fact, or to take part in a seminar: As its members explained when they visited London to meet the Minister, they were preparing for privatisation, and—as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw observed—who would buy shares in a public industry that faced a £25 million repair bill? Moreover, Trent Water cannot get the money back from British Coal.

The survey to which I referred has been discussed many times with Ministers and has been debated in the House. It referred to 33,000 damaged homes, roads and service supplies such as water, gas and electricity. It made it clear that in all the areas surveyed there was major concern and that havoc was being caused to the coalfield communities.

5 pm

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston spoke of the way in which British Coal was being allowed to act as offender, judge and jury. British Coal is in fact getting away with blue murder against the people in the coalfield communities. It hides behind the six-year rule, which many in the legal profession say is of extremely doubtful merit but which is upheld because of lack of action by the Government. British Coal acts as judge and jury by acting as banker, as it were—openly blackmailing people who are suffering from subsidence problems, people who cannot go to courts or go through the Lands Tribunal.

"Blackmail" may seem a strong word to use, but evidence has been produced by hon. Members on both sides of the House describing how letters have been sent by British Coal to home owners saying, in effect, "Unless you accept this minimal sum, we shall put your case to the bottom of the pile and take it through the legal processes, and that will take years. If you risk going through the Lands Tribunal or some other means, you will risk losing everything, including your home and savings."

Alternatively, British Coal had demonstrated its determination to cut to the lowest sum possible the amount expended to fulfil its responsibilities in respect of coal-mining subsidence damage. By using the blackmailing technique of "take it or leave it" with home owners and others, British Coal states that only certain types of repair will be undertaken. Having said that, it employs the cheapest possible builders, who repair the properties not properly but cosmetically. They Polyfilla over the cracks and cover with the cheapest possible paint or other rendering.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said he knew of people who had been out of their homes for three or four months while repairs were done. I have constituents who were out of their homes for more than two years. Twelve months is normal for people to have to leave their homes in my constituency while subsidence work is done.

Then there is the plight of those who do not leave their homes while the work is done but who have to stay because of a lack of properties in which to house them, such is the scale of the subsidence problem in my area. As I say, British Coal employs the cheapest builders who, when faced with, say, major cracks across a living room wall, do not take down the wall and rebuild it—replastering and rendering as necessary—but cut out a portion where the crack exists, cover the furniture with cloths and make the families remain in their homes while the repairs are carried out. That takes not a day or two but weeks and sometimes months.

Hon. Members have spoken in previous debates about how cheaply British Coal gets the work done. There have been cases of people who have produced the wallpaper that was on a wall before it was repaired and have been told by British Coal that it was not prepared to pay, say £3 per roll—the current price of the wallpaper—but only the original price of 99p per roll. What a disgraceful state f affairs.

Builders in my area have gone so far as to tell British Coal that, because of the prices it is willing to pay, they are not interested in taking on the work. Some builders have told me honestly that, but for the slack winter period when they have little work on hand, they would not even bother to do British Coal work because the contracts that British Coal awards are not worth having.

The amendment refers to financing the repairs of coal-mining subsidence damage. There seems to be a difference of opinion about how such work should be financed. On a previous occasion, I asked the present Minister of Housing and Planning, when he was at the Department of Energy, how much money was available for subsidence work. As we know, money is collected on every tonne of coal produced for work of this kind. Indeed, the Government continue to claim that that charge has led to coal mine closures, so expensive is the cost of subsidence repairs.

Mr. Illsley: I can give my hon. Friend an example of a colliery that closed because of subsidence problems. I refer to Redbrook colliery in Barnsley. When the NCB costed the amount that it would have to pay in subsidence claims compared with the profit that would be gained by mining the coal in that pit, it decided to close the colliery.

Mr. Meale: I thank my hon. Friend for giving that example. Some time ago, Mansfield colliery in my constituency was closed. I had been told for at least a year prior to its closure that it would be shut, not because of subsidence but because although it was a pit with reserves, the NCB had decided not to expand production and dig into those reserves.

When the closure announcement finally came, in a press release, British Coal and another organisation used the opportunity to accuse me of closing the pit because I had been busy fighting for the rights of coal subsidence claimants. I faced a stupid and untrue situation. I checked the files in my office and discovered that of 32 cases for whom I had made applications to British Coal's estates department—for repairs and proper compensation for the properties concerned in the area of the pit that was closed—not one had been settled by British Coal. In other words, in many cases the Government are using the excuse of coal-mining subsidence costs as a major reason for closing pits.

When at the Department of Energy, the present Minister for Housing and Planning said that, in the accounts, £260 million had been set aside for the repair of damage caused by coal-mining subsidence. I have since asked questions, in the House and elsewhere, to discover whether that money is in a separate account and, if so, why it cannot be used for subsidence repair work. I have been told by British Coal, in letters to me and through the media, that no such fund exists because such money has been set against the industry's losses and deficits each year and has been written off.

I suggest that the House is being misled. Considering that an amount is attached to every tonne of coal that is produced, and that that money is put into a fund for the payment of subsidence damage repair costs, it cannot be written off to pay for the industry's debts. After all, those sums must, or should, have been put into a bank account to be drawn on at a future date for subsidence repairs. Indeed, if British Coal has not been doing that, it has not been carrying out its responsibilities. There should have been at least £260 million in the fund at the time when the Minister made his statement, and by now, having gathered interest, the total should be considerably higher.

Let me say a few words about the future as the present Government see it. One must give them credit for their honesty as they have never shied away from their immediate plans and their absolute determination to privatise the coal industry. I am disappointed with the Bill and with the fact that so far the Government have not accepted our amendments. Unless they sort out the problem of coal-mining subsidence damage, all the residents, public services and business in coalfield communities throughout Britain will be left in severe difficulty. If those people do not have much of a chance of getting damages paid now, how on earth will they get them when a private employer takes over the responsibility for those coal mines?

It will be extremely difficult to sell those industries, not simply because people will be unwilling to invest in them —if the Government are that determined, they will pass laws exempting them—but because the problem of coal-mining subsidence damage needs to be sorted out. I warn the Minister, as I warned his predecessor, that if any attempt is made to privatise the industry without having sorted out this business, according to that survey, there are 13,500 people with damaged homes in my constituency —that is just in the private sector; there are hundreds more in the public sector—who will band together and take the case to Europe. The Minister knows that, if we go to Europe for a ruling about people's rights to repair their homes which have been damaged by a public industry, without a shadow of a doubt the ruling will be in our favour.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if such a case went to Europe before the flotation of the electricity industry, the Commission might take a rather dim view of that progress being made?

Mr. Meale: I agree with my hon. Friend. Obviously, the Minister has taken note of his point.

I spoke to the Minister yesterday and asked him for an assurance that he will come to the Nottinghamshire coalfield area and see for himself the level of damage. I am pleased that he was willing to do that and assure me that he would not do what his predecessors had done and come to Nottinghamshire only to talk to British Coal. Given that the report states that there are 33,500 damaged homes, I do not want the Minister simply to spend time talking to the people who have caused the problems and who are denying their responsibility for repairing people's homes. I want him to spend time in the Nottinghamshire coalfield area meeting the people who have to live with it day in and day out and run their businesses there.

Mr. Lofthouse: Is my hon. Friend aware that, certainly in my constituency, some council tenants' applications to buy their homes under the right to buy have been outstanding for three years because the council has been unable to reach an agreement on subsidence damage? Some people have become so desperate to purchase their property that they have signed an agreement to buy it at its present value, hoping that they will get reasonable compensation from British Coal, but so far they have been unable to achieve that.

Mr. Meale: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, and again the Minister is making notes. I hope that he will be able to respond to it when he replies to the debate.

I am pleased that the Minister has agreed to come to Nottinghamshire and to meet people running businesses, home owners, property owners and people providing public services. I wonder whether he can do that before the Select Committee on Energy, to which I pay tribute, returns to Nottinghamshire this spring. The work it carried out in the early 1980s has not been fulfilled by British Coal or by the Government.

I remind the House about the lack of action that the Government have taken to sort out coal-mining subsidence damage. The Waddilove inquiry was commissioned in 1983, completed in 1984 and published in 1987 after severe pressure from Members of Parliament. The Government responded in 1988; now we are heading into 1990, and the Government are missing yet another opportunity to alleviate the problems.

Action is needed. We need a legal centre for claimants who cannot afford to use the legal system which hinders their attempts to get justice. We need a low-cost independent arbitration system to get over problems caused because British Coal is judge and jury, and we need mandatory protection for claimants. Most of all, we need guarantees that the Government will produce a solution to help our people get back to a normal life.

5.15 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I wish to pay tribute to all the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) has done to draw attention to the huge problem of mining subsidence, which is not just a matter for Nottinghamshire, although we have heard an awful lot about Nottinghamshire today. It also occurs in north Staffordshire and in my constituency of Stoke-on-Trent, North. In his usual pertinent way, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield made it clear that mining subsidence damage will be a real problem for the Government in the run up to privatisation. I do not argue that the industry should be privatised. I warn the Government that every coal mining community throughout the country will band together to draw attention to coal mining subsidence.

One of the first things I did as a newly elected Member of Parliament was to go to the Secretary of State for the

[Ms. Joan Walley]

Environment, who is now the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and take up Stoke-on-Trent city council's case for inner-city status for Stoke-on-Trent because the extent of subsidence and the way in which it undermines the city meant that any new building would cost half as much again as it would cost anywhere else in the country. Without extra support from the Government and from the Department of the Environment, there was no way in which we could get the new buildings, new jobs and new opportunities for the city of Stoke-on-Trent. I hope that the Minister and the Secretary of State will take on board the clear need to liaise closely with their colleagues at the Department of the Environment because it is an environmental matter as well as one for the Department of Energy.

Subsidence is a scandal in Stoke-on-Trent and it has been a national scandal for more than 20 years. In her maiden speech, my predecessor before one, Harriet Slater, spoke about the need for the Government to do something about subsidence and to sort out the problems faced by the local city council and Staffordshire county council. Those problems have not been resolved and I certainly join my hon. Friends in telling the Government that something will have to be done.

My hon. Friends have described the extreme hardship faced by individuals who are living in homes which have been damaged by subsidence. Many people in Stoke-on-Trent, North have made claims but many more were not even aware that they had the right to do so. The way in which British Coal has done everything possible to prevent people from making claims for subsidence on their properties is absolutely out of order. It is not the easiest thing in the world for someone who is not aware of his legal rights to take on British Coal and demand proper compensation for the cracks and for the fact that his house is no longer saleable.

One of the really difficult things that I have had to deal with is what to say to people when, time and time again, British Coal tells them that they will have to make do with £100 which the contractors will spend on repairs to their homes. There is no way that an independent assessment can be made of the damage. Something must be done about subsidence. One point that must be taken up is British Coal's refusal to pay attention to the serious hardship and stress that people are suffering.

Another environmental problem is methane gas from old refuse tips. Yesterday we had an indication that the Secretary of State is prepared to consider retrospectively the need to make good damage from such tips. If the Government can deal retrospectively with that, they can do something about all the claims for subsidence damage.

The Government have told us that they are concerned about the environment and that they will make the whole country clean so that there will not be a huge environmental problem. Is that a cautionary approach? Of course not. Why is no assessment being made of the scale of the problem in individual properties? Why is the cost of subsidence not considered as part of the entire cost of coal mining? Only recently the Government have recognised that something must be done about the decommissioning of nuclear power stations. The principle is the same. Any coal-mining operation that produces subsidence must take account of that subsidence and put right the damage or must prevent it in the first place. The cost should be part of the overall cost of coal mining.

It is for those reasons that I ask the Minister to accept new clause 1. It is not just the 33,500 people in Mansfield whose homes have suffered from subsidence but all the other affected people in all coal-mining areas who want something done. Organisations such as the Coalfield Communities Campaign will make certain that there will be full compensation for people who need it, especially before privatisation. My hon. Friends and I are committed to working towards that.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I welcome the opportunity to participate in a debate on one of my favourite constituency subjects, the coal industry. Although I could not be here for the whole debate, I think that I would have been familiar with many of the speeches. There is common ground on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Mansfield, (Mr. Meale), my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and I, among others, participated in the Channel 4 programme which has been mentioned. I thought that it was a fair programme which looked objectively at the plight of people affected by coal-mining subsidence. I dare say that British Coal may take a contrary view, but it was given an opportunity to make its position plain, and I am not sure that it used the programme to its best advantage.

The hon. Member for Mansfield said that one injustice is that British Coal is perceived as judge and jury in its own cause. That is a major criticism. It shows insensitivity towards people for whom coal-mining subsidence can be a long drawn out and bitter experience.

One individual, David Linford, not my constituent but a constituent of my late colleague in Mid-Staffordshire, runs an important building company in my constituency. He had to wait 13 years for recognition by British Coal that subsidence had caused problems with his brand new house, which he had built after getting advice from British Coal about where faults were. Such insensitivity does no credit to those responsible for managing the affairs of British Coal.

To break the bipartisan camaraderie on the issue, I declare again a view that I have put many times: that this is the inevitable result of nationalisation. I accept that Labour Members will take a contrary view, but I invite them at least to consider the thought that if the industry were in the private sector, it could not afford to ride roughshod over the will of people in whose community it operates.

Ms. Walley: If we were to have a privatised coal industry, what compensation would be given to the hundreds of thousands of people who have suffered subsidence damage to their properties?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Lady anticipates a matter for a future Parliament. I have always declared my position, that I am in favour of the privatisation of coal because I believe it would greatly benefit the people who work in the industry, its customers, and those, like many of my constituents, who work and live in coalfield areas. I believe that a privatised industry would be forced to be much more concerned about how it treated the community. If it were not, the community would deny it the right to work the coal.

British Coal will have to be much more sympathetic because gone are the days when it could with impunity rape the countryside of its mineral content. It will need the support of the community in which it works. Coal will continue to be an important fuel. The nation expects of British Coal that it will discharge its duty responsibly.

In the past, the industry could rely on the fact that, as people whose homes were affected by subsidence were the very people who were employed in the industry, they were unlikely to protest too much because they might be in danger of losing their jobs. Today, with a much more slimline industry, the position is different. Many who are affected by mining subsidence are not employed in the industry, but are its victims. They do not feel beholden in the same way as I suspect in years gone by those employed in the industry did. British Coal no longer dominates the community. I say with as much force as I can muster that I hope the people responsible for running British Coal will take a much more sympathetic and careful view of the problems of subsidence that have been expressed by hon. Members on all sides.

I have noted the new clause in the name of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and his hon. Friends as far as it relates to coal-mining subsidence. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), who over the past two years or more served as Under-Secretary of State for Energy with great distinction, was cognisant of the difficulties mentioned by hon. Members. I know that he took the problem seriously, which is why some of the recommendations of the Waddilove committee that do not need statutory permission have been implemented. However, some of its recommendations will need statutory approval, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry)—whom I congratulate on his elevation to the post of Under-Secretary of State for Energy, in which I wish him a long and successful career—will take on board the cross-party view that it would be more sensible to introduce comprehensive proposals later rather than to tack them on to the Bill.

5.30 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): My hon. Friends the Members for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) and for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) spoke eloquently of specific cases in their constituencies. However, people directly affected by coal-mining subsidence can more eloquently describe the problems that they face.

A constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield appeared on the Channel 4 series "Dispatches" in a programme entitled "In the Coalhole". About five minutes of that programme were devoted to her speaking forcefully about mining subsidence during a visit to one of my hon. Friend's advice centres. The producer told me that she spoke for about 25 or 30 minutes about the difficulties that she faced.

Hon. Members' constituents have experienced vast problems with subsidence for ages and have records, notes and photographs of their experiences. I wish that there were a system to resolve their problems, to help them get their homes repaired and to help them to overcome the traumas that they have experienced.

I have a problem of subsidence resulting from past coal mining in my constituency at Hartington road in Staveley. At one time, I was rather reluctant to discuss the problem, but people in the area began to publicise it themselves. There is likely to be similar problems in the future, because of mining development at Markham pit, which is presently taking place in south Staveley in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). In time, the problem will move to north Staveley, which is in my constituency.

Inkersall green special school in south Staveley has been seriously affected by subsidence. It was known that there was to be mining development underneath it, so precautions were taken. A large ditch was built around the school so that it would fall slightly and settle, minimising the problem of mining subsidence. When mining halfway under the school, they hit a fault—I do not know whose fault it was that that was not foreseen—and could not continue. That broke the back of the school. It is a beautiful school and some of its facilities have been paid for by the local community, but anyone walking inside it feels seasick.

The problem is what to do about it, what will happen to special education in the area, given local government's problems with resources, and whether it will receive full help from British Coal for repairs. Hon. Members have spoken of the difficulties of dealing with British Coal and its agents, of their constituents receiving inadequate help and of them often having to accept a raw deal.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) said that the clause should not be given a Second Reading because a later Bill will deal with the problem of subsidence. I shall argue that it should be given a Second Reading now, unless I can be convinced otherwise by the Minister.

The Bill is almost a paving measure for the privatisation of the coal industry. Some of the cash arrangements in the Bill may be acceptable to Labour Members, but their purpose is to prepare the industry for privatisation. In those circumstances, people are worried about whether funds will be made available to cover outstanding claims. New clause 1(3) is essential to ensure that adequate funds will be available. If the industry is privatised—that will not happen, because after the next election there will be a different Government—the problem of ensuring that funds are available and used will remain. The other sign that this is a paving Bill are the provisions that deal with small mine development.

A further reason for giving the clause a Second Reading is that more pits will close if the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill is enacted. Unless the other place passes an amendment stopping coal imports through the Humber ports—if that happened, the promoters of the Bill would withdraw it—the coal industry will be further damaged. British Coal will be forced to concentrate on a few super-pits and to develop opencast coal mining on a large scale. In those circumstances, if adequate funding is not made available to cover subsidence at coal mines that have closed, people will be in a bad position.

A further reason given for not giving the clause a Second Reading is the promise of a Bill to deal with coal mining subsidence. I wrote to the Minister on 5 December, made one or two suggestions about the Bill and mentioned the need for coal-mining subsidence legislation. I received a reply, and I have since received a second version, which is circulating among other hon. Members. The letter states that,

"at the earliest practical opportunity",

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

there will be some appropriate legislation, but we need to test what is meant by that.

As has already been said, there have been six years in which measures could have been brought before the House. This is the umpteenth debate on coal-mining subsidence. Many previous debates were initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). When he was lucky in the ballot for motions that he could bring before the House, he ensured that we could discuss this matter. Many of the points about what is required in legislation have been hammered out in the House and in meetings with the Department of Energy.

The Minister's letter says:

"With regard to your concern about coal mining subsidence, you will, I am sure, recognise the inherent complexity of the subject".

The subject is complex and there are conflicting interests involved, but that cannot be a reason for delaying such a measure. The complexities have been discussed at considerable length. The problems are well understood by Opposition Members and should be well understood by the Department of Energy. The measure must be brought forward.

The letter continues:

"and consequently, that subsidence requires its own Bill in its own timetable. I believe it would be wrong to rush a subsidence measure through the House tacked on the short, primarily financial, Coal Industry Bill, which requires early enactment. The government is therefore committed to introducing a Bill dealing comprehensively with subsidence issues at the earliest practical opportunity."

The letter later deals with my points about the need for independent arbitration, the need for British Coal to have a primary duty to correct the problems, its legal responsibility and various other items. That shows that there is a great deal of sympathy within the Department of Energy with certain points that the Opposition have put forward.

However, the letter implies that if we wait, everything will be okay. Many of us are sick of waiting. We have seen the problems of our constituents. Does

"at the earliest practical opportunity"

mean this Session, despite the fact that such a measure was not contained in the Queen's Speech; or does it mean that we are expected to sit back and to wait for such a measure to be contained in another Queen's Speech, if the Department of Energy bids for sufficient resources and funds to enable it to carry out such legislation?

Opposition Members believe that it is not good enough for the Government to intend to introduce legislation in the next Session. That would not deal with our constituents' problems and the future difficulties that many of them face. I hope that the Minister will explain why he thinks that new clause 1 is inappropriate and, if so, what other measures would be appropriate. When will such measures be introduced? They are now very urgent.

Mr. Illsley: I want to speak briefly on points that are similar to those made by my hon. Friends. It is nice to hear Conservative Members welcoming public money being given to the coal industry. Usually, when we ask for further funds to be given to the coal industry, we meet a barrage of hostility from Conservative Members.

It is important that subsidence is dealt with in the Coal Industry Bill. New clause 1 deals with British Coal's historical debts. It is important that those debts are sorted out before the end of the financial year. As many of the subsidence claims are historical debts for British Coal, money should be voted now to help the industry to meet its liabilities. Some hon. Members have heard from the chairman of British Coal the amount of money that British Coal requires for concessionary coal liabilities and claims for industrial deafness.

Subsidence damage claims should be included in the Bill. The money required for subsidence claims has an effect on British Coal's investment decisions about collieries. Such considerations have had tremendous importance in the past. I have spent hours in meetings with British Coal—or the National Coal Board, as it was—which was trying to decide which coal seam or coal face could be mined in view of the amount that the board might face in subsidence claims if that coal were taken.

Sometimes, decisions were taken to close seams or collieries because British Coal could not afford the amount of subsidence liability that it would have faced had it continued to maintain that face or seam. Subsidence has an important effect. Collieries and jobs may be cut because the board has insufficient money to finance the subsidence claims that have accumulated over the past few years. The Government must help with that liability. They must consider new clause 1 and ensure that British Coal has sufficient money to cover its liabilities on subsidence.

5.45 pm

Subsidence claims are endemic to mining areas. My hon. Friends have talked about their constituents with subsidence claims. A number of my constituents—including myself—have such problems. My present and previous houses suffered from subsidence so I am well aware of the delays in dealing with claims. One street in my constituency—Melvinia crescent—had to be demolished. The owners are waiting for their properties to be rebuilt by British Coal. However, I want to put on record my appreciation of British Coal's Allerton Bywater estates department, which has been helpful in my dealings with subsidence damage claims.

However, claims put a considerable strain on my constituents who are faced with the decision of whether to remain in a property that has been damaged by subsidence and which may have been tilted, cracked or broken. Buying a home is usually a person's major financial investment. It is heartrending to have to decide whether a home should be demolished, repaired or rebuilt, especially if the property is of high value or if someone has personal reasons for wanting to remain in it.

Subsidence also affects local authority housing. Sometimes, local authorities which are cash-squeezed by the Minister for Housing and Planning—the former Under-Secretary of State for Energy—cannot afford to spend money on housing repairs, although that money is owed to them by British Coal. Sometimes, tenants have to remain in properties that have been damaged by subsidence because local authorities cannot provide the money quickly enough for repairs to be carried out as they are still waiting for British Coal to make payments for subsidence damage claims.

There is also damage to local authority roads and to road building programmes. Roads in my constituency have been substantially damaged by coal-mining subsidence. The local authority is having difficulty in keeping the roads repaired to a suitable standard. It has

recently been criticised because of that damage, yet because of the cash limit that has been imposed by the Government, it cannot meet those expenses.

It is important that we deal with the problem of subsidence now in the Bill, which deals with coal industry finance, rather than wait for another Bill to deal with subsidence on its own. The Bill deals with historical finance, and subsidence imposes a historical financial burden on British Coal. As British Coal's finances will not be restructured again for a considerable time, we should deal with the matter now. I hope that the Government will support the new clause.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and a pleasure also to see the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), who used to be the Under-Secretary of State for Energy, and responsible for the coal mining industry, but who has now been moved over to the Department of the Environment by that lady at No. 10. I understand that he is now the Minister for Housing and Planning, and that must be why he is here today: he has an interest in housing—in the housing in which our constituents live, which has been damaged by mining subsidence. The hon. Gentleman knows all about it. He has had his ear clobbered many a time when responding to questions and debates on mining subsidence but he has not done a great deal to sort the problem out. Now he has left it completely. He has gone to another Department and left it to somebody else.

So who do we have now? We have as Secretary of State the right hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham). The right hon. Gentleman does not know a great deal about mining—he has never worked in a pit—and he does not know much about mining subsidence either. He knows about nuclear dumping, though I remember the campaign that he ran in his constituency where they wanted to take boreholes there with a view to dumping nuclear waste. That plan did not come off. The right hon. Gentleman won his campaign and we are asking him to win ours now that he is Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Dobson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Secretary of State broke with Tory party tradition and established a nuclear-free zone in his constituency?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) will oblige me and return to the new clause.

Mr. Haynes: I am not daft, Madam Speaker, and I know that when you are in the Chair I have to watch my Ps and Qs, so I shall not stray from the new clause, which I fully support.

Before my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) interrupted me, I was about to say that we have a new Under-Secretary of State for Energy responsible for coal. I welcome him, and I hope that he will do something about our problem. I see that he represents Banbury. There are not many pits in Banbury, and not much opencast either. Both the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary have listened to our every word this afternoon. They are getting an education about coal mining and mining subsidence, and they now realise, I am sure, what a serious problem it is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras did a marvellous job in opening the debate but I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, how many pits are there down in Holborn and St. Pancras? My hon. Friend has done his homework and put a first-class case, as have a number of my hon. Friends. A good case has also been put by some Conservative Members and I hope that they will join us in the Lobby, because the new clause is necessary. We have waited for so long. We have clobbered Ministers. In days gone by, I even clobbered the Prime Minister about mining subsidence in my constituency and in other places in Nottinghamshire.

A little while ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned the House of Lords. When a piece of plaster fell from the ceiling, they closed the place down to repair it. It cost a fortune. The Government found the money, as my hon. Friend rightly said. I remember an Environment Minister coming to the House to tell us that Big Ben was 9 in out of true. It is, indeed, 9 in out of true and the reason for that is that we have not always had a car park. All those years ago—25 or 26—they scooped a whacking great hole out beneath the building and put in five floors so that hon. Members could park their cars. [Hon. Members: "Opencast mining."] Opencast mining, yes. The end result was that Big Ben started to be affected and to move out of true. I never go round that way because one never knows. We have been given assurance that it is okay now, but I never give it a chance. That is a perfect illustration of what happens. It is easy to understand the kind of problems that we have in mining areas back in our constituencies.

Mr. Ashton: Is my hon. Friend aware that, only about 10 years ago, the Terrace was raised because of the level of the River Thames? One could put one's hand in the river at high tide. Hundreds of millions of pounds were spent on a Thames barrage to protect this place and the lower areas of London.

Mr. Haynes: There you are, Madam Deputy Speaker: my hon. Friend is leading me in the right direction by referring to money being found to do that kind of work when money is not being found to do the work that we need done in our constituencies.

Mr. Hardy: Does my hon. Friend think that, as global warming occurs and the sea level rises, and all the flat low-lying coastal constituencies represented by Conservative Members are threatened, those hon. Members will be clamouring for lots of public money to defend themselves from inundation by the sea?

Mr. Haynes: Yes, but that will come later, and we have a problem right now. I thought that my hon. Friend was going to take me down lovers' lane, but I am steering clear of that one. I have done enough damage with that one, and I shall not go further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and I get people coming to our morning surgeries of a Saturday. The result is that I visit homes on Sunday morning when I should be in church. Like any hon. Member who does his job correctly, I must look after my constituents, so I do not go to church very often. Last Sunday I went to visit a Mr. Taylor of Hill crescent in Sutton in Ashfield. The work on his house has been completed and it is shocking. You cannot close a door, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the door frames have

[Mr. Haynes]

whacking great cracks in them. When Mr. Taylor took me outside, I saw that there were whacking great cracks in the bay windows too.

I know what is wrong. We have seen British Coal officials go to prison for fiddling over subsidence repairs. Many of the contractors that have been brought in to do the repairs are cowboys, who keep the costs down and make a nice profit, and British Coal does not provide the money necessary to enable them to do the job properly.

Another constituent of mine lives just round the corner from where I used to live. When he came to see me, he brought photographs to show me exactly what was happening to his property, which was supposed to have been completed. I wrote to the director of the Nottinghamshire area, who replied, "We have spent enough money on that property: we are not spending any more." That property is not fit to live in. Honestly, it is shocking; it is disgusting the way they have been treating people back home in our constituencies.

We really need the new clause. All right, a Bill has been promised to deal with the subsidence problem at a later stage, but I do not accept that promise, because we have waited and waited and waited. We have had a bellyful; we want some action from the Government now.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham) *rose——*

Mr. Haynes: I have not finished yet. The Secretary of State need not get so excited.

There are properties——

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Speak up.

Mr. Haynes: I hope that you will watch the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: My attention is entirely riveted on the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

6 pm

Mr. Haynes: The hon. Gentleman's attention is riveted on me. He is always bawling and shouting instead of listening to what is being said, so I am saying it again.

It often works out that hon. Members become agents on behalf of their constituents, yet there are agents who are supposed to be working for them. They are not doing their job. For a start, they are taking on too much work. They keep small staffs and they cannot handle the situation properly. The result is that constituents suffer in their homes.

Tilt is the main problem with a number of properties. The board does not want to know if there is tilt. One can walk into some properties, and it is like being in a rowing boat in the middle of the Atlantic. How can the Secretary of State and Ministers in the Department of Energy put up with that? They should go and look for themselves. I would welcome the Secretary of State visiting the beautiful county of Nottinghamshire and looking at some mining subsidence problems. He could spend the day there and open his eyes to the suffering that is going on in hon. Members' constituencies.

People can be transferred from their own homes to other homes while serious repairs are being done. People have been out of their homes for as long as two years before they could get back into their properties. The reason is that the contractor, who has been employed by British Coal, is never on the job. The result is delay after delay. People come to hon. Members' surgeries and, once again, hon. Members act as agents and make representations. The agent is supposed to look after and represent people with problems with British Coal. Oh, no —because he is an easy touch, the hon. Member has the problem dropped in his lap.

I have a filing cabinet full of letters about mining subsidence problems. The Minister might not believe that, but it is true. I am sick to death of it. I am fed up. It is a nightmare. I have had problems with social security or housing, but the subsidence problem has been with me all along, and I have had enough. Hon. Members are looking for help for the people whom we represent. They have been getting a raw deal for far too long.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock) knows about subsidence. He has had properties in my constituency. He has suffered just the same as others have. He could not get repairs done, simply because the board would not find the money to do them. The board says, "Well, regulations have been laid down by the Government." Opposition Members want the Government to get off their backsides and do something about the problem.

I hope that the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South, the Under-Secretary of State for Energy will keep his eye on the problem. He has a responsibility in this housing matter. In the main, we are talking about domestic properties. Of course, there are serious problems with factories, schools and so on, but, in the main, we are talking about people's homes. I recently told the Prime Minister herself that her Government encourage people to own their own homes, yet many homes are being destroyed by mining subsidence.

We have a real problem. I ask the Secretary of State please to grab hold of the new clause. It should be in the Bill so that we can deal with the problem now and not wait until later. The problem is big enough and serious enough, and we want some action. I ask the Secretary of State to vote for the new clause and let us have it in the Bill.

Mr. Skinner: I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) raised those points. Some of my other hon. Friends have also dealt with the matter at length. The Secretary of State will know that I have referred to the problem of subsidence in Bolsover church. For several years, negotiations did not proceed at any level between British Coal and Bolsover church, partly because of some negligence on the part of British Coal and the fact that there was no vicar for a period. I had to take over—*[Laughter.]* It's the way I tell them. I had to take over as an intermediary. Several years ago, I was approached about whether I could get negotiations started. I told British Coal that I would be prepared to challenge it to a debate in Bolsover church so that the whole community could take part in it. That cracked it. British Coal then decided to start negotiating.

I raised the matter with the Church Commissioners and I was promised an investigation. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) will see a reference to that on the valuable list that he produced. In the past few days, I received a further letter from the newly installed vicar, John Easton, of

Bolsover parish church. I am sad to report that, despite all the efforts that have been made, there is a deadlock. I ask the Secretary of State for Energy to take note of the point that I am making. There is no doubt that some of his advisers will know that this matter must be resolved.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield said, it is mainly housing that is affected by subsidence. We know that a terrible backlog has accrued in the past few years. When promises are made in the House on behalf of the Church Commissioners, the matter should be resolved. It was raised a considerable time ago. The vicar and the church wardens have jointly written, stating:

"We have waited expectantly over the last six months for the fulfilment of the offer from British Coal but to no avail. We now agree with our architect and our solicitor who reluctantly conclude that British Coal are deliberately delaying payment with new quibbles about the wording of the document of acceptance."

That is how British Coal plays the game. That will register a chord with thousands of people in our constituencies —the idea of quibbling about exact words. They went on to state:

"We thank you for your interest and help in the past and hope that you will now be able to help in determining why payment has not been made."

This stage of the Bill's proceedings is an admirable opportunity for me to place that matter on the record.

There is a history to the backlog, and it is as well that the relatively new Secretary of State for Energy knows that. We also have a new Minister. He should be apprised of the reasons. Subsidence cases have not been raised in the same numbers since I have been an hon. Member. In the main, the backlog occurred during 1983, when suddenly it was found that some agents operating and acting on behalf of tenants and property owners were lining their pockets with large commission payments out of subsidence claims. Certain people became more involved in the matter. It received a lot of media attention. There was tremendous publicity about a few cases and about some people who were at arm's length from the problem—people who were making money on the side. Literally scores of thousands of residents with subsidence problems suffered.

British Coal asked "What will we do? We will tighten up." Rather than agents and people who obtained the commission, people such as those at Bolsover parish church and thousands of others about whom hon. Members know have suffered. That is why the rule was changed to what is commonly known as the "six-year rule" and it was made more difficult for the honest-to-goodness residents to get that compensation.

I hope that the Government's two representatives—Ministers who are relatively new to this—are fully apprised of why the change took place and why my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) has suddenly taken an interest and devotion in this matter that is far greater than that taken by his predecessor. There is a good reason for that—and point number one is that my hon. Friend succeeded his predecessor. However, my hon. Friend became interested because of the problem. Among others, my hon. Friends the Members for Ashfield and for Derbyshire, North (Mr. Barnes) have raised this matter because of the tremendous backlog in dealing with these cases and because of the Select Committee report that drew a lot of attention to the problem. I am not knocking that—I am simply saying that once attention has been drawn to the problem, it should be remedied in the proper way.

Let us not cause something to happen that means that the local residents will suffer. I can understand the agents losing their villas in Spain—not that they have, as a matter of fact—but it is unfair to lump the problem on to those people who are suffering.

If there is plenty of money in the country to put pearly gates outside No. 10, there must be a bob or two left for people such as our constituents. We could give a litany of the ways in which the Government could spend money. We could also say the same about British Coal. If it can use some of its money for two-inch-deep carpets all around Hobart house and provide the wherewithal for all the luxuries and God knows what else there, it has a duty to assist in this difficulty.

The Secretary of State for Energy has a chance to make a name for himself in the last two years left to this Government. Of course, it might be less than that, because Ministers are now shunted around very quickly. The previous Minister for Coal, the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) is sitting behind the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman was halfway through the Bill—he did not expect it—but he suddenly got a telephone call from inside the pearly gates, saying, "You are wanted. We have run out of real Right wingers. You're about the only one left." That was not the greatest compliment of all time to be paid by Bernard Ingham, but the Minister was shifted.

That is why I am advising the Secretary of State and his new Minister for Coal that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield put the situation in the right context when he said, "Grab hold of it." There are many problems and they are not associated with Opposition Members only. Many Tory Members have these complaints. My hon. Friend was absolutely right to say that we get more complaints about subsidence now than about almost any other subject.

Let us deal with this matter in a general way and take on board the points that were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras and other hon. Friends. The Government should make sure that there is no more waffling, because there has been some on this issue. When my hon. Friend opened the debate, he gave an account of the way in which the Government have pushed the issue to one side. There is no doubt that the Government have done that with the Waddilove committee and all the rest of it. They have been buying time, but we have now reached the point when the buying of time should end.

Let us get on with the job. If the new clause cannot be accepted, that is one thing, because we are simply saying that the Government should accept that kind of clause if they intend to do something about resolving the problem for the thousands of people who are suffering and losing money and who, in many cases, have not been given any money at all for their genuine claims of subsidence against British Coal.

Mr. Wakeham: May I say at the outset that I welcome the opportunity to discuss subsidence? It is an aspect of the coal industry about which there is widespread interest and concern among hon. Members of all parties. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and his hon Friends have done the House a great service in raising the issue for debate on this new clause. One cannot come to this issue without one thing being crystal clear —that the present state of affairs is not satisfactory.

[Mr. Wakeham]

Rather than being a substantive point, perhaps my first point should be regarded as an audible aside. Opposition Members have made several attempts to draw a connection between the problems of subsidence and coal privatisation. The Government have a clear commitment to bring forward legislation on the problems of subsidence quite independent of the privatisation, about which I shall speak later. The Government have also clearly stated their proposals for coal privatisation, which will be dealt with in the next Parliament.

However, as I have spent a considerable amount of time on the subject, perhaps I may draw an analogy from the electricity privatisation. To put the matter at its lowest, there seems no possibility of privatising British Coal without first clearing up the questions of the liabilities and problems of subsidence. I am not saying that there is a connection between the two, but as an aside to what some hon. Members have been saying, I should add that I do not think that some Opposition Members took the logic of the points that they themselves were making.

6.15 pm

The new clause, in fact, goes rather wider than subsidence, because it seeks to extend deficiency grant to cover not only British Coal's subsidence liabilities, but also all its loans as well. Perhaps it could be convenient for the House, therefore, if I were to deal with all the other matters first and then devote the remaining part of my speech to dealing with points on subsidence.

In these other matters, the new clause would go well beyond what the Government have in mind and what is necessary. The basic purpose of the capital reconstruction is to recognise that the corporation's asset base has been severely eroded by the events of recent years, and to restore the corporation to a position where I can properly continue to advance loans to meet its day to day cash requirements. It has never been our proposal that we should write off all British Coal's debts, but we do believe that it is necessary to bring them into closer alignment with the true value of its colliery assets. Our Bill will achieve that. The Opposition's new clause would not only wipe out all the corporation's debts, but would also endow the corporation with many billions of pounds of spare cash. That would, quite rightly, be unacceptable to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury as well as being contrary to European Community rules on state aids.

Quite understandably the Government have been asked how much the deficiency in British Coal's accounts is likely to be by the end of the financial year. I said on Second Reading that it was likely to exceed £5 billion, and that there was a wide margin of uncertainty at present about certain elements, particularly the valuation of the corporation's assets.

This margin of uncertainty could be as much as £2 billion and it may be several months before we are able to arrive at a more precise figure. This is because the revaluation of each colliery will be based on a detailed review of its future cash flow and, of course, there will need to be detailed discussion of the strategic assumptions underlying the cash projections, and particularly the assumptions for prices, output and productivity.

Questions have also been asked about the valuation of land and coal reserves in the accounts. Land and buildings are included at cost, but the annual accounts also give information on its value at current prices. At March 1989, British Coal's estimate of the current market value was £584 million, compared with a book cost of £207 million.

I can assure Opposition Members that British Coal is in no financial position to hoard land. In fact, it has stepped up its sales of surplus property to nearly £100 million in the course of this financial year and will have to continue to sell its land if it is to generate cash for reinvestment in the industry.

Mr. Hardy: In addition to valuing the land and property owned by British Coal, will the Minister put a notional figure on the value of the coal reserves in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated my next paragraph. Unworked coal reserves are not included in the balance sheet, but they represent an immense and vital national asset. If they were sold, they would, of course, have to be valued, but I am certainly not envisaging that unworked reserves, as distinct from the coal mining industry, would ever be privatised. Nevertheless, I understand the feeling expressed in Committee, that, as steward of our coal reserves, British Coal might provide a fuller and more regular analysis of the volume of reserves in each coalfield. It is important information and I shall certainly draw the matter to the attention of Sir Robert Haslam.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): This is an important point. I am sure that some of my hon. Friends will be confused about assets and reserves. The Secretary of State must be aware that pits have closed, not because there was no coal in them, but because it was considered that the economic climate had changed. Pits were deemed unprofitable even though the coal was still there. That coal may even be worked some day, when there is a more realistic appreciation of the value of coal resources. Our worry is that the closure of some pits was a piece of vandalism and that coal was sterilised for all time.

Mr. Wakeham: I shall leave aside part of what the hon. Gentleman said and come to the central point. I agree that it is not possible to value coal reserves. It is not our intention to do so. We do not envisage privatising that part of the coal industry. We do not believe that it is proper to value coal reserves. The hon. Gentleman will agree that a fuller and more regular analysis of the volume of reserves in each coalfield is more important than artificial and meaningless assessments of their value.

I shall make a request to Sir Robert Haslam to make more information about the volume of reserves available. Many people involved in the coal industry would like to have such information. I agree that it would not be fruitful to attempt to value coal reserves.

Clause 1 provides that I may pay deficiency grant up to the level of the deficiency shown in British Coal's accounts. I cannot guarantee that I shall fully extinguish the deficiency to the last penny. For one thing, part of the grant represents state aid requiring the approval of the European Coal and Steel Community. The level of grant will have to be sufficient to clear up British Coal's balance sheet to the point where I can properly continue to lend to the Corporation. In other words, there must be a genuine

prospect that it can service and repay its remaining debt. This means that a very substantial amount of deficiency grant will be required.

I now turn to the subsidence aspects of the new clause. First, I assure the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that the deficiency already allows sums to cover its estimated liability for compensation for subsidence damage. The adequacy of these sums will automatically be reviewed by British Coal's auditors at the end of each year. The sums do not allow for the effect of further legislation on subsidence. It is not possible to make a proper assessment of any increase in the liability on this account until details of the Government's legislation are finalised. I do not expect that the extra liability will be significant.

In response to the point raised by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), whatever British Coal's financial difficulties or liabilities in the past—I hope that such difficulties will not continue—there is no question that any properly settled claim would not be met by British Coal. It could not reasonably plead poverty in settling its debts. That would be unacceptable. I hope that that will help the hon. Member for Mansfield to deal with the human problems in his constituency and in others. I shall deal with the negotiation and settlement of claims later in my speech.

Mr. Meale: I admire the Secretary of State for his honesty and openness, and I am grateful for his reply.

Mr. Wakeham: Fine. I appreciate friendly comments, wherever they come from. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) occasionally makes such comments, but they often have a sting in the tail.

Many claims are already being met by British Coal. I am pleased to tell the House that the trends are encouraging. The number of new claims continues to fall. In 1988-89, British Coal received 9,600 new claims, some 2,300 less than the previous year. British Coal settled about 10,000 claims, at a cost of nearly £50 million. A further 4,600 claims were rejected, with the result that the total number of cases outstanding fell by about 5,000 compared with the previous year, to a little over 26,000. That compares with backlogs of 37,000 in 1986-87 and 52,000 in 1983-84.

It may be helpful to the House to run through what has happened since the Waddilove committee on subsidence reported in 1984, and the Government's White Paper response was issued in 1987. As the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said, the Waddilove report on repair and compensation for coal mining damage made 65 recommendations, not all of which required legislation to be implemented. It is worth recalling that the report did not call for a radical overhaul of the existing system. It concluded that the thrust of the existing legislation was broadly right but needed strengthening in a number of areas. I draw the attention of hon. Members to paragraph 169 of the report.

Between the publication of the Waddilove report and the Government's White Paper response, British Coal introduced several improvements to its management procedures. The result was that, by the time that our White Paper was published, over half of Waddilove's recommendations had been implemented, wholly or in part. In response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock), the *Official Report* listed those improvements in January last year.

For example, British Coal now acts in accordance with Waddilove's recommendation that priority should be given to the repair of damage and that payments in lieu should be made only in exceptional circumstances. It also repairs all property to a good standard, even though the Coals Mining (Subsidence) Act 1957 requires British Coal only to make the property "reasonably fitted" for use.

British Coal does not strictly apply the time limit in the 1957 Act, which requires a claim to be made within two months of the damage becoming apparent and will generally accept claims up to six years after the damage occurred. Several hon. Members spoke about the time limit. I recognise that that causes problems. That is why we propose a change in new legislation to make the position abundantly clear.

I am advised that claims will be allowed up to six years from when the claimant first had reasonable grounds to believe that damage had occurred. That is six years, not from when the mining took place, or from when the damage occurred, but from when the damage appeared. I hope that my comments will be of help to people who are in any doubt about that.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Secretary of State accept that there are still problems? When a person claims that his house has been damaged, it is possible for the Coal Board to say, "The houses on either side were damaged four years ago, so you are out of time." As the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock) said, the Coal Board can say in effect, "You have suffered from the damage for so long that we will not pay you any compensation."

6.30 pm

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that the position is not entirely satisfactory, but I said what I did in order that the legal position should be as clear as I am advised that it is. But we recognise that legislation is necessary to make that crystal clear.

Some hon. Members have suggested that more should be done in advance of legislation. We agree, and I am actively looking to move things forward. That is why we are preparing a new version of my Department's advisory leaflet, often refered to as the Green Book. That will describe new procedures agreed between the Department and British Coal for dealing with subsidence claims. Those procedures will, as far as possible, incorporate the best aspects of both the existing Acts and anticipate our proposals for legislation. I am well aware of the anxiety that claimants may suffer simply from not knowing how to proceed. I hope that that will go some small way to reduce uncertainty in the minds of claimants until such time as our new legislation is implemented.

Secondly, the House may recall from the White Paper that we said that we would conduct an attitude survey to assess public satisfaction with British Coal's notification procedures. If the existing arrangements are found to be unsatisfactory, British Coal will be required to notify individual households. The fieldwork for that survey is now complete and I expect a report shortly.

Thirdly, because of the prospect of early legislation we have brought forward the review of disputes procedures which Waddilove recommended should take place in 1990.

[Mr. Wakeham]

That, in part, answers some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse). That review is now under way and will look at a range of options. We shall shortly be consulting more widely and I hope that the outcome will be a simpler, quicker and cheaper way for claimants to resolve disputes with British Coal.

The options that we are looking at include a better defined and more widely available form of independent adjudication; lower-tier to the Lands Tribunal, roughly equivalent to a small claims court; an ombudsman; a legal advice centre, and a disputes procedure based on the rules of the Institute of Arbitrators. At this stage it is not possible to anticipate the outcome of this review or when and how its findings will be implemented, but it may be possible for a new system to be agreed and established without legislation.

I shall consider carefully all the points that have been made by my hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) and for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), and the hon. Members for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) and for Mansfield, along with the other helpful suggestions that have been made.

The Government remain committed to introducing a Bill on subsidence at the earliest possible opportunity, but subsidence is a complex area. There are two Acts which currently apply. We are not only introducing positive improvements, we are also consolidating two Acts into one Bill. Some of the provisions of these Acts, while desirable, are not always as clear as they should be.

Many hon. Members will be only too aware of the uncertainties surrounding the interpretation of the six-year rule, on which we have already had exchanges. I accept that fully. Unravelling those Acts and replacing them with a lucid and comprehensive new Bill will involve a lot of "lawyer's law" which will require careful drafting and careful scrutiny by the House and in Committee. Moreover, a great deal of work and further consultation is going on and we want the legislation to reflect its outcome.

For those reasons, it would be neither practical nor desirable to tack subsidence provisions on to the present short, primarily financial, Bill which is urgently required by the end of the financial year. I was responsible for the business of the House for long enough to know that I cannot predict when the legislation will be introduced. That is a matter for decision elsewhere. But I am sure that the Government, in reaching their decision on the timing of a Bill, will wish to take full account of the views expressed today, and I hope that on that basis the Opposition will withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Dobson: We do not want to withdraw the new clause, because this is an urgent matter. It is getting on for six years since the Waddilove committee reported. Its recommendations are sufficiently clear, and they should be implemented now.

If the Secretary of State is not prepared to amend the Bill at this point or to see it amended in the other place, let me remind him of his previous incarnation as Leader of the House. In the previous Session of Parliament, we saw through the House the lowest number of Bills in an ordinary Session since the second world war, and in the Session before that we saw through the lowest number of Bills ever seen through the first Session of a Parliament since the second world war. We are promised that there will be even fewer Bills in this Session, so there must be room in the Government's legislative programme for this important measure. If the right hon. Gentleman wants his hon. Friends to drop the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, or the Education (Student Loans) Bill, we shall facilitate that.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 246.

Division No. 36] **[6.35 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris

Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 4

LICENSING OF COAL WORKING, SEARCHING AND BORING

Mr. Dobson: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 2, line 27, at end insert—

'(c) in paragraph (c) after the word "tonnes" there shall be inserted "except that no operation shall proceed where the land was included in Acts of Enclosure which were enacted prior to 1840 and is currently devoted to agriculture, forestry or recreational purposes.".'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 5, in page 2, line 27, at end insert—

'(c) in paragraph (c) after "tonnes", there shall be inserted "and when undertakings have been made by the operators for the restoration of the land affected by the working of coal or by operations incidental to such working.".'.

No. 1, in page 2, line 27, at end insert—

'(1A) After subsection (2) of that section there shall be inserted—

"(2AA) Applicants for a licence under subsection 2(c) above shall undertake to deposit a bond, with the relevant local authority, sufficient to cover the costs of the restoration of land affected by operations under that licence as estimated by that local authority.".'.

Mr. Dobson: This group of amendments is intended to ensure that the activities of private opencast operators are brought up to the standards of the opencast operations of British Coal. That does not mean that we think that British Coal's opencast operations are necessarily as good as they should be.

Amendment No. 4 is a shrewd amendment, which was originally tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). It relates to the enclosure Acts, many of which specified that when common land was enclosed hedgerows should be established and then maintained in perpetuity. My hon. Friend will explain at greater length that, although that legislation is still in force, regrettably—even under the present law-and-order Government—it is not enforced. Amendment No. 4 seeks to offer protection wherever there is a threat of opencasting.

I am reminded of a piece of doggerel that was popular at about the time of the Enclosure Acts, which my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) will recall, as may other right hon. and hon. Members:

"The fault is great in man or woman
Who steals a goose from off a common.
But what can plead the man's excuse
Who steals the common from the goose?"

Common land is now enclosed only because hedges were erected around it—and if they are required to be removed, eventually they should be replaced.

We argue that private operators of opencast sites should not be allowed to expand the scale of their operations from 25,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes, but if the Government persist in increasing the maximum take tenfold, there should be a substantial improvement also in the protection given to local communities, to match the operators' degree of exploitation.

There is no doubt that further protection is needed. Over the years, many reports have illustrated the problems created by licensed opencast sites. One of the most thorough—albeit that it is now somewhat old, having been published in 1984—was that produced by the minerals and reclamation group of the County Planning Officers Society. It describes problems that confronted its members and local communities in no fewer than six counties. The report runs to 17 pages, and its contents should be noted.

One of the problems that the report reveals is that operators do not observe conditions of operation, nor do they fulfil their obligations to restore an opencast site when their work is finished. Amendments Nos. 1 and 5 require operators to enter into an agreement to meet certain conditions. Also, after an operator has sought and obtained planning consent, the planning authority will secure a bond to cover the cost of the required restoration work. If the operator does not honour its obligations, the county council will have the funds to undertake the necessary work in default, at the operator's expense. That is only right and proper.

The planning officers' report lists numerous examples of conditions not being fulfilled. In one case, a condition restricting the height of the overburden mound was disregarded. The mound was too high and caused a nuisance to local people. A condition restricting the noise emanating from the site was also disregarded, causing trouble to local people.

The report cites an example of the shady behaviour of which operators are capable. At another site, an operator

"was unable to comply with agreed working scheme because of the cost of replacing overburden in worked out area."

The planning authority was virtually blackmailed into granting additional planning consent for another area of opencasting, so that the operator could finance the restoration work required at the first site. That approach is typical.

The report describes flooding in a village adjacent to an opencast site in another county because of inadequate drainage. At the same site,

"non-compliance with approved time period and phased working scheme caused greater disruption in the area than necessary, and lasted longer than necessary."

On a different site in the same county, a condition to protect the stability of the highway and road safety by providing a 40 ft safeguarding strip alongside the highway boundary was disregarded. Instead, extraction took place right up to the highway boundary, which undermined the highway itself.

At another site, consent was given for only 18 months' working. The report observes:

"Slow rate of working because contractors kept 'diverting' machinery to sites which they considered more urgent"—

and which presumably paid better. On that 52-acre site, the operator won about 40,000 tonnes of coal over seven years—but the neighbouring community had to pay a big price for that.

As to the original amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for the Member for Wentworth, the report gives another example of an operator being provided with a detailed working plan and conditions relating to the safeguarding of hedges—but removing the hedges and then applying for retrospective planning consent to do so. Meanwhile, severe damage was caused to the landscape.

My final example relates to a site that was inadequately restored because the operator went bust. If the operator had been required to lodge a bond with the county council, money would have been available to complete the restoration. As it was, the council was left to decide

whether to use the money of its ratepayers—soon, poll tax payers—to compensate for the fiddles perpetrated by the private operator.

I notified the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) of my intention to mention a site in his constituency, which he may recognise from the photographs that I have. I refer to the Rope walk north site worked by United Mining Ltd. which won 18,265 tonnes between June and August 1987. The photograph was taken in December 1989 and shows that the promised restoration work had still not been undertaken. It may be that it was completed over Christmas and in the new year, but that seems unlikely. That is another example of things going wrong in the east midlands because an operator failed to comply with its original undertaking or with the planning authority's conditions.

Other examples are to be found in the report, "Opencast—casting a shadow", published in 1989 by the Durham Area Miners Support Group. The chapter on private opencasting is entitled, "Licence to make a killing?". That is certainly what some operators have been doing. In Northumberland, R and A Young was working both the Jacks Law extension and Wandylaw moor sites under two licences so that that company could keep within the tonnage limit.

7 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): The company that my hon. Friend mentioned is considering submitting an application for a further site in my constituency. The life of that site will probably be 30 years. The initial application for a site at Gassop near Bowburn in Durham is for opencasting for three years and drift mining for 26 years. The opencast mine will probably be expected to last even longer than that. It is appalling to have such an application in an area of landscape beauty and scientific interest. How will the amendment prevent companies such as R and A Young from exploiting the countryside in my constituency and making life miserable for many people? If its application were to be accepted, life around Bowburn would be unbearable for 30 years.

Mr. Dobson: I understand perfectly what my hon. Friend is saying. As was explained in Committee, opencast sites are a great menace, not only on environmental grounds but because they are a threat to health with the dust that blows from them. There is little evidence that private contractors are willing to comply with any conditions that anyone may seek to place upon them. If my hon. Friend's constituency is of such outstanding natural beauty, but without the capital letters at the beginning of each word, it is probably best if the county council turns down the application. If the company then wants to appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member who has moved from being the coal Minister to being the appropriate Minister at the Department of the Environment will give close attention to that application. We must recognise that the position is grotesquely unsatisfactory.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the Government have weakened the planning powers of local authorities to refuse permission on environmental grounds. Local authorities are now told to take the financial aspects into consideration—that means the commercial interests of those making the application for opencasting. That is weakening the powers of local authorities and creating havoc for the local communities.

Mr. Dobson: That is certainly the case. Ministers say that they are green; indeed, they are practically coming into the House wearing green suits. However, they have not withdrawn any of the ludicrous circulars that were issued when the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) was the Secretary of State for the Environment. He basically said, "If any rich Tories in business want to make a planning application, it will be granted." That is a rough summary of the circulars that he issued.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Not for building sites.

Mr. Dobson: As my hon. Friend points out, there was a caveat that that should not apply to an application for building development within the view of the former Secretary of State's house. There were obviously certain special considerations from time to time.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Snide.

Mr. Dobson: Yes, they are snide remarks. However, it is humbug—the only description I can use in the House—for a Secretary of State to go around the country saying, "You must give up your view and put up with noise and filth for the sake of other people having homes or for the sake of the country's industrial development—but that does not apply to a planning application near my house."

On the problems of small operators in opencasting, the report from the Durham Area Miners Support Group says:

> "As private operators tend to apply for smaller pockets of coal which can be worked relatively quickly, they claim that their operations are only temporary."

However, once operators have started on a site and obtained permission to work on it, they return and make further applications for work in adjoining or adjacent areas. That has proved a useful way of sidestepping the 25,000 tonnes licensing limit. In future, they will make multiple applications for 250,000 tonnes. They will do it in the same way, but on a much larger scale.

One operator in the north-east applied for four changes to the conditions, including to be

> "allowed to run the washery on the site on a 24-hour basis"—

which was noisy. It also asked to be

> "allowed to destroy a belt of trees which in their original application they had argued would be left as it added interest to the landscape while the site was recovering."

It took the trees some time to recover as they were chopped down. There is little sign that they are restored to their former health. Sites have been left unrestored for years.

I shall cite an example to justify our proposal for introducing a requirement for applicants to place a bond with the county council. At present, they can be required by British Coal to place a bond with British Coal, but that does not necessarily do the trick because British Coal's relationship with those people is not just to do with the environment. In Durham, the county council asked British Coal to invoke a bond. British Coal duly informed the council:

> "No decision as to the possible use of the bond can be taken until the corporation has resolved other financial matters"

not with the orginal applicant, but

> "with the receiver."

[Mr. Dobson]

It was interested in taking the bond money to make up for other moneys that it did not get from the receiver when the company had gone bust. The problem was that that bond was not used simply to protect the environment. Our proposal means that the bond would be used only to protect the environment. It would have to be placed with the county council and, if the operators failed to comply with the conditions on the site or failed to restore the site, they would lose their bond money.

As anyone who has anything to do with opencast operators knows—and it can apply to British Coal sites as well—things that go wrong and breaches of the operating restrictions that are imposed when an application is granted are difficult to deal with. If they work all night for two or three days and ruin the night's sleep of a neighbouring village, there is not much that the county council can do about it. It can say three days later, "Don't do it again," but it cannot put things right. If operators louse up a watercourse and flood a field or village, that cannot easily be put right. We need the restrictions.

Other aspects of the performance of private operators are equally bothersome. Some of the sites move from the opencast executive of British Coal to the private operators or back again, depending on the size of the workings. That swapping about is not intended to improve the environment or to protect the interests of neighbouring communities.

Another aspect that needs to be considered, which is bringing the operators, the county councils and the system into dispute, in County Durham in particular, is what might be called the transfer of staff—that is the best interpretation of it—between the regulatory authorities and the organisations that they are supposed to be regulating. In recent times, a planning officer and a land and property officer from Durham county council went to work for one of the mining companies. Then a person who did land agency work for that council went to work for the same mining company, and shortly afterwards they were joined by the ex-chief executive of a district council in County Durham. I shall say no more about that, but corruption charges are outstanding at the moment.

I do not suggest that any of the interchanges of staff are necessarily corrupt. I certainly am not saying that about a person who worked in land management for Durham county council and who moved to another company, or a person who was the planning officer with the Gateshead metropolitan borough, who went to yet another of the operators. However, as one legal officer from Durham county council recently pointed out, due to the number of staff who have left the county council to go and work for the private opencast companies, the private operators now know the Durham county structure plan better than the planning department staff. That brings the system into disrepute, and it should be avoided.

If the Government purblindly and stupidly insist on going ahead with a tenfold increase in the maximum size of opencast private workings, there should be parallel strengthening of the planning laws to protect local people, who are sick to death of the sites that they already have. The amendments are intended to achieve that.

The Minister may say that the amendments are technically at fault, or that the Government cannot accept them tonight. However, if the Government are serious about trying to protect the environment of people in coalfield communities, they should either accept the amendments or put similar amendments into the Bill in the House of Lords, and we should happily give them a fair wind when they come back to the House.

Mr. Lester: I thank the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) for telling me that he was going to mention parts of my constituency in his speech.

I have considerable sympathy with his basic premise that if we intend to extract more coal by the opencast method, we must ensure that extraction is controlled by the most stringent planning conditions and environmental controls that can be conceived.

The Select Committee on Energy has described opencast mining as:

"One of the most environmentally destructive processes that is going on in the United Kingdom."

Certainly, in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire—the counties mentioned during discussion of the last amendment—the Committee regarded opencast mining as a most serious environmental problem.

In the previous debate, we talked about the cost of coal. It was said that one reason why it is not costed correctly is the lack of protest from those most critically affected by subsidence. Of course, subsidence arises after the coal has been extracted and not much can be done about it. The Secretary of State gave figures—the backlog of 37,000 unprocessed claims has been reduced to 25,000—which show the scale of the problem.

When we talk about opencast mining and the assets that we hope to extract, we are talking about the future. I can assure the Minister that opencast mining will not get through on the side, because there is understandably great opposition from local groups already.

I pay tribute to the groups that operate in my constituency to oppose the principle of opencast mining. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) in his place, and I know that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) will support my point of view.

Nowadays, it is not enough to say to people who live in mining or ex-mining communities that one should not be surprised if people want to extract coal when one comes to live in a coal mining area. No one who goes to live in a village knows how much coal lies underneath it.

Mr. Hood: I accept the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Does he agree that many people who move into former mining communities do so on the understanding that there will be no more harrassment from mining works? When they move in they are confronted with proposals for opencast mining. One cannot say that it is their fault because they knew that they were moving into a mining community.

7.15 pm

Mr. Lester: People make exhaustive surveys before they buy property, but I have never seen a survey which says that there are workable coal reserves underneath a house, and that one must anticipate that someone will want to extract that coal.

We are moving into green field sites. That is certainly the experience of my constituents. In the past, opencast mining has been sold on the basis that it uses derelict sites, and will improve them. I pay tribute to the Coal Board because it has certainly improved parts of

Nottinghamshire. The Flowers report suggested that 15 per cent. of opencast coal mining was on derelict land but the other figure given by local authorities—25 per cent. —is probably more accurate.

With the increasing pressure from the Department of Energy to extract cheaper coal—opencast is usually cheaper—the question of the environmental effects of moving into green field sites is serious.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): My hon. Friend referred to the report by the Select Committee on Energy. One of its recommendations, which I strongly support, is that the licensing process should go back to the Department of Energy, as was the case with oil and gas licensing. That would provide a first vetting system whereby the Department could say which areas are environmentally suitable and which are not, before planning applications are entered. That would provide more safeguards than the present system, in which the Coal Board retains the patronage for issuing licences, subject only to planning approval.

Mr. Lester: My hon. Friend makes a valid point.

One of the great things that has happened in Nottinghamshire, for which I give enormous credit to the present Secretary of State for Wales, is Operation Eyesore. People who work in local government may remember it. Under the scheme, the Government gave 100 per cent. grants to deal with problems caused by mining—to get rid of tips, to level areas and to introduce new controls to change the face of the countryside. That certainly happened in Nottinghamshire. The ugly, tall tips, the black-topped mountains and all the consequences of coal extraction without proper environmental controls are memories now.

I was chairman of the county finance committee at the time that Operation Eyesore was introduced, and we contributed a pound for every pound that the Government gave and doubled the funds. We cleared Nottinghamshire of the eyesores inherited from the coal industry. I still drive through Nottinghamshire and point out sites that used to be such eyesores. Now, one would not think that those areas had ever been affected by mining. I regret that we now seem to be taking the retrograde step of promoting opencast mining, which has serious environmental effects, and despite modern methods, we will recreate those problems.

As the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said, in his constituency they are talking about opencast mining for 20 or 30 years. The potential opencast sites in my constituency, such as Shilo north, which is the subject of a planning inquiry, Beauvale, which is mentioned in the books of D. H. Lawrence, and Robinettes, are green field sites. As the name suggests, Beauvale is a beautiful place, and those areas are among the most attractive parts of my constituency. If the proposals for opencast mining go through, my constituency will be affected for between 25 and 30 years.

Mr. Steinberg: Applications are now coming in for development of the exceptionally beautiful landscape around a small village in my constituency that has been a coal extraction site for many years. Millions have already been spent on the reclamation of old industrial sites in villages within a two-mile radius; now there is the possibility of a 20 or even 30-year extraction programme in this green field site. All that money has gone down the drain, and now the descendants of the families who first experienced the problems of coal extraction—which has continued for hundreds of years—must put up with identical problems caused by opencast mining. It is crazy.

Mr. Lester: That reinforces my case. If we are seriously considering opencast mining as an active policy, we must view it more globally, as did the Select Committee on Energy. Under the new mineral-extraction procedures, need no longer has to be proved, but we must consider the cost and the likely impact on the environment.

I believe that expensive inquiries such as the one that has already taken place in a site in my constituency are not "costed into" the eventual cost of coal extraction. Heavy legal fees may be involved, as the representation of all the objectors may last for two or three months. However, no one has considered the cost of overall compensation paid to a community for the noise, dust, lorries and general nuisance that the process will involve, and for the fact that the very face of the community will be changed. Under present legislation, that cannot possibly be taken into account.

It is, of course, possible to agree on the development of cricket fields or sports pavilions on certain sites, and we have helped such developments to come about. No one has anticipated the proposed work in these green field sites, however, and the principle of maintaining maximum control and the highest possible standards is therefore essential. I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that neither the House of Commons nor our constituents will simply acquiesce in the various schemes. We need an overall strategy on opencasting; we should not rely on a hotch-potch of policies in the hope that we shall win where we can. My hon. Friend should think through such a strategy, along with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. A newspaper article headed "Opencast hot seat" describes a confrontation with my right hon. Friend, who freely admits that the most difficult decision that he must make—in a quasi-judicial capacity —concerns mineral extraction, not just coal extraction.

The principle behind the amendments should be considered, in the interests of the environment as well as those of the coal and electricity industries. We need a range of much tighter controls on both private and public contractors, to ensure that the only sites to be worked are those that can be worked with the least damage to the environment and local communities. We should perhaps consider a system of preparatory licensing, rather than embarking on expensive planning inquiries that will take for ever and, having spent all that money, end up without enough safeguards. I ask my hon. Friend not to dismiss the amendments lightly, as they deal with a matter that concerns hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), who spoke with the aid of direct constituency knowledge. I am sure that the Minister will take his words to heart, and will recognise that the issue must be confronted. The bald statement in this short Bill that opencast mining licences will raise the production limit from 25,000 to 250,000 tonnes will ring alarm bells in many communities where the horrors of opencasting are already known. A possible tenfold increase will affect a much larger area and many more communities, and the Government must give us an idea of other criteria that may be applied.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

The hon. Member for Broxtowe rightly referred to the pressure for an expansion of opencasting. He said that the coal would be cheaper, but that will depend on how we "cost" the environment, and unfortunately we have no mechanism with which to do that at present. The Secretary of State has said that he is looking into some of the suggestions made by academics and economists who have proposed the use of taxation or some other financial mechanism to put a price on environmental pressures, but at present not even the cost of a public inquiry—which imposes a considerable burden on the community—is counted in the cost of acquiring the coal, and certainly the disruption and damage suffered by communities is not taken into account. The Departments of Energy and of the Environment should put their heads together and try to establish improved environmental criteria and codes of practice.

The amendments—although useful, valuable and worth taking seriously—all relate to the restoration of sites after workings are completed. It should be written into the Bill, that advance funding will be provided, so that if a company goes bankrupt, the community is not left to bear the cost, but we must also ensure that environmental costs are taken into account while the workings are in place, through a code of practice guaranteeing minimum exposure.

An operator may wish to open up an extensive area because that is the cheapest and easiest way of getting at the coal, but more limited workings that could later be reinstated and moved on to another phase would reduce environmental damage. We should also seek transport and access measures that would not put all the pressure on one area for 20 or 30 years. The environmental impact of workings must be minimised, even if cost is involved.

It is slightly disturbing that we should be asked to legislate for such an extension of coal-mining practice in the absence of new criteria and codes of practice, and the Minister will do the House and the public a service if he can inform us that the Government have any new ideas. Without such reassurances, the news of a tenfold increase in licence allocation will give no comfort to many coalfield communities.

7.30 pm

Mr. Ashby: I welcome the Under-Secretary and the Secretary of State to the Department of Energy because I detect the presence of a completely new spirit in that Department. That new attitude represents, I believe, a breath of fresh air. The problems that have faced that Department over the years have been such that I hope that the window is always kept open and that we shall continue to have fresh air blowing in, because significant changes must be made in the extraction of coal in Britain.

I do not agree with those who say that we should support the coal industry no matter what. Rather, we must look at the total costing, including that to the environment, before we embark on a given project. I should be happier to import coal from, say, South Africa and Australia, where it is cheaper, in the sure knowledge that later our own coal will have risen in value to the extent that we can extract it at a price that will be profitable and that will take into account the environmental impact of extraction, because, as I say, we must look at the totality of the cost.

I represent a constituency that has been devastated by opencast mining. Indeed, I consider it to be one of the worst areas for opencasting.

Mr. Hardy: Does the hon. Gentleman live there?

Mr. Ashby: Yes. Not only do I have a home in the constituency but I have just purchased a new house there, and there are plans for an enormous opencast site right next door to that house, although I purchased it in the knowledge that the application would take place. I assure Opposition Members that I have witnessed the effects of opencast mining on my area and the people who live there.

The Bill is intended to grant licences for large amounts of extraction. Will the Minister say—he may care to answer in writing—how many sites there have been in Britain over the years when extraction of 25,000 tonnes has been exceeded? In other words, does he know how often the licensed amount has been greatly exceeded? I assure him that there are many such examples, and if he does not believe me he should come to my constituency and see for himself.

There has been sharp practice by British Coal over the years. We note that, for opencasting, British Coal deposits long-term plans. A private operator makes an application for a certain tonnage, and then goes over that amount. The opencast division of British Coal takes over the site and says that the operator is acting as its agent or under contract to it. In that way, British Coal gets more from a given area, and a lot of sharp practice of that type is going on.

Over the years, British Coal, in most coal-mining areas, has been Big Brother. One need only examine the legislation on the subject to see the effect that that has had. For many years, large numbers of Opposition Members were members of, or were sponsored by, the NUM—whether or not under the Hastings agreement—and they used to kow-tow to British Coal. Whatever British Coal said, they agreed to.

For a long time we lived with that attitude of subservience to British Coal—*[Interruption.]* That was the case. I witnessed it. Indeed, in many areas in which people were employed largely by British Coal they had a feeling of subservience to British Coal. As a result, things took place which in other areas would never have been allowed to occur. People were afraid to object or to take on British Coal. They agreed to things to which nobody else would have agreed. British Coal got away with murder in some areas, and it is still getting away with murder.

In environmental terms, there is the possibility of the deposit of a bond. That is a good idea, but we must not lose sight of the fact that local authorities receive rating revenue in relation to the number of tonnes of extraction from sites. It has always been difficult to discover how much they get. It took me two years of questioning and research to find out the percentage, but I have never been able to discover how much a local authority receives for any one site.

Local authorities will never divulge that information; that money goes into the general rating fund and never returns to the affected areas. The community is entitled to restoration and some compensation, and to a large extent the money for that is there and has come from the

extraction process. That money should be used—because it is available—by local authorities and county councils in the areas that have been devastated and destroyed by opencast mining. The money should be used not only to repair roads and so on but to make the environnmental improvements that are needed.

Mr. Skinner: Many years ago, the Tory-controlled Derbyshire county council had a policy which was, by and large, to allow any opencast application by the opencast executive of British Coal to go through. In 1981, we had a change of administration locally. The Labour group got control and it decided to adopt the policy that, when hon. Members who represented the areas concerned objected, such opencast applications would be opposed, and to a degree that policy has been successful. British Coal has on occasion conducted separate inquiries and won the day, with the support of the Tory Government and the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Meanwhile, the Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council has had a proud record in opposing opencast mining applications, and that flies in the face of what the hon. Member has said. I assure him that that council has been supported in its policy by those working in the mines and by local councillors, and many opencast applications have been opposed by me, supported by many of my hon. Friends.

In other words, in my part of the world, the people who have supported British Coal have been the Tory-controlled Derbyshire county council, Tory councils in general and Tory Secretaries of State who have allowed mammoth opencastings to proceed. That is why I am currently opposing the application at the Pinnock site, the application at Slayley, the one at Stanfree that has reared its ugly head, and the application at Rainge near Morton and Clay Cross. I and many of my hon. Friends are opposing all of them, because those applications are designed to line the pockets of the friends of the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West.

Mr. Ashby: To some extent, I am pleased to hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I urge him to cross the border into Leicestershire and speak to those who run the Labour-controlled Leicestershire county council, who always lie down and do exactly what British Coal asks them, and who grant one planning permission after another. I attack the Labour party in Leicestershire, the members of which have acted disgracefully towards the people of north-west Leicestershire. I blame them for much of what has happened in my constituency.

I did not want to put this matter on a party political basis, but the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) should know that the story of planning applications in Leicestershire is totally different from the story in Derbyshire.

We also have the problem of old consents which do not allow for the full and proper restoration of sites. There should be a review of sites with old consents, and modern conditions should be placed on them. There is a site—one of the many areas of devastation in my constituency—which started off as a small clay extraction. It began with a pottery firm, and only a small amount of clay was required. After 10 or 12 years, that pottery firm was taken over by a larger pottery firm, and in due course that was taken over not by another pottery firm but by a company which was interested in extracting coal.

That firm is using the existing consent to make an application for the extraction of 25,000 tonnes. It has bought all the land, going way back. We all know that that is not a 25,000-tonne application but one for 250,000 or 300,000 tonnes. The consents in respect of the original site are old and do not provide for proper restoration. I am getting no satisfaction from the company or from the county council in terms of the proper restoration of the site.

What we really require is not the separation of the licensing and the planning, but a coming together of the two. We in Leicestershire want an insistence on long-term planning for extraction. We all understand that there is coal under the ground which at some time will have to be extracted by opencast mines, because we need the energy, but it is not difficult to accept that a certain hill or park has reserves that we plan to take out in 30, 40 or 50 years' time, and to put in a planning application now. Then we could specify that trees should be planted for afforestation of the area.

There is no need for us to devastate the countryside. We should plant trees around a site and then extract the coal from the centre. Nobody would know the extraction was taking place, as the forest would deaden the sound and the dust and would improve the environment.

Mr. Hardy: But the trees would die.

Mr. Ashby: Not if they are properly planted. In that way, we would achieve the necessary extraction in the long term, while ensuring that it was environmentally acceptable.

In north-west Leicestershire, we are hoping for a new midlands forest which will stretch from the Charnwood forest across Derbyshire to Staffordshire. That is a delightful concept, which has my total support. What is really needed is a policy from the Department of Energy and from British Coal that includes the concept of a forest, bearing in mind the requirements of the Department of Energy and the environmental effects. We should apply the concept that the dirty, noisy, nasty extraction can be carried out in a way that is acceptable environmentally and to everyone. If we do that, we shall be successful.

It is no good for an area to have an opencast mine such as Coalfield north in the Ravenstone area—a large opencast mine which operates for 10 or 12 years and causes great upheaval. When there are explosions, the houses shake and that causes damage, although British Coal always says that it is not responsible, despite the fact that the damage always occurs after an explosion. British Coal continually denies responsibility. One could put up with one opencast mine, but having suffered 12 years of one site as soon as that site is finished there will be another one right next door to it and then there will be another, until they encircle the entire area. We can never get away from it.

If we are to allow opencast mines of such a size, extracting 250,000 tonnes, there has to be only one licence per area at any given time. When that licence has been exhausted, the area must have a chance to rest and the people who live there must be given the opportunity to live a normal life away from opencasting. There should be a gap at least 20 years before there is another series of opencasting in the area.

7.45 pm

The friends of the hon. Member for Bolsover on Leicestershire county council take the view that the coal is there, and that the sooner it is extracted the better. That means 50 or 60 years of absolute hell for the people who live in north-west Leicestershire, and presumably it will be heaven for our grandchildren. But no doubt there will be something else to be extracted when the coal is finished and the hon. Gentleman's friends, if they exist then—I doubt that they will exist, given the current political climate—will insist——

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashby: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, as he is about to walk straight into it.

Mr. Barron: The Labour party does not control North-West Leicestershire district council, but the hon. Gentleman is making all those accusations. Surely he should be levelling his accusations at the Department of the Environment, which changed the regulations for opencast coal, giving people the right to mine coal before there is any development on the land. The Government whom the hon. Gentleman supports have done all the damage.

Mr. Ashby: The hon. Gentleman has got it absolutely wrong. The Labour party, together with its Liberal allies, absolutely controls Leicestershire county council. The Labour party also controls North-West Leicestershire district council. The Conservatives do not control either council, so the hon. Gentleman's friends are responsible all the way along.

Mr. Dobson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashby: In a moment.

It is really a question of long-term planning and taking into account the history of an area—how much opencasting there has been in the past and how much devastation has occurred—and deciding what should be done in future. It is important to have long-term plans and to consider the past and the future. In that way, people can just about live alongside opencast mining. It is absolutely essential that long-term planning should take into account past planning, that there should be only one opencast mine at a time and that there should be environmental preparation for a given opencast site before such a site is allowed.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Having listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Leicester, North-West (Mr. Ashby), I trust that he will be with us in the Lobby tonight. He could go at least that modest distance, as our amendments are modest compared with many of the problems.

In one month last summer, British Coal, supported by the Government, closed two pits in my constituency—two of the six pits that have been closed in the past 18 months in a 25-mile radius. In the same 18 months, British Coal and private opencast operators have proposed to dig up both sides of my valley and the neighbouring valley. The communities put up with many of the problems of deep-mine pits in our valleys, because we believed in those jobs. Having closed those pits and sealed off millions of tonnes of reserves by capping the shafts of Merthyr Vale colliery within a month of the closure, the very communities that supported the industry and sacrificed their environment are not willing to sacrifice it any longer.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester)—99 per cent. of whose speech I support—spoke about the green field sites. I should tell him that the existing coal mining valley communities also want to join the environmental protection society as much as those who are threatened.

There is coal in every one of my hillsides. There is no doubt about that. They do not need much drilling, although drilling is already taking place. There is coal in all our hillsides—tonnes of it—but the communities have had enough.

We accept the need to diversify our economy. One of the clearest contradictions of the clause which we seek to amend is the economic contradiction of the lessons that we are being taught by the Government. The Prime Minister, in a rare visit to a Welsh mining community recently, told the people to cheer up, to consider the change in the environment and the need to diversify economically, to create light industry and to develop the service and tourist industries. Before she came, and even before the present Secretary of State for Wales came, we had been doing just that. We had recognised that we had to change the basis of the economy and get away from the dirty, extractive industries to a high-tech industrial service sector. We are in the process of doing that, supported by the Secretary of State for Wales in his valleys initiative.

I will give one classic example in my constituency to illustrate the contradiction in the clause. We are building a new business park in Pentrebach in the middle of the Merthyr valley. It will be a beautiful development with modern factories. At the centre of the business park are the business headquarters of the Welsh Development Agency. The site looks good. It will be a prime valley industrial site for light industry and other commercial development.

Within the last week or two, there has been an application by a private opencast contractor to claim 40,000 tonnes. That is the interesting figure; he is already jumping the gun set by the 25,000 tonnes. He has obviously read the Bill or understood months ago that this provision was on its way.

Where is the development proposed? It is immediately in the vicinity of the new business park. There are coal tips which we can clear. There is tremendous support for land reclamation such as we have done since I, as a junior Minister in the Welsh office in 1969, helped to set up the original derelict land unit. We have done an amazing job. We have cleared tips and altered the landscape by developing grassland. Now there are proposals to dig up the virgin countryside and copses of trees which create a good backdrop to the new business park at Pentrebach.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) does not mind me saying so, I think that he was too kind to British Coal in his opening remarks. The amendments do not go far enough in regard to the existing operations of British Coal in south Wales. It was British Coal opencast executive that dug one of the largest holes in Europe in my constituency. The Trecatti site is 600 ft deep. It took 20 years at Dowlais Top to do it. The people of Dowlais Top suffered blasting, noise and dust for 20 years. Then it all came to an end. There was a genuine sigh of relief. With the skills that we have to grow grass on our hillsides, even on reclaimed waste land, within six months we had magnificent green grass, with sheep grazing on it.

What happened? Within months of the appearance of the new environment, British Coal wanted to develop the area next to it. That means ravaging part of the restored and reclaimed site. When pits are being closed, bringing the loss of jobs that we wanted to maintain, one can imagine the reaction when British Coal at the same time wants to destroy the environment. When people in the area have put up with an environmental handicap for 20 years, hon. Members can imagine their anger and frustration.

There has been reference to existing planning consents. I can give another illustration, which reinforces the point about the impact that ill-thought-out schemes can have on the immediate environment. The residents came to see me about it only last Saturday. For years, the people of Rhymney had to put up with an existing consent for opencasting. One consequence was a change in the watercourses on the hillside. One night, suddenly all the houses were flooded. That had never happened before. When the opencast site was complete, the hillside was redrained.

A few weeks ago, drilling rigs from British Coal turned up and started drilling within 60 yards of the houses. British Coal is prospecting for more coal on the very hillside where it caused problems which led to the flooding of the houses. The drilling did not require planning permission or any consultation with the community. British Coal is still drilling. I want a message to go out loud and clear from the House: we cannot stop British Coal drilling but it will not get planning consent from any district or county council to reopen the hillsides of our community.

I support the amendments. My community, which for 200 years sacrificed the environment for economic development, has been told to learn different tricks, different economic arts and a different basis for the development of its economy. We wish to change faster, because the job gains are not matching the job losses, but we are not willing to suffer again the ravaging of our hillsides and the raping of our mountains. The Secretary of State for Wales has a fine environment in his constituency of Worcester, and has been supporting developments such as I have described in my constituency and in his valleys initiative. When county councils and district councils refuse to give planning permission for opencast development, whether to British Coal or private contractors, we shall expect the Secretary of State for Wales to stand up for our environment.

I support the amendments, but we need to go further. We should send out a message loud and clear from the House that environmental protection applies not only to marvellous countryside but also to communities that have sacrificed their environment in the past but are no longer willing to do so.

Mr. Rost: I want to add my support to the concern expressed on both sides of the House about opencast mining. While I am in sympathy with the amendments tabled by the Labour Members, I think that they are asking the impossible. They are really demanding that British Coal, a commercial producer which is anxious to produce as much coal as possible, should also act as regulator. That is impractical. It is like expecting the nationalised water boards to regulate and prosecute themselves.

That is the very reason why I have argued that the whole licensing system must go back to the Department in the same way that oil and gas licensing is in the hands of the Department. Before an oil company is granted a licence to explore or develop for oil or gas, onshore of offshore, the Department vets whether it is a suitable area and imposes conditions which have to be complied with if the operator is allowed to go ahead. Until such time as the coal reserves are vested again in the Department of Energy on behalf of the State and are then licensed under a vetting system, there cannot be any sensible national planning policy.

It is quite unreasonable to expect British Coal to do other than grant whatever licences it thinks it can get away with, and it is unreasonable to expect independent planning inquiries to protect the interests of a local community or wider environmental issues.

I argue that the amendments should go much further. The Department should be responsible for the licensing process, so that there can be a pre-vetting system and a national strategy for opencast mining. Applicants for licences would know that they are being granted licences for opencast mining only when the Department, with its independent monitoring team, can assure itself that it is a satisfactory and suitable area for opencast mining. They would be subject to the criteria of planning approval and of the licence, such as restoring the site properly and environmental protection, which would lead to a far more orderly system of opencast development that is far more acceptable to the communities most affected by it.

8 pm

Mr. Hardy: At various times in their political careers, all Conservative Members have demanded that we uphold the law. I was particularly interested by the speech made by the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), in which he referred to the law and the limit of 25,000 tonnes. About 18 months ago, I discovered that clause 32 of the coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946 imposed the limit of 25,000 tonnes and raised the matter in a parliamentary question. Some people in British coal and some private contractors were not very pleased with me at the time, which may be one of the reasons why the Government have decided to bend over backwards to facilitate those who previously were helping themselves. The speech made by the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West suggested that he will approve of my speech, because I also will ask the House to uphold the law.

Amendment No. 4 may seem rather odd, but it is extremely relevant. I shall give a few historic details so that the House can appreciate the context in which I present it.

The enclosure of our common land proceeded until 1840, and 4,000 Acts of Enclosure were passed, almost all of which were for the lowlands of England. I obviously have not read all of them, many of which are kept on long rolls in the other place. After 1840, enclosure procedures were covered by a general Act, but before then there were 4,000 of them. Some referred to relatively small areas of common land, but others covered substantial areas.

My attention was first drawn to those Acts in 1980, when I was seeking to protect the hedgerow. In their greenery, the Government have blocked every attempt to protect hedgerows. My attention was drawn to the fact that, invariably, private Enclosure Acts required that the common land enclosed when fields were established be protected by hedgerows in perpetuity. This is a serious matter, because those Acts have never been repealed. It

[Mr. Hardy]

would suit me if the Government decided that they could ignore those laws and that the terms of the enclosure legislation were no longer legal, because I could say, "Very well, we will return the land to the people." We could restore the common to the descendants of the owner of the goose in the doggerel quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson).

I should find that a matter for rejoicing, but the Government will not agree to such a dramatic change.

It is interesting that commons were enclosed largely because of the argument that as the population of England swelled in the industrial revolution, food production had to increase and agricultural efficiency had to be achieved. Yet now, we are talking about reducing agricultural production, so perhaps there is a case for the repeal of the commons legislation.

In amendment No. 4, I am being perfectly reasonable —I hope that the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West will not say that I am being subservient—in merely asking the Government to uphold the law.

I first raised the matter in a question to a Minister of Agriculture. I can recall that Minister—I have spoken to him today—leaning on the Dispatch Box and confidently saying, "I have reason to believe that these old measures no longer apply." I took up the matter and correspondence ensued. I established that the last case on the subject was Pratt *v.* Garnett in 1928. The law was upheld in that case. I pointed out to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that, over the previous 30 or 40 years, millions of pounds of ratepayers' money had been spent on grants for farmers to grub out hedgerows. The Ministry had never bothered to check on that, but I said to the Minister, "You must accept that a huge amount of ratepayers' money, under successive Governments, has been given in grants to grub out hedgerows, which are required to be maintained under the Enclosure Acts."

I found the correspondence with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods entertaining. The Minister said, "It is not our fault. If someone has been given a grant for grubbing out a hedgerow, we could not have been expected to be aware of the Enclosure Acts; he should have been aware of them, in which case we shall have to recover the full amount of grant that has been paid."

Some Conservative Members think that the Labour party does not like farmers, which is quite untrue. I recognise that such a burden and blow to an agricultural practitioner could be almost ruinous. I did not wish farmers to be bankrupted, so I drew the matter to the attention of the National Farmers Union.

I congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Energy on his appointment. He sat through the Committee's proceedings on the Bill last week. He will recall that last Thursday I gave him notice of this matter. The fact remains—the Minister must confirm this—that the law stands. A private Act of Enclosure is almost certain to include a requirement that the fields established shall be surrounded by a thorn fence and that it shall be maintained in perpetuity.

Amendment No. 4 is entirely in accordance with the law of the land. I am aware of a case in Lincolnshire—this applied in many parts of the eastern counties—where the persons enclosing the land were required not only to plant and maintain a hedge in perpetuity but to protect it by oaken fencing three rails high. An area in Lincolnshire was turned into a Royal Air Force bomber command station during the war. No one then could have put the interests of the Enclosure Acts and the environment before the needs of the nation, but now we are talking not about the needs of the nation, but about money sharks who want quick investments and to cook the books, to make a quick profit, to rape the countryside and to destroy communities. I do not believe that our historic law should be ignored so that a few sharks, who will have more friends among Conservative Members than among Labour Members, can make a lot of money.

I have been involved in conservation for a long time. I recall that when we established the position about enclosure, I said to conservation bodies that we should establish a test case and that it would be useful to fund such a case. In all the cases known to me in the past three or four years in which a farmer was about to grub out an enclosure hedgerow, and was warned that he would be breaking the law and that action would be taken, he retreated.

In my own constituency, for example, I learned a couple of years ago that a landowner was proposing to take out some hedgerows. I sent him a courteous note and said that I was sure that he would be aware that the area concerned was enclosed common land and that the local enclosure award required the perpetual maintenance of the hedgerow. He replied immediately, saying that I was aggressive and threatening. I said that I was merely telling him what the law of the land was. I said that I thought he held a copy of the enclosure award, but that if he was in doubt, there was a copy of it in Rotherham library. In fact, copies of most of the enclosure awards for the area can be found in Rotherham library and every one of them has a requirement for the perpetual provision of hedgerows.

The other day, a little girl called Charlotte Bowen from Rawmarsh wrote me a splendid letter in which she expressed her concern about a small pond, which is served by Colliers brook. I wrote to the borough council, which said that the problem was that it did not know who owned the pond. It pointed out that British Coal might wish to carry out opencast mining and to destroy the pond, which Charlotte showed me a few days ago. However, the area was covered by an Enclosure Act; in fact a considerable area in South Yorkshire is covered by Enclosure Acts.

I must tell the Minister that, as a law-abiding, constitutionalist Member of Parliament, I am not prepared to see the law ignored for the purposes of greed or for the environment in my area to be subject to the strains that we thought we had seen the last of in 1950. There was opencast mining around the villages of Wath upon Dearne and Wentworth in the 1940s and 1950s. Much attention was paid to that in the national press at the time and we were assured that everything would be restored properly. However, the farmers in that area still cannot grow potatoes half a century later. I made that point to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) in Committee the other day.

The problem is that although there was a great deal of upheaval in the 1940s and in the 1950s from the opencast operations there, we now see greater engineering capacity, as my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) reminded us. Opencast mining

can now go deep. No area in the existing coalfield is likely to be free from the attentions of the private money-grabbing opencasters.

The opencast mining in my area in the 1940s and in the 1950s took out two or three seams of coal near the surface, but there are another four or five seams of coal that are accessible to opencast mining on a large scale. I am not prepared to see an area such as mine, where pits have been closed and where there has been complete disdain and disregard of local needs by half the members of the present Government, treated in that way.

I am sorry to have to refer to this matter on successive days in the House. An area of my constituency spills over in the west into the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) and in the east into the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay). Every pit in the Dearne valley has closed, as have the glass works and the coking plants. What was once the largest railway coal concentration yard in Europe has closed.

In the middle of that area, there are 2,711 drums of toxic waste, about which the Government do not seem to be the slightest bit concerned. As I said yesterday, had those drums been in Surrey or in Finchley—would that they had been—the Government might have taken action. It is not acceptable for us to have that amount of dereliction to our north and then to face the risk of environmentally destructive opencast mining to the south.

In view of the pathetically small sums available for derelict land grants, there is no reason for hon. Members who represent coalfield areas to fall over backwards to accommodate such ruinous developments. I am opposed to them. I am glad that the areas that were enclosed—and a large proportion of lowland England was enclosed—had invariably to be surrounded by fences, thorn fences or hedgerows which had to be maintained perpetually. I want the Minister to assure us tonight that all the people who will be queueing up to opencast, to destroy the environment and to rape our green heritage will be made aware that they must not carry out their opencast mining if it means that hedgerows which the law says must be there for ever are to be destroyed. I am not a lawyer, although I have consulted lawyers about this matter in the past. However, I hope that the Minister will accept that the Enclosure Acts may be old, but that they still have meaning and considerable value in protecting the environment in the coalfields.

8.15 pm

Mr. Hood: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) is not in his place, because I want to comment on his reference to some of my colleagues who were formerly miners and members of the National Union of Mineworkers. He said that over the years, we had been subservient to British Coal. I was a miner for 23 years and I am still a member of the NUM. I can remember many occasions when area directors wanted to speak to me and when colliery managers wanted to remonstrate or to reminisce with me. I can assure hon. Members that the one word that they never used to describe me in 23 years in the pits was "subservient". It was an interesting comment and may prove how much the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West knows about the mining industry.

Opencast mining is an environmental problem that always excites heated debate, and our debate today has been heated and good. We must always remember that planning authorities are—and must remain—the custodians of the local community and of the environment. When discussing planning applications for opencast mining, they have to balance commercial need and the effect on the environment.

Last week in Committee, the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) made a comment about previous planning refusals for opencast mining. He had statistics which showed that 80 per cent. of the planning applications that were refused were under Labour authorities. I said that I hoped that he was not trying make a correlation between the authorities that refused permission and the party that was in the majority on them. He said later that that was not the case. The obvious point, as I said in Committee, is that where there are coal reserves, there are usually not many Tory councils, so that point of the hon. Member for Gedling was not relevant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) made an important point, which could apply equally to the Scottish coalfields. There has always been loyalty in Scotland between the local authorities and the coal-mining industry. In Scotland, the deep-mining industry and the opencast mining industry were one. There was always a cross-subsidy, so the deep-mining industry depended on the opencast industry to make it more viable. Our local communities throughout Scotland, almost without exception, had loyalty to mining —that word is not too strong—and tolerated planning applications for opencast mining where they would not normally have done so.

The Scottish coalfield has been devastated since the Government came to office in 1979. It has been ravaged to the extent that we now have one remaining colliery, and have lost 18,500 jobs. Now local authorities are rightly saying that their loyalty has been abused in the past and that they will not allow it to be abused in the future, and we may well find that opencast mining is rightly viewed more critically in Scotland and elsewhere than it has been in the past.

The Bill increases the amount that may be mined from 25,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the abuses that have taken place under the existing laws. In my own area, we have what I describe as plot mining. When the limit was 25,000 tonnes, a firm would be given a licence for that tonnage for one plot, a second licence for another plot, and so on. I can speak with some authority on this, partly because I was a miner for 23 years and partly because I have 140 million tonnes of coal reserves in my constituency, known as the Harpendon coal reserves.

My constituency also has the largest opencast site in Europe—the site named Dalquahandy—where we have 20 million tonnes of proven reserves, a figure which, in the opinion of those who know the area well, could be doubled. Sometimes, in the planning process, those employed in some sections of the industry have ended up on the other side of the table. I remember that, when we were dealing with the Dalquahandy opencast planning application, the regional council planning boss seemed to be pushing British Coal's planning application. He left the regional council with a golden handshake and the next we heard of him was that he was employed by British Coal and had managed to get planning permission for highways

[Mr. Hood]

for the construction. I dare say that British Coal and the gentleman concerned would say that that was a coincidence, but not many people where I come from believe in such coincidences.

The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West made an important comment, as did the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester). Opencast mining must be properly planned on a long-term basis. On the Dalquahandy opencast site, development has been started without the proper infrastructure being provided. If we are to allow opencast mining, we must provide the proper infrastructure and long-term planning for dealing with reclamation and restoration. Everything must be in place before we develop sites.

Hon. Members have referred to the activities of individuals and companies engaged in private mining. We all have our own horror stories about the activities of private mining companies that have been given licences by British Coal. Recently, a private licensee came to me complaining that he had had his licence taken off him. When I asked him why, he said that British Coal had been unreasonable. I said, "I'm used to British Coal being unreasonable. How are they being unreasonable now?" He said, "Well, they have closed my little mine down because I owed them £12,000." I asked him, "Why do you owe British Coal money?" He told me that his accountant, had spent £12,000 of the miners' pension contribution. That sum had gone missing, and the poor accountant, who by then had died, got the blame.

We have all heard stories such as that. One mining company in my area—the LAW mining company—has applied for planning permission to drill all over the Douglas basin, where there is loads and loads of coal. That company has been prosecuted many times for dumping in and so polluting our streams and rivers.

Many hon. Members remember the previous chairman of British Coal, Sir Ian MacGregor without affection, although I suppose that some Conservative Members may remember him affectionately. He promised a company that it would get a plot in my constituency known as Townhead near the village of Rigside, with coal reserves of 250,000 tonnes. I give credit to British Coal for insisting that it would not give permission or a licence to mine the Townhead site. It may well be a coincidence that the figure of 250,000 tonnes, promised by Ian MacGregor to the private mining company concerned, is the figure that now appears in the Bill.

I am sure that the Bill will be looked on with horror by villages in my constituency such as Rigside and Ravenstruther. The opencast quarries to which I referred mean that a 32-tonne coal truck goes through the villages every six minutes, 12 hours a day—sometimes 24 hours a day—six days a week. The coal reserves at that site are such that the villages can look forward to 20 years of such harassment and damage to their environment.

The Bill spells disaster for the little villages in Clydesdale. It will do further damage to Rigside and Ravensburgh and other small villages in my constituency. I shall certainly be voting for the amendment and against the Bill.

Mr. George Buckley (Hemsworth): My hon. Friends have given examples of the devastation that is wrought by opencasting. Conservative Members should realise that those of us from mining constituencies are mindful of the fact that opencastings are destined to increase in our area, particularly where pits have recently been closed. In areas where pits have closed—and closures have been fairly extensive since the 1984-85 strike—opencasting applications have almost inevitably been made in respect of the closed colliery sites. As Conservative Members have said, we are concerned that such applications have now been extended to green field sites, which will be even more devastating to the environment.

The closure programme that has been embarked upon by the British coal industry and supported by Conservative Members has reduced employment in mining constituencies. It is unacceptable to our communities that whereas mines may now employ 900 men—for example, Ackton Hall in Featherstone—their opencast equivalents employ a maximum of 30 or 50 men. Opencasting is devastating not only to the environment but to employment prospects in coal mining communities. That is the main reason that local authorities may justifiably oppose opencast mining applications. Areas that have suffered such manpower losses will not accept a continuation of such devastation.

The Bill would extend the tonnages for opencast sites from 25,000 to 250,000. I draw the attention of hon. Members to a point that I made in Committee. New section (2A) states:

"shall not render unlawful anything done in accordance with such a licence."

Does the Minister interpret that as stating that licences can be issued in contravention of the legislation? The extension to 250,000 tonnes may, by licence, be extended under the Bill. That would add further devastation to mining areas.

The amendments are necessary to cushion the community from the proposals outlined in the Bill. I would further extend the requirement. An application for a licence to mine 250,000 tonnes should be solely for the relevant local authority. If devastation is to be experienced by a community, it ill behoves the Minister, who is not familiar with that community, to override a local authority on planning applications. Responsibility should be in the hands of local community representatives. The economic viability of and justification for a proposed site and its environmental consequences should be weighed by people who are familiar with the area. The matter should not be in the hands of a Minister who may override the refusal of a planning application.

8.30 pm

Because of environmental intrusion, I foresee greater opposition from local people. There was enough devastation in the past, even with the restriction of 25,000 tonnes. The Bill will permit far greater devastation. Will the existing licences that were granted under the 25,000 tonne limit be extended under the proposed legislation? Local people were assured that permission was granted for a limit of only 25,000 tonnes. Certain environmental conditions were agreed. However, conditions and promises will be overridden by the granting of new licences.

People in my constituency were reasonably happy with guarantees of protection. I should like an assurance from the Minister that the figure in the Bill is a maximum tonnage, not a permitted tonnage that can be extended under licence, as set out in clause 4.

I hope that Conservative Members, and the Minister in particular, appreciate that the Government have embarked on supposedly environmental legislation. I hope that the principles laid down in the Environmental Protection Bill are embraced in this Bill on behalf of people in mining communities.

Many people move to mining communities on the understanding that mining operations have ceased. They will strongly object to a reduction in the value of their properties as a consequence of a proposed licence to extract coal in the near vicinity of their recently acquired properties. Those people will be at the forefront of protests about environmental devastation.

Mr. Skinner: Opposition Members have a fairish chance of winning the vote on this amendment. At least two Tory Members have said that, like Opposition Members, they are very much opposed to the extension of the opencast limit from 25,000 to 250,000 tonnes. I expect the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) to join Opposition Members in the Lobby to support the matters about which he feels angry. Other Tory Members who have reservations now have a great opportunity to declare themselves. They could induce the Secretary of State to vote with them. He does not like the ground in his constituency being disturbed. Of course, it was to do with low-level nuclear waste, but he would not even allow drilling to take place. I have news for the right hon. Gentleman: opencast mining extends over a large area of his constituency. He could accept the amendment, and it would be game, set and match.

We know why there is more opencast mining. It is partly because pits have been closed left, right and centre. Many have been going through occasional or temporary economic problems. The Coal Board has come along, shut the pit and given a nod and a wink to its friends on the opencast executive and its friends in big business and said, "Look here, there is plenty of coal left in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Scotland"——

Mr. Ashby: Leicestershire.

Mr. Skinner: —and Leicestershire—"You can get the contractor to come along, dig big holes, and make a lot of money." Of course, coincidentally, the combine is engaged in motorway construction. It is very strange. Suddenly, we find great big diggers digging out large sections of motorway. Work is concluded, and people ask, "Have you heard who has the new opencast?" The same people have all the spare machinery and need to occupy it for a certain time. They move from the motorway and start digging a hole in the opencast area.

People talk about market forces. I do not believe that many opencast operations that have taken place in my lifetime, especially since I have been involved in politics, have been carried out on the basis of fair and open competition. It is almost as though people say, "It is your turn for the next one." All hon. Members have heard stories in their constituencies. One firm does one opencast, and then it asks, "Who is going to do the next?" My hon. Friends can recount all the usual stories about how companies move from one area to the next. It has been part and parcel of the pit closure programme. When they have churned out the coal, made large sums of money and left the dereliction behind them, they leave the big hole, and somebody comes along and says, "We will dump some toxic waste in it and make some more money."

I have continually said that it is important that we do not have toxic waste—low-level or high-level nuclear waste or any form of waste—dumped in those areas. It is one thing for communities to put up with large-scale opencast mining—even more so if the Bill is passed—but there will be even bigger holes in which to dump rubbish. Dioxin was dumped in my area of Morton. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) can no doubt tell another story.

Mr. Hood: I hesitate to mention *The Sun* newspaper, but there was a report in it only a few weeks ago about the Clay mining company, which had six little mines that were bought for £40,000 and were sold to Lea Waste Disposal Limited for £17 million. That company is to dump toxic waste in those six mines.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What is more, it is worth placing on record, as my hon. Friend did in Committee, the fact that opencast mining companies use some of the profits that they make out of opencast mining and put them into the Tory party's funds to fight elections. I am referring to companies such as—*[Interruption.]* I hope that "World in Action" will do a programme on this matter as well. I will give it some names to start with. The research has already been done. They include Taylor Woodrow, Costain and Wimpey. They are ready and available to grease the palms of those Tory Members who are to support the Bill.

The real scandal is evidenced in some correspondence that I came across today showing that another opencast and private mine is now going to be developed in the centre of a tiny village in my constituency—which has only a few hundred inhabitants—called Stanfree, where Tommy Swain used to live. All my hon. Friends will remember Tommy. The opencast mine will be within 20 or 30 yards of Tommy Swain's old bungalow, and not only that, but 16 old-age pensioners' bungalows will be within spitting distance of the opencast operation, if it takes place.

I place it on record here and now in Parliament that I am fully behind the Stanfree pressure group that is to oppose the opencast operation and the private drift mine in that village. Just imagine, the Bill has not yet become an Act—it is not yet law—but it is already being anticipated. Those concerned know that opencast operations can now be extended under private licence from 25,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes. They know that private mines can be extended in terms of the people working in them from 30 people to 150 people or more.

Already, people are beginning to say that there is money to be had and no doubt some of the money from the Derbyshire mining company that has some proposals on this will be passed to the Tory party. Even if it is only 1 per cent., there is a lot of money to be had and it will probably finish up——

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is a lawyer. He will probably be one of the lawyers who launder the money from the mining companies and the opencast work into the Tory party.

Mr. Ashby: That is a disgraceful and most irregular statement for the hon. Gentleman to make. He should know more about corruption than anybody—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should answer one

[Mr. Ashby]

question. Is there any difference between opencasting on a large scale by British Coal or by companies in the private sector? It is as bad with both. What is the difference?

Mr. Skinner: None.

Mr. Ashby: Which is more efficient?

Mr. Skinner: None. Frankly, the hon. Gentleman has been trying to split hairs all night. He has a problem and is full of guilt. He wants to be able to tell his constituents what he has done about opencasting, so I invite him to join us in the Lobby. He can get rid of all his guilt. Guilt is riddling his body. All that he needs to do is a simple thing that will take only a few minutes. He can walk into the Lobby with us when my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) seeks to put the amendment to the vote. That is all that the hon. Gentleman has to do. Indeed, he could bring some of his Tory friends with him—those Tory Members who are making all the noise and who have crocodile tears pouring from their eyes every time they make such speeches. All that they have to do is to go back to their constituents and say, "Judge me by what I did last night and not on anything else."

I understand the hon. Gentleman's problem, but both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) have a problem in our constituencies in respect of the Slaley site and the Pinnock site. The Slaley site was a real scandal. We had an inquiry and the Labour-controlled county council opposed the proposal as did the Labour-controlled Bolsover district council and the parish councils. We had a massive inquiry. We fought the Coal Board and its expensive lawyers and we won because the inspector said that the board could mine the coal for only 11 seconds a day, and you cannot get a much better victory than that. They put the flags out in Clowne and Barlborough.

What a great victory, but what happens? The Secretary of State sits on it. We thought, "Right oh, we've won," but along comes the new green and friendly Secretary of State for the Environment and the first thing he does when he gets the job is to look at the Barlborough, Clowne and Slaley application and overturn the decision. "Old Fag Ash" supported us, but this green and friendly one has allowed the opencast to proceed.

Both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East condemn the Slaley proposal because it should have gone back to the people. They should have been allowed to decide. There is now another proposal called Pinnock site, most of which falls in the constituency of my hon. Friend.

There are four opencast applications within the space of four miles in those two constituencies. Three are massive applications. It is an absolute disgrace. All this is combined with the closure of pits in these areas and there will be even more.

However, when the pits are closed, opencast operations will take only about one third of the reserves. Two thirds will be lost for ever because, once opencast begins, it will not be possible to drift or bore a mine. The coal is lost forever. Two thirds of the coal that belongs to the nation will be completely sterilised. That is short-termism. It means that someone can make a quick buck and line the pockets of those in the Tory party and the opencast executive, but large areas of coal reserves will be lost to the nation forever.

On top of that, there is the problem at Arkwright, a drift mine that was closed recently. Methane gas then poured into the houses in the village and although many families had to be evacuated, British Coal is now saying that it will not pay compensation. I put it on the record before the matter goes to court and becomes sub judice —and this is probably the last chance that I shall have —that I am saying to the Secretary of State, "Look into the Arkwright case." I mentioned this matter several times when the right hon. Gentleman was Leader of the House. Now, in his new job, I am asking him to say to British Coal, "Be decent and honourable and pay out compensation to the families in Arkwright." I repeat that families in my constituency had to leave their homes for weeks because of the methane gas that escaped from that drift mine after it was closed.

8.45 pm

There is no doubt that we must vote for the amendment. There is no question about the fact that we do not want Tories coming here, rabbitting on about how much they oppose opencast, but then sneaking away in the night. If those Tory Members really mean it, they have a great opportunity. They can join us in the Lobby and then go back to Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and all the other places before they are defeated in the next general election and say that they used their voices and followed them with their votes. That is the opportunity that is presented to them tonight. I hope that some of them have the guts to take it.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said, the hon. Members for Leicester, North-West (Mr. Ashby), and for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, both spoke passionately against opencast mining. It will be extremely interesting to see whether they have the courage of their conviction in following their voices into the Lobby.

Mr. Ashby: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that what I said was that it is inevitable that the coal will have to be extracted, but that it must be extracted under strict conditions, taking full account of the environment? That is what I said, and that is what the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) failed to understand. The coal is there and has to come out some time, but only under the strictest of conditions.

Mr. Fisher: I am sad that the hon. Gentleman is now trying to talk his way out of what I took to be a speech that was extremely criticical of opencast mining.

The ground on which the hon. Gentleman and the Member for Broxtowe criticised opencast mining was the destruction that it caused to the rural environment and to beautiful places. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and others talked about the destruction that is caused to communities. I wish to make a short contribution about the damage and destruction that opencast mining can do to urban areas in the middle of our cities.

At present, the opencast executive has an application to mine 650 acres right in the middle of the city of Stoke-on-Trent on a site called the China site, which is

surrounded by thousands of homes. It is right in the middle of one of the largest cities in this country. The devastation to that community and to the city will be great. That is why I am speaking against the extraordinary tenfold increase in the licences from 25,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes, and against opencasting in recreational and enclosed land. Those 650 acres comprise scrubland that has always been open land, right in the heart of our city. It is one of the few lungs in our city, but the opencast executive now proposes to take 3 million tonnes out of that site, which I repeat is in the middle of one of this country's largest cities.

The executive will work to a depth of over 300 ft. At present, there is no road access to the site. It is proposed to take 3 million tonnes of coal out of the site by road, right through the heart of Stoke-on-Trent. When the project was announced 12 months ago, the opencast executive said that it was willing to go ahead only because it had a willing partner in the local city council. When it leaked its plans, it met, not surprisingly, with total opposition from every resident of the city, from everyone who was interested in the environment and from both the district council and the county council. The executive could not find a single supporter for its plans in north Staffordshire.

In spite of the assurance that the director of the opencast executive gave to me, that he was going ahead only because he believed that he had a willing partner, the plans will proceed. The day after tomorrow, the executive will launch a slightly modified plan for only 165 acres over the next four years and a mere 1 million tonnes. It is interesting to note the relationship between that decision and clause 4.

There will be public consultation about the plans and, again, they will meet total opposition. I ask the Under-Secretary of State to make several points clear when he responds to the debate. Is it not significant when everyone in an urban community such as Stoke-on-Trent is completely opposed to a project? Should not those voices be taken into account? Should not it be taken into account that both local authorities reject the plans? Is the middle—not the edge—of one of the largest cities in the country a suitable site for extracting 3 million tonnes of coal?

If that were planned for the middle of London—for example, in Hyde Park—would the Government give permission to go ahead? If it were the middle of Manchester, Southampton, Bristol or Winchester, would the Government say that it was perfectly all right to extract 3 million tonnes of coal, although the site is surrounded by residential areas on three sides and by commercial, industrial and retail developments on one side? Is it reasonable to take 3 million tonnes of coal from under people's homes? It is proposed to go right up to the edge of people's gardens.

Opposition Members understand anxieties about the environment and about destroying the green and beautiful parts of the country. To work 3 million tonnes of coal right in the middle of a city in this day and age is equally appalling.

In Stoke-on-Trent we have paid our dues in coal. We have done enough. The whole city is built on a seam and is undermined. The major pit in Stoke-on-Trent, Hanley deep pit, had its main gates on the opposite side of the street to the main department store until the second world war.

For 200 years we have lived with the devastation that coal dust can cause in a community. Virtually every man in Stoke-on-Trent either has white dust on his lungs from pot banks or black dust from working down the pit. In the ward abutting the proposed opencast pit, with which the executive is determined to proceed, 50 per cent. of the men do not live to pick up their pension. We have paid our dues, and many people have paid with their lives. We are now being asked to have a 650-acre opencast mine in the middle of our city. That touches a raw nerve in the people of Stoke-on-Trent and they will not tolerate it.

The Under-Secretary should understand that the changes in clause 4 imply not only the destruction of the countryside and a complete abnegation of the Government's commitment to a green and pleasant environment, important though that is, but the destruction of urban environments. The Government talk about inner-city regeneration. Is it inner-city regeneration to mine 3 million tonnes of coal in the heart of Stoke-on-Trent? The Minister cannot mean that. He should examine the plans and reject them as surely as everyone in Stoke-on-Trent and both local authorities reject them. We have paid enough. That is the reality of the Bill. I hope that the Under-Secretary will understand that when he replies to the debate.

Mr. Harry Barnes: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned north-east Derbyshire in connection with both the Pinnock site—which affects his constituency and mine—and Tom Swain, who formerly lived in Stanfree in his constituency. Stanfree is to be subject to an opencast development. It is a pity that Tom Swain did not live and had that unfortunate accident. He would have been solidly behind the fight to ensure that the opencast mining development does not go ahead.

The Pinnock site has been mentioned previously in the House. It was the subject of an Adjournment debate introduced by my hon. Friend and of a petition that I presented to the House from residents of Mastin Moor on 13 June 1988. Those people live next to the proposed Pinnock site. The usual arguments against opencast mining, such as the disruption that it causes and its dangers, were presented earlier in this debate and were listed in the petition. The petition was responded to by the Department of the Environment, but such petitions should also be examined carefully by the Department of Energy, because such opencast sites will be affected by the Bill.

Opencast developments face a problem, in that the conditions for such developments have already been weakened in a circular issued 18 months ago by the Department of the Environment in connection with planning permission. It has become increasingly difficult for local authorities that have objections to granting planning permission for opencast mining, to act within the rules to block applications. There have been attempts to ensure that planning permission is squeezed through at local level and does not go to appeal or a planning inquiry, which in many cases overturns the local planning decision.

In an earlier debate I mentioned the problems with opencasting that arise from the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. In order to compete with foreign coal, the Coal Board and the private sector companies will promote a smaller number of deep mines and super pits at the expense of other pits. They will also go over to opencast mining developments in a cavalier manner.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

That is particularly the case in the areas that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover represent. My constituency has an odd structure, the eastern side being similar to the constituency of Bolsover and the western side being more like the constituency of Derbyshire, West in its rural aspects and in its towns. It is divided politically, the western side being more strongly Conservative and the eastern side more strongly Labour.

However, the opencast issue is a great unifying force. The opencast executive has given me a huge map of the area showing how opencast mining will be developed. Those developments will be similar to those described by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover. Pits such as the Renishaw Park pit, in former industrial areas, have been closed, and sites such as the Pinnock site will, when it is developed, take coal that would otherwise have been taken by the Renishaw Park pit.

However, the western side of my constituency, with its agricultural land and commuter towns, also has fantastic potential for opencast mining. In the 17th and 18th centuries, it was full of cutrills and drift mines. The map that I have shows not only the areas already mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, but many others in both our constituencies, with fantastic potential for opencast development.

9 pm

Dronfield in north-east Derbyshire is separated from Sheffield by a small strip of land known as the green belt, but that is all on coal, so it could soon become a black belt, with a host of transport problems and other forms of disruption for the communities in the area.

I could travel round my constituency from parish to parish showing the extent of the problems in the two regions that I have described. I will do everything that I can to stop opencast mining being developed by British Coal or its successors, or by private developers, ripping open my constituency and causing problems for north-east Derbyshire, such as those that existed in the constituency of the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby).

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Tony Baldry): This has been a lengthy and interesting debate upon this group of amendments on opencast mining in which hon. Members on both side of the House have taken part. I want to make it clear to each and every one of them that the Government believe that opencast mining must strike a proper balance between national economic needs and environmental concerns. That is clearly paramount.

The House should recall that Britain's opencast industry is an important natural resource, producing coal of excellent quality, low in ash and chlorine. A substantial proportion is used for blending with deep-mined coal that would otherwise be unusable. Several major coal consumers have tight specifications that can be met only by opencast coal. Their business would otherwise go to other fuels or to imports.

Opencast coal is also one of the cheapest forms of energy available to Britain. Its costs are, typically, a third less than those of deep-mined coal, which means that it can compete with anything on the international market. That source of energy is a real import beater and any Government who turned their back on it would be irresponsible.

However, I fully recognise that an environmental penalty is attached to opencast coal. That is why the Government introduced new planning guidelines on opencasting 18 months ago which spell out more fully and more tightly than ever before the environmental criteria that operators must meet. The mineral planning guidelines then issued spelled out more fully than ever before the environmental criteria, including restoration, that have to be met, and the Government have also insisted on full environmental impact assessments on all but the smallest sites.

The new guidance represents a proper and durable balance between the interests of energy supply and the environment. Tighter regulations also prevent time wasting in the planning process because environmentally unacceptable applications will not be put forward.

We should recall that in the case of small sites that have traditionally been worked under licence, the present 25,000 tonnes statutory limit on their size has led to a piecemeal working of opencast deposits. That small surface area has limited operators' ability to adopt imaginative schemes of restoration. The Bill lifts that obstacle and thereby reduces the period of disruption to the community and gives greater scope for even higher standards of restoration. I am glad to tell the House that local authority representatives in Scotland and England have welcomed the new, tighter guidance.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Does not the Minister recognise that when there are larger opencast sites there will be more transport on the road because transporters will be in use? The bigger the output, the more transport there will be on the roads.

Mr. Baldry: The fact that opencasting is subject to full planning procedures seems to have been missed out of the debate. It is important for the House to recall why we have been discussing this group of amendments on opencast mining. Doubts were expressed, initially by the Select Committee on Energy in its report in 1987, about British Coal's practice of licensing opencast sites of up to 35,000 tonnes, against the statutory limit of 25,000 tonnes or not greatly in excess of 25,000 tonnes. The Government have taken the first legislative opportunity since that report to remove any doubt by raising the limit to 250,000 tonnes. The Bill retains the flexibility for British Coal to issue licences for amounts not likely to exceed, or greatly to exceed, 250,000 tonnes. Such flexibility is needed because we can never be precise about how much coal is available in a particular site.

Mr. Ashby: Do I understand my hon. Friend to say that, as I suggested, British Coal has been breaking the law for years?

Mr. Baldry: It was because the Select Committee drew attention to the fact that there was uncertainty about how licences were being issued that we took the first legislative opportunity to clarify the position. I hope that that clarification will be much welcomed by the House.

Some hon. Members expressed concern about the issuing of consecutive licences. I would not expect British Coal to issue consecutive licences in the same deposit. Where a licence for up to 250,000 tonnes in a large deposit

of coal is being considered, I would expect the corporation to have regard, among other factors, to the likelihood and desirability, under current mineral planning policy, of the deposit being extracted as a whole under a single operation.

Each of the amendments in the group is interesting. However, for reasons which I hope I shall make clear, they are all superfluous and unnecessary. Amendment No. 4 was first raised in committee by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) when he asked my predecessor, now the Minister for Housing and Planning, for an assurance that approval for an opencast site would not be given if the site was covered by a pre-1840 private Enclosure Act. I cannot give such an assurance. Even if the condition relating to hedgerows, which the hon. Member for Westworth has discovered in some pre-1840 Acts, is to be found—it is far from clear that it is to be found——

Mr. Hardy: I have made the point—but the Minister appears to be disregarding it—that obviously, I have not studied all 4,000 private Enclosure Acts. However, I have studied, or had studied for me, a substantial proportion, dealing with various parts of the country. They all contain the clear, perpetual requirement that those hedgerows enclosing the fields and taking over the common land should be maintained for all time. The Government cannot have their cake and eat it. Either they respect the law or they do not. If the Government respect the law, the Minister cannot continue to maintain his evasiveness.

Mr. Baldry: Even if the Enclosure Acts contain conditions relating to hedgerows, it is questionable whether any persons other than adjoining landowners could ever enforce them. That matter is for the planning authority to take into account when issuing the planning consents that all opencast sites require. If the hon. Member for Wentworth contends that the Enclosure Acts continue to have legal force, amendment No. 4 is unnecessary. If they have no such effect, it would be improper to extend them in the way that the hon. Gentleman proposes. In either case, amendment No. 4 is superfluous.

As to amendment No. 5, I emphasise that proper and responsible restoration of opencast sites is of paramount importance and should be a fundamental consideration when appraising any proposal for opencast mining. Amendment No. 5, which requires applicants for exploration and production licences to make undertakings relating to site restoration is, again, unnecessary and superfluous. Such requirements are already dealt with in planning legislation. A local planning authority can, and generally does, attach restoration conditions to any planning consents. The authority also usually requires an applicant to provide an environmental impact assessment. The Government's current planning guidelines deal specifically with restoration standards.

As British Coal does not issue production licences unless prior planning consent has been obtained, no purpose would be served by including restoration requirements in the licence, and to do so could cause confusion if they were inconsistent with conditions stipulated by a local planning authority.

British Coal also requires licensees to deposit a bond to ensure the fulfilment of restoration requirements. The current practice, whereby British Coal issues a licence on condition that planning consent conditions are met, is perfectly satisfactory. It places planning issues where they belong—with local planning authorities—and avoids the risk of confusion by requiring only one set of restoration conditions. It is a matter for local planning authorities to ensure compliance with any conditions that they attach to consents.

Amendment No. 1 requires applicants for production licences to deposit a bond with local authorities to cover estimated restoration costs. Such a provision is also unnecessary and superfluous because local authorities can effectively already require such a bond to be lodged with them as part of the planning consent process. As, again, British Coal will not consider an application unless the applicant for a production licence has prior planning consent, there is no need for any amendment.

In view of the proper balance that the Government have introduced in respect of opencasting, and having heard my explanation as to why the amendments are unnecessary and superfluous, I hope that the Opposition will feel able to withdraw them.

Mr. Dobson: I should have welcomed the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) to his new job earlier. I may add that he has proved to be a bit of a disappointment already. We had hoped that Baldrick would come up with a cunning plan, but he has failed us.

Our amendment would require any applicant for planning permission to place a bond with the local authority against the possibility of going broke or deliberately not restoring the land properly afterwards. The bond placed with British Coal does not do that, because British Coal has other financial relationships with those private opencast operators and may use the bond for those purposes, rather than to look after the local environment and neighbourhood. The Opposition think that amendment No. 1 is a sensible amendment and we do not understand why the Government cannot accept it. All the Conservative Back-Benchers who spoke thought that it was a good idea.

9.15 pm

We think that it is a good idea and we want to put amendment No. 1 to the vote.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 2, line 27, at end insert—

'(1A) After subsection (2) of that section there shall be inserted—

"(2AA) Applicants for a licence under subsection (2)(c) above shall undertake to deposit a bond, with the relevant local authority, sufficient to cover the costs of the restoration of the land affected by operations under that licence as estimated by that local authority."'—*[Mr. Dobson.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 161, Noes 229.

Division No. 37] **[9.15**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Bradley, Keith
Allen, Graham	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Anderson, Donald	Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Armstrong, Hilary	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Ashton, Joe	Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Barron, Kevin	Buchan, Norman
Battle, John	Buckley, George J.
Beckett, Margaret	Caborn, Richard
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Callaghan, Jim
Bermingham, Gerald	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Boyes, Roland	Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*

Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Patnick, Irvine
Raffan, Keith
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew

Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Barron: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 40, at end insert—

'(2A) After subsection (2) of that section there shall be inserted—

"( ) A licence under subsection (2)(a) above shall not be granted to

(a) any person who, or company which, has been convicted of an offence relating to its colliery activities in the relevant period, or

(b) any company in which the controlling interest is held by a person who, or company which, has been convicted of an offence relating to its colliery activities in the relevant period.

( ) For the purposes of subsection (2B) above the 'relevant period' shall be defined as five years prior to the date of the application for a licence under subsection (2)(a) above, or the date upon which this Act received its Royal Assent, whichever shall be later.".'.

We are concerned about the lack of regard to safety and health accompanying the increase in the number of private mineworkers. It cannot be denied that the safety record of the private mining industry is appalling and would not be tolerated in most industries. On Second Reading and in Committee, we discussed the ratio between major reportable accidents, and fatal accidents, in the private sector and those in mines operated by British Coal.

In Committee last week, the Minister referred to a press statement issued on 8 January by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) about the number of underground private-sector mineworkers. In order to ensure that the statistics used were safe, my hon. Friend assumed that about 4,000 were employed, but the next day the then Under-Secretary of State said that he believed that the figure was about 1,700. That can be found in column *121* of the *Official Report*, Standing Committee A, 9 January 1990.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras received from the Secretary of State a written reply to a parliamentary question today in which figures were given from the British Coal Corporation's annual report for 1988-89 showing that only 1,524 people were working underground in the private licensed sector. In other words, the record that we regarded as bad when we began to look at the statistics for the private sector is shown to be even worse than we thought.

9.30 pm

The Government say that we exaggerate the concern that is felt and that coal mining is, by its nature, a dangerous job. That is so, and that is why we are seeking to ensure that safety standards are of the highest.

The amendment would prevent anyone who had been convicted under the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 from being granted a licence to mine for coal. That is not to ask for a great deal, for we are again seeking an assurance that safety standards will be paramount and that they will be considered as the first priority for everyone in the mining industry, be that British Coal or the Federation of Small Mines of Great Britain in the private sector. We have not been convinced that that priority exists. The utmost protection must be given to those who work in that sector of the industry.

Many questions about the Bill have been put to the Department, and we still await answers to them. For example, it appears that British Coal was not consulted before the changes were proposed. In a British Coal press release following the publication of the Bill, it was said that British Coal would be having discussions with the Government. Have those discussions taken place, and if so, what was the outcome?

We have asked whether the Department of Energy or any other Government Department has discussed the issue with the mines and quarries inspectorate, which has statutory responsibility for the upkeep of safety standards in British coal mines. I hope that, when responding to the debate on the amendment, the Secretary of State will answer our questions. Until now, we have received only assertions, which have gone no way to allaying our fears about safety and health in an expanded private licensed sector.

The mines and quarries inspectorate shares our fears. For that reason, in the summer of 1988, it initiated a meeting with the Federation of Small Mines and gave a damning indictment of the standards of safety in that sector of the industry. In a newspaper report dated 4 October 1988, Mr. Albert Davies, a deputy chief inspector of mines, was reported as having said in relation to that indictment of safety practices in that sector:

"Professional standards of management in licensed mines must improve. All too often the reports record very poor mechanical, electrical and mining standards. There is no excuse for these or the fact that managers often do not understand what proper standards should be."

The principal district inspector of mines and quarries in the south-western district wrote to all licensed coal mine owners and managers in 1988 instructing them to improve safety standards.

Is it any wonder that we are concerned about the amount of regard that is given to safety in that sector when, in response to such criticism, the chairman of the Federation of Small Mines said on 3 October 1988:

"I think it would be an error to focus too much on safety."

Does the Secretary of State take that view, or does he agree that those who operate in that sector must be proven to have safety as their first consideration?

In the last 10 years, the Government have allowed safety standards to fall and to become subordinate to cutting costs and increasing profit. In that period, there

have been nine convictions under the Mines and Quarries Act, at least two of which were the result of deaths in that sector.

It would be interesting to know how many of those nine prosecutions were mounted after an accident had occurred and how many, if any, were mounted after the mines and quarries inspectors had found something not up to standard. If, as I suspect, most, if not all, of those convictions occurred following an accident or a death, the Opposition's fears about that sector and whether we should be discussing its expansion are justified.

Incidentally, another written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras contained the information about the prosecutions over the past 10 years. In every one of those nine cases, the owners of the mines were found guilty as charged. The fines totalled more than £31,000. In one case, a fine of only £1,500 was imposed after a death occurred leading to a conviction under the Mines and Quarries Act 1954. It does not seem to me or my hon. Friends, whether or not they have worked in coal mining, that that would be much of a deterrent after the loss of a life after breaking the law. That is a paltry fine. We have been repeatedly told that raising the numbers that can work underground in private mines will make the pits safer, as there will be investment in modern technology.

Many Conservative Members, although sadly not Ministers, accept that the private sector seems to think that such investment will take place only if there is total deregulation. Is it not more to the point that the raising of the employment limit is a sop to those in the City and on the Conservative Back Benches who made it quite plain on Second Reading that they were pressing the Government for more deregulation and privatisation? It is just a taster of what they have in mind for the industry in future.

The former Under-Secretary of State told us—almost as his parting shot from the Department of Energy—in a press release from the Department of Energy that the new provisions

"should also provide opportunities for new employment through working remnant coal at closed pits".

That seems a contradiction in terms, but given the fact that that statement was made in a press release from the Department of Energy, perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us tonight exactly what lay behind the comments in the press release which were not made on Second Reading nor in Committee when the Minister used some of the press release.

A statement was sent out to the press telling us that the Government are now talking about

"working remnant coal at closed pits".

Very few pits operated by British Coal would be accessible for private coal mine operators—most of them are too deep. The pits that have already closed have put that coal out of reach. It is a great loss to the coal industry and to the nation that those reserves have been sterilised, perhaps for good. Are we to assume that, in the few cases where it might be possible, the private mine operator will inherit the benefits of all the investments made by British Coal, or rather the British public, in sinking shafts and maintaining them over the years? What will happen if private operators take over mines that are running down production?

Will the Secretary of State tell us—I see that he is swapping notes with the new Under-Secretary of State—exactly what is meant by 150 people in clause 4? Does it mean that 150 people will be underground at a particular mine on a particular day? Does it mean that there will be a limit on the number of people underground but no limit on the number of people who can be employed at a particular mine? As opposed to the present situation, when there may be 30 people at a mine, could there be 150 people at a mine on different shifts? It is important that we have answers to those questions, as it is not certain exactly what will happen.

The Secretary of State may be aware that, in Committee, we said that it was impossible to find out exactly how many people work in that sector of the industry—hence the three misleading statements about the total work force, or exactly how many people work in each individual coal mine. That seems wrong under the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908, which states that people who work in a coal mine should be registered.

Consequently, the Department should be able to answer questions similar to the question that my hon Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras put to the Secretary of State for Employment:

"if he will list the private licensed coal mines known to the mines and quarries inspectorate, giving the numbers employed below ground in each case."

The reply was:

"Following is a list of private licensed mines held by Her Majesty's inspectorate. Figures for persons employed at individual mines are not readily available."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1990; Vol. 165, *c. 64*.]

We argued in Committee that that would be a breach of coal-mining regulations under the 1908 Act. Given that the Secretary of State intends to expand by ten times the number of people who can work in these mines, what guarantee have we that the regulation will be complied with? We have no idea how many people will be working in the private mines.

We are not satisfied by the complacent attitude of Government spokesmen that everything will be all right, and that particular attention is not needed. It is abhorrent to us that a sector so damned by the mines and quarries inspectorate should be given freedom to employ more workers without prior evidence of a commitment to uphold safety standards.

That is why we believe that amendment No. 2 will not guide the Department of Energy for ever but that it is necessary now to protect lives and people's safety. The private licensed sector should be tightly regulated. It has a deplorable safety record. It is difficult for the mines inspectorate to keep it under control. Until we have the safeguards that are in the amendment, we shall oppose clause 4 and all its implications.

Mr. Allen McKay: I want to relate what my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) has said to health and safety and problems in small mines. I recall that on Second Reading the Minister said that the expansion of the number of people in small mines would take account of the use of modern machinery. That raises some questions.

The manager of a small mine does not need a manager's certificate; he can have a lesser certificate. If the number of people employed in small mines is to be expanded, will the person in charge of the mine need a manager's certificate? If so, will the person who is second in charge need a qualified under-manager's certificate? If a manager is responsible for a mine for 24 hours, even when he is not there, there has to be someone in charge who is fully qualified. If private mines are to have electrical and mechanical equipment such as is used in deep mines, will

there be an electrical engineer and a mechanical engineer in charge? Will there be a second in command to look after the electrical and mechanical equipment? Will those people be qualified under the Mines and Quarries Act 1954? Will the manager and the under-manager be qualified under that Act?

If the small mines sector is to expand, we must consider carefully the safety of the people who work in the mines. There must be a proper management structure. I should like answers to the questions that I have put.

Mr. Eadie: We may be reaching the fag-end of debates on the Bill, but this is an important one. Safety is of paramount importance in the mining industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) said that he had worked for private mine owners. I started in the pits as a boy of 14 in 1934, when the safety record of private mines was deplorable. Thousands of miners have been killed during this century, most during the period of private ownership. I remember working as a boy at the coal face, and I remember some of the things that were done in the interests of producing coal at a profit. We have heard much about producing coal at a profit, but many good men were killed at that time.

To some extent, the amendment is a test. This debate on safety will be nothing compared to the debate that we shall have on the Government's proposals to privatise the coal industry.

9.45 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) said that sanctions must be placed on safety. The Minister may think that it is a sacrifice for private mine owners to have to comply with safety regulations, but the history of safety in the mining industry has been born from sacrifice. I am old enough to remember when we had to introduce sanctions on safety in the days of private enterprise. We made great personal sacrifices. If a man was killed in the pit, what sanctions were we able to apply? We decided that if that happened no one would work in the pit on that day.

My wages when I began working in the pit were 2s 9d a day. A man on day wages received 7s 6d a day. Those fortunate enough to work at the coal face earned nine or 10 bob a day. To lose a day's wages was a great personal sacrifice, but we owed that to our colleagues. We said, "If the private coal owners are not prepared to look after our safety, our only sanction is to harm their profits." No man worked on a day when a man was killed. Unfortunately, if we consider the history of the mining industry, we are talking about not one man but dozens being killed. I remember the Gresford disaster, when 200 men were killed.

One of the great achievements when the mines were nationalised was that we stopped that slaughter in the industry. We were also able to build up the independence of the mines and quarries inspectorate, which was respected by miners. They knew that it could apply certain sanctions and that safety would prevail.

The amendment tests the Government's sincerity. Do they want to see slaughter in the industry as more private mines open? The Minister shakes his head, but we shall test his sincerity. The amendment places sanctions on people who ignore regulations. They are not fit to become owners of these mines. This is the test. Incidentally, the Government should have a close look at deregulation, about which I am sure that my hon. Friends will talk later. It will make it easier for private owners to operate mines in relation to the Mines and Quarries Act 1954.

I feel emotional about this subject, because some of my family have been killed in the pits. If I do nothing else tonight, I owe it to them to make this contribution to the debate.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: It has been well documented on Second Reading and in Committee that the private mining sector has an appalling record on safety. I said in Committee, when we were debating raising the manpower in private pits from 30 to 150, that I foresaw disaster occurring somewhere in the mines because of the attitude of some private mine owners. I gave examples of many incidents that were described by mineworkers. Some were horror stories that would make one's hair stand on end if one were a miner working in the British coal industry.

I want to illustrate why private mine owners should be severely watched when they open a mine. I want to quote from the case of a 51-year-old fellow who was killed at the Robin Rock pit in Northumberland. It emerged at the inquest that

"electrical equipment at this mine had been poorly maintained".

Danger signs had apparently been seen for three weeks beforehand. An electrical junction box had caught fire, and sparks and smoke had come from it. Fortunately, the men managed to get out of the pit in time. Any fire in a mine is a reportable offence to the mines and quarries inspectorate, but on that occasion, the mine owners did not inform the inspectorate. Apparently they thought that as everyone had got out of the pit, they need not report it.

The same thing happened three or four weeks later. The box caught fire and smoke came out. Unfortunately, one of the old fellows did not make it and was suffocated by the smoke. The three brothers who owned the mine were prosecuted, and each was fined £1,000. When they were asked at the inquest whether they had an electrical engineer, they replied, "No." When they were asked whether they had an electrician, they said that they did. When they were asked what his qualifications were, they said that he had served his time at another colliery as a mining apprentice.

We have had a great debate. Safety in the mines is an emotive subject and I am sure that we shall return to it. With my 20-odd years' experience of the mines, I ask the Minister seriously to consider new laws for the private mines. He—not the Opposition, who hope to win in the Lobby—is increasing the private mines. The responsibility will lie on the Minister's head. I shall never let him forget what I have said when there is a disaster in the private mines after the level of manpower is raised from 30 to 150.

Mr. Hardy: Given the position adopted by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), I should be foolish to seek to make a long speech. Nevertheless, it is appropriate that I should remind the House that I am sponsored by the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, the trade union that represents those employed underground in the British coal mining industry, who have a statutory responsibility for safety. Let us leave aside for a moment all questions of politics and dogma. NACODS is deeply concerned about the extension of private mining. It is the considered view of the NACODS leadership—people who have a great deal of

[Mr. Hardy]

experience—that the Government's proposals will lead to more people being killed and maimed. That must surely be a serious matter.

I know that we shall not persuade the Government to withdraw the proposal, but although the Minister has only just taken office, he is aware of the points that we have made concerning the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908—a subject to which I referred twice in Committee. That Act is not being enforced. The Government have already had several weeks in which to ensure that the Act was being enforced. I want an assurance from the Minister that no private mine will be allowed to operate under present arrangements or in future unless that regulation has been put into practice. This is another example of the law being observed when the Government want it to be observed because it suits them. In this case, common sense and the need to save limbs and lives make it essential to ensure that the provision is put into effect without further delay.

Mr. Lofthouse: I hope to be able to persuade the Minister to accept this modest amendment. I certainly deem it to be modest; I should have liked it to go much further.

I realise that Conservative Members may feel that people of my generation—my hon. Friends the Members for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) and for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes)—speak with some bias on these matters because of our experience in the privatised coal industry. Conservative Members, who have never had such experience, are probably justified in questioning our views.

I wish to outline briefly my own experience both of present-day technology in the mining industry and of licensed mines in Britain. In my experience, the American coalfield, which as we all know is privatised, does not bear comparison with the British coalfield and its industry. I can say to the House with all sincerity that the American coal mines that I have been down are the most unsafe that I have ever visited in all my experience—since the age of 14—in the mining industry.

I have been down American mines—with ladies working in them, incidentally—where, on reaching the end of a coal face, my party has had to be brought back by what we in this country call a deputy. The normal system in this country is to go through one roadway on to the coalface and then through another roadway at the end of the coalface, which is called the return. In America we got to the end of the face and had to turn back.

Conservative Members who accompanied us on that trip did not take exception, because they did not realise what was happening. We had to be brought back the length of the face because there was no other way out. There was only one way in and out. That is privatisation: the firm was saving the expense of a second roadway. I have never before seen such unsafe conditions. It was the only time that I have ever experienced fear in a coal mine.

The conditions in private mines in this country were drawn to the attention of the House by the 28 January 1987 report of the Select Committee on Energy. Paragraph 171 states:

"Other operators in the industry as well as BC have a responsibility to safeguard their workers' safety. Figures given to us show that 1 in 100 workers in the private deep mines suffered a fatal or major injury in 1985-86, compared with 1 in 187 in BC's pits."

That accident rate is a fact. The accident rate in private mines in this country was nearly double the rate in British Coal's mines. Incidentally, only 40 per cent. of American mines are unionised, and only those mines record accidents. Their accident figures are 2·5 per cent. to 4 per cent. higher than British Coal's.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Coal Industry Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Lofthouse: I challenge any hon. Member to produce accident figures relating to any country that operates a private mining sector and compare them with British Coal's figures. I should be very surprised if an hon. Member can do that.

I well remember on 19 December 1939 going down a big hole in the ground in Featherstone in West Yorkshire. I was a 14-year-old boy at the time. I saw conditions in those days that were not fit for people to work in. I saw circumstances in which men were criminally killed because there were no roof supports for protection. Within three months of my going down that mine, driving a pony, I arrived at the coal face one morning and saw a man lying dead because he had had nothing to support himself with. The cemetery at Featherstone in Yorkshire is full of such men.

Only in recent times, Mr. Kenneth Moses, who was a technical director of British Coal and, I suppose, can be recognised as one of the senior mining engineers in the country, was questioned by the Select Committee. I asked:

"How do you explain the accident rate in the private pits in this country compared with British Coal?"

Mr. Moses replied:

"Well, because we are using two entirely different technologies."

He can say that again.

"The private pits are using the technology we were using in 1947, we are using highly mechanised modernised technology, and the way in which we have reduced accidents is, in fact, by the application of mining engineering technology."

Mr. Moses conceded that the high accident rate in private mines in this country was because we were mining coal with pre-1947 technology.

It is one thing to organise and control a mine with 30 men with pre-1947 technology, but it is another thing to expand to 150 men without that technology. Small mines will not be able to maintain British Coal's safety record, because the capital development which previously enabled British Coal to supply mechanisation for coal faces and so on will not exist. The Bill, which extends the number of men in private mines, will, as sure as night follows day, create a situation in which men in the mines will be in much more danger than their British Coal counterparts.

One can say, "Well, they are protected by the inspectorate." It is true that the inspectorate visits the mines and that the mine owners must carry out the inspector's instructions. However, I remind the Secretary of State and the House that it is the self-same inspectorate that is inspecting the private mines now that is inspecting British Coal mines, yet the accident record in private mines has nearly doubled. It is not an argument for being protected by the inspectorate.

I hope that these arguments and the personal experiences that have been put to the Secretary of State tonight will lead him to consider—and, I hope, concede—this modest amendment.

Mr. Wakeham: It has been a short and important debate. I had been, and am, going to quote exactly the same remarks that were made in the Select Committee report by Ken Moses, as were quoted by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), but perhaps towards the end of the debate we were nearer to getting a better understanding of the problems. Of course I understand the sincerity, the feelings and the passions that are raised by safety questions and by history. I hope that hon. Members will hear what I have to say, which I claim modestly to be stated with as much sincerity as that with which they made their remarks.

The Opposition's position on the licensing of mines seems to remain the same as that stated in their comments that were attached to the end of the Select Committee on Energy's 1986-87 report into the coal industry. They believe that the manpower limit should remain at the levels set in 1946. In other words, they wish to condemn private sector mineworkers to the working methods and the safety levels of the 1940s. On the other hand, we believe that the most effective way of making mines safer for underground workers is through mechanisation.

This is borne out by British Coal's own experience. Mr. Ken Moses, British Coal's technology director, pointed out recently when giving evidence to the Select Committee on Energy—in exactly the same piece of evidence quoted by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford—that the private pits are using the technology of 1947 and that British Coal is not. He said that British Coal has improved the accident record

"by the application of mining engineering technology."

I believe that to be absolutely right. It is the reason for our wish to increase manning levels in the licensed sector. I have no doubt that the out-of-date working practices that licensed mines are currently forced to use because of their size prevents them from improving their safety standards. I accept that the accident rate at licensed mines does not compare favourably with that at British Coal's mines, but that is because their mining practices have not kept pace with technological developments. *[Interruption.]* We heard what Opposition Members had to say, so I think that I should be allowed to speak.

The reports of the mines and quarries inspectorate on accidents in the licensed mines sector suggest that many of the fatal accidents reported would not have happened had modern mechanised group support and conveyance systems been employed. The investment required for that can be generated only by mines that are larger than the existing ones. The need to increase productivity by multi-shift working or by working two faces means that more men are needed, which means more mining jobs—jobs in areas where they are needed.

Of course we wish to see improvements in licensed mine safety. We believe that the improvement in the manpower limit will enable modern, mechanised and, above all, safer pits to be developed in the licensed sector.

The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and others have raised with me the question of the numbers of men employed in licensed mines. I shall do my best to give an answer, but it is not the clearest answer that I have ever given in my life. However, I repeat that I shall do my best.

The hon. Member for Wentworth asked about the exact number of people employed in licensed mines and related that to the provisions of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. I should make it clear that the 1908 Act required that a register be kept of persons going below ground and returning to the surface, so that a record is kept of the hours spent below ground. It may be a useful guide to the numbers of persons employed in the mine, but it is not a register of persons employed; nor has it ever been that.

As I have said, the hon. Member for Wentworth was also most concerned to have a cut-and-dried answer to his question about the numbers of people employed in licensed mines. I am sorry that I cannot give a precise answer to that question. The work force in licensed mines changes frequently. Unlike for British Coal's mines, there is no central organisation to collect figures.

Not all licensed mines belong to the Federation of Small Mines of Great Britain. Her Majesty's mines and quarries inspectorate makes inquiries to ensure that the numbers employed at the mine and the qualifications of officials are consistent with the requirements of the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and associated legislation. The inspectorate does not keep detailed records of the numbers employed at each mine.

As the licensing authority for private coal mines, British Coal must satisfy itself that the mining plans submitted with a licensed application could be undertaken by 30 men or fewer. Once the mine is in operation, it is for the owner to ensure that he complies with the requirements of the licence. British Coal will have to consider carefully whether a licence should be revoked at a pit where it is discovered that there has been an infringement of the licensing agreement.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) asked about the qualifications of managers. I can answer his question simply. The basic principle is that the management qualifications required for a given size of mine are the same for a licensed mine as for a British Coal mine. A manager would require a first-class certificate at a mine employing more than 30 people.

Mr. Allen McKay: I accept that, but is the Secretary of State saying that there will be 150 men per shift over three shifts? If there are 150 men per shift, a structure of under-managers will be needed too.

Mr. Wakeham: I shall not go further than what I said, because that is what I was advised. The same regulations, under the same Act, will apply whether the mine is a private licensed mine or a British Coal mine.

The amendment was not referred to very often in the debate. I recognise the importance of the issues with which it deals. I recognise that mine safety must be paramount. I agree that mines should be run by those fitted to do so. It would be inappropriate to use the Bill to impose mandatory sanctions on owners for offences not directly related to its subject. The safety regulations covering the mining industry are part of the heath and safety at work legislation.

The amendment does not distinguish sufficiently between serious and trivial offences. It would be iniquitous to put a company out of business for committing a relatively minor misdemeanour. I recognise the force of the argument behind the amendments. The most effective and proper way to deal with the issue is through the licensing process, not legislation. That is precisely how we deal with

[Mr. Wakeham]

the problem in licensing North Sea oil operations, where safety is equally vital. The statutes covering those licences do not contain requirements similar to those in the amendment, but applicants' safety records are taken into account in the licensing process.

I shall draw the attention of British Coal to what has been said and ask it to take into account any criminal record of the mine manager or owner in any application for a licence or renewal of a licence. I cannot accept the amendment, although I understand the reasons for it.

10.15 pm

Mr. Barron: I am dissatisfied with the Secretary of State's explanation, as I am sure many of my hon. Friends are. He argued that mechanisation was the answer. No Opposition Member or anyone in the mining industry would disagree with that. He talked about running two faces of a coal mine with a limit of 150. But when Marine colliery in south Wales was mothballed, Mr. Crispian Hotson of Ryan International said that 150 would not be adequate to run such a colliery with fewer than three coal faces.

The Minister's argument does not stand up. At no stage since the introduction of the Bill have the Government ever spoken to British Coal, which issues the licences and should police that sector, about the implications of clause 4 and raising the figure from 30 to 150.

We still do not know how many people work in the private licensed sector. We have had three different figures in the three weeks that the Bill has been considered in Committee. The Minister says that the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908, which we and everybody else, including the inspectors, believed gave the number, as a useful guide. But that is not good enough when people are working in the same environment that existed pre-1947, when three or four coal miners were killed every day in British coal mines. We cannot accept an extension of that.

At least 18 counties in Britain, sadly not all with Labour Members of Parliament, have private mines or plan to have private mines. Yet Conservative Members sit in silence when we are debating a measure which will increase fivefold the number of people who can work in private mines.

We do not accept all the Minister's arguments about mechanisation, because that is limited by the number in the Bill. I am not arguing for more. We do not accept that there is any regulation at present of the licensed mine sector; hence the present number of deaths and injuries. Over the past 10 years, there have been nine prosecutions under the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 in the private sector and not one in British Coal mines during the past 10 years. Therefore, the people who work in the private sector now, and who will do so in future, need the protection that the amendment gives, and we shall put it to the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 149, Noes 214.

Division No. 38] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*

Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Patnick, Irvine
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Greg Knight.

Question accordingly negatived.

10.30 pm

Mr. Wakeham: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I shall be brief, as I do not intend to deal with the detail of the Bill, other than to note that there has been a general welcome for the proposed capital reconstruction of British Coal. We had good debates in Committee on the detailed clauses and, thanks to the Opposition, we have had three good debates today on the issues that concern them—subsidence, opencast mining and licensed mines.

The Bill, together with the power stations' contracts for large tonnages over the next three years, gives British Coal an opportunity to build on the success that it has achieved over the past three years. Against that background, I have asked it to carry out a fundamental review of its business prospects, taking into account the prices achievable by each coalfield and the productivity improvements achievable by each colliery. As I emphasised on Second Reading, continuing strong productivity gains are essential if those opportunities are to be realised. The Bill provides further Government support for British Coal's restructuring programme.

The core of the Bill, is how to deal with the deficiency in British Coal's accounts—which will probably be more than £5 billion and could range up to another £2 billion. I do not claim that our deficiency grant is simply an act of generosity; it is essential if British Coal is to be re-established as a viable business. By valuing each colliery on the basis of its future earnings potential, the industry can establish more clearly than ever before where its future lies. Ultimately the size of the industry will depend upon the efforts of management and men together to maintain the trend of productivity growth and cost reduction.

As I said on Second Reading, given all that, I am confident that the capital reconstruction will provide the industry with the means to compete in the market place of the future, and I commend the Bill to the House.

10.31 pm

Mr. Dobson: I, too, will be brief. On publication of the Bill, and again on Second Reading, we welcomed the Government's proposal in effect to write off the debts of British Coal so that the industry could compete and run its business properly. However, we are suspicious that this write-off is the precursor to the ultimate sell-off of British Coal, which would harm those who work in the British coal industry and the people of Britain in general.

We also welcome the increased provision for redundancy payments, but we regret that the contract that has recently been negotiated—if that is the right word—between British Coal and the electricity generating companies will involve further losses in coal burn, which will inevitably lead to redundancies for which these payments will be necessary.

We remain fundamentally opposed to the proposal for a fivefold increase in the number of people allowed to work below ground in private pits. In terms of safety, private pits are a disgrace. They are four to five times more dangerous than the British Coal collieries. It is preposterous for the Government to launch into that fivefold increase without any serious consultation with any of the people or bodies concerned with the safety of mines.

The National Association of Colliery Managers and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers are utterly opposed to the proposal, as is the National Union of Mineworkers. Even if the Government insist on the increase, because of the known poor safety record of private mines there should be a parallel development and stiffening of the safety provisions covering private mines. If they do not work for 30 people, they certainly will not work for 150.

We have presented proposals to improve safety provision, and the Government have rejected them. I should have thought that a Government who presided at the time of the King's Cross, Piper Alpha and Herald of Free Enterprise disasters, as well as innumerable others, would at least put safety first in the mining industry, but it appears that safety is not one of their priorities. I sincerely hope that Ministers will not be coming to the House within a few months to say, "We got it wrong: if we had taken a bit of notice of people who knew what they were talking about, this disaster would not have come about." Opposition Members do not look for such disasters, but we do fear them.

The Government also propose a tenfold increase in the size of private opencast workings. The new Minister's preposterous justification for that proposal was uncertainty about whether it was lawful for British Coal—blatantly, deliberately and with the agreement of the Department of Energy—to exceed the present limit of 25,000 tonnes and increase production to as much as 35,000 or 40,000 tonnes. To avoid the problem of a marginal increase over what was set down in the statute, he proposed an increase to 250,000 tonnes.

Although, for the sake of argument, we accepted that barmy proposition, we demanded parallel protection for the communities and the environment in areas where opencasting was already in progress and was likely to continue. We have not been assured of such protection; consequently, operators of ragshop, ruinous, rotten, awful opencast workings will be able to do so on 10 times the present scale.

We remain disappointed—and we are sure that the coalfield communities will be at least as disappointed as we are—that the Government have not taken the opportunity to improve the arrangements for compensation for mining subsidence. I understand that the Press Association has put it out on the tapes that the Secretary of State announced great improvements today, and said that all sorts of wondrous things would be done. No doubt all credit is due to the press officer sitting in the Box, but the PA seems to have omitted the fact that almost all the proposals concerned were put to the Government nearly six years ago, and the Government have done nothing about them. We feel that, if the Government are not prepared to introduce provisions to improve subsidence compensation when the House of Lords debates the Bill, they should find time to introduce such provisions in some other part of the threadbare legislative programme that they intend to push through this year.

For all those reasons, we are still opposed to the Bill as it stands. However, as it will provide the coal industry with substantial sums that are very necessary, and as we have already registered our opposition to the private mine proposals on Second Reading, we shall not vote against Third Reading.

10.39 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, the Bill provides substantial sums of money for British Coal.

I wish to highlight a scandalous situation in my constituency, which used to be the heart of the anthracite coalfield. There is one drift mine, Carway Fawr, which, though mothballed, is almost ready to mine. It is being maintained by British Coal and has not been opened. I understand that £330 million has been spent on it.

I discovered a few days ago that some of the heavy electrical equipment in that mine has been removed to another mine. I appreciate the reasons for that, but there is fear in my constituency lest more heavy equipment is taken out. Once that happens, that mine will never re-open.

There is a shortage of anthracite in Britain, especially of good quality anthracite. Imports are coming in from China, and last week there were rumours of imports coming here from Vietnam. That imported coal is not cheap and the quality is not very good. Those imports are coming here because of a desperate shortage of anthracite, yet British Coal is sitting on this mine, which could employ 600 people and produce first-class, top quality anthracite for the British market. That is scandalous.

In his discussions with British Coal about the additional money that it will receive under the Bill—we welcome that—I hope that the Secretary of State will raise the anthracite issue again and ask British Coal to make a decision. Will it, or will it not, open this mine? If it does not, I shall regard it as my duty to have the matter investigated by the Public Accounts Committee or the Audit Commission, to find out why £30 million was spent and wasted. I hope that that will not be necessary. The coal and the jobs are needed. I urge the Secretary of State to intervene.

10.41 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the Government's commitment to writing off the debt of British Coal as firm evidence of the Government's continuing and long-standing support for the coal industry and for putting it on to a firm and viable footing.

As for the remainder of the Bill—affecting British Coal and the private sector—I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is aware that for the communities affected, environmental issues are of the greatest importance. One of the most important measures that the Government undertook was to take planning issues away from the Department of Energy and to put them into the normal planning procedures under the Department of the Environment.

I listened with interest to the comments of the Under-Secretary when he said clearly and categorically that nothing in the Bill would derogate from normal planning procedures or would remove existing protections from communities faced with planning applications for opencast, drift or deep mines. On the basis of those clear, categoric and unequivocal assurances, I welcome the Bill.

10.42 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Bill is necessary—in some cases regrettably necessary—because British Coal needs a major financial injection. That is why my hon. Friends and I voted for the Bill on Second Reading and why we support it tonight. But certain issues which arose during the passage of the measure remain unresolved, and I fear that we shall have to return to some of those, probably in further legislation.

The two main points that have been debated are the increase in the numbers employed in private mines and the substantial increase in opencast mining. I remain convinced that we need firmer guidelines and a much clearer policy on the issue of opencast if we are to reassure communities affected by it not only that they will get the restoration that they need but that they will receive the sort of compensation that is justified for the devastating effect of a much bigger expansion of opencast mining, and we shall need new environmental practices to minimise that impact.

I hear the Labour party's clear opposition to the increase in the licensing of private pits from 30 miners to 150, but given that it will happen, there are causes for concern, in that who will be licensed will continue to be entirely a matter for British Coal and the criteria for licensing them will also remain a matter for British Coal.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made a plea on behalf of his constituency for a working that has been mothballed, which British Coal can choose to leave mothballed and about which nobody else can do anything. In Committee I raised the case of Betteshanger, which has been closed, and Monktonhall, which has been mothballed, and there may be other examples.

When resisting my amendments suggesting that the transfer of licensing from British Coal to the Department of Energy was the way forward, the Minister hinted—in Committee and to some extent informally—that such a step might be taken at a later date. For many of those enterprises, that later date may come too late and the opportunities, reserves, pits and jobs will be lost for ever.

I remain dissatisfied that a genuine attempt to ensure that the issue was addressed was not just defeated in Committee—as was perhaps predictable—by 21 votes to one, but did not secure a recognition from the Government that, in the changing climate that they are creating, British Coal cannot be trusted to be the sole custodian of the nation's coal assets and the sole determiner of licensing conditions and applications and which pits should be closed, which pits should be mothballed and which pits should be operated.

I predict that, in future, communities will tell hon. Members that they are dissatisfied with the fact that their potential is being obstructed by British Coal and that the law does not allow any way around that, and not even a right of appeal to the Secretary of State. I hope that the Government will take those points seriously, because I am sure that they will reappear again and again.

10.45 pm

Dr. Woodcock: In general, the Bill is to be welcomed, but with reservations. Many hon. Members have expressed their concerns about subsidence, and we welcome the statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about that as a significant move forward.

[Dr. Woodcock]

Some of us also have reservations about private mining operations, licensing and royalties. I recently asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in a written question whether he would review the royalty paid by the private mine operators. My right hon. Friend replied:

"Royalties are a matter for the British Coal Corporation, as owner and licensee of coal reserves."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. *307*.]:

Royalties should not be a matter for British Coal, and it should no longer own the coal reserves. We hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will do something about that in the not-too-distant future.

I remind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the coal industry does not simply concern British Coal employees and private mining operators. Many other people are involved in the industry, including wholesalers, importers, exporters, producers of smokeless fuel, coal merchants and many others. Many of those people are concerned about some of the practices of British Coal that are allowed under the present law. They are particularly concerned about back-door nationalisation and anti-competitive practices.

I want my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to bear those points in mind. Ultimately, I want to see the privatisation of the state sector of British Coal and not the nationalisation of what remains of its private sector. I hope that my right hon. Friend will bear that in mind when he considers other legislation.

10.47 pm

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): I will be brief and refer to two important issues in clause 4. Under that clause, the manpower in a private mine can be increased from 30 to 150. Clause 4 states:

"to work below ground there is at no time likely to exceed, or greatly to exceed, 150".

An increase of 200 may be covered by the term "or greatly". The Bill would provide for such an increase unless the Secretary of State gives a different undertaking. The increase will be 150 only if the Secretary of State gives that undertaking. At the moment, that is not clear from the Bill.

I do not believe that the private mine operators will be able to use deep mines with 150 people below ground. However, is the Secretary of State aware that the miners' rescue team is run by the Coal Board? We can all hope that we never see another explosion in a mine, but they can occur. The Coal Board rescue teams will have to go underground if such an explosion occurs, because that is their job and they are a brave set of individuals. However, I cannot see why they should have to do that. The private mines are there to make a profit and the nationalised industry should not pay for the rescue teams. At the moment, equity does not prevail in that situation.

On deep mining, especially in seams like the Barnsley seams, the only reason we have had no explosions is because we have been able to seal them solidly by stowing. It costs a lot of money and manpower. If people risk deep mining without stowing, as sure as God made little apples, a mine will go up, and our lads will have to go in and rescue the poor individuals who are underground.

Once, there was no stowing. I remind the Minister that there are still four men sealed in the pit that I worked. In 1940, when I had just started, I was pony driving, taking sand down to seal it off, when it went up a second time. There are four still in there because it was too dangerous to go in for them. The consensus was that they were dead. Since stowing started, we have never had an explosion. At Bentley in the 1930s, I think that over 30 men were left in because stowing was not done then.

I am frightened that, if there is not investment in stowing in deep mines, our lads from the miners' rescue squads will have to rescue the poor sods who are down there. I hope that it never happens. I hope that the Minister will pass on to the chairman of British Coal, whom we saw this afternoon, that conditions should be laid down before licences are granted.

There is to be an increase in opencast operations. We all know what has been happening. Where there has been permission to take 50,000 tonnes, when that has been extracted, British Coal has agreed to the extraction of a few more tonnes just because the machinery was there. What will happen if the operators want a bit more when they are taking 250,000 tonnes? I remind the Minister that this is not America or Canada. It is a small island. The Government are raping it by allowing this to go ahead.

If it takes two years to get 25,000 tonnes, with lorries going through beautiful little villages, will it take 20 years to get 250,000 tonnes? If Conservative Members vote for this, I remind them that permission will be granted about the time of the next election, and their electors will not like it. I would not like it if lorries were passing my house for 10 to 20 years. They could do it in five or six years by increasing the capacity of the lorries and having them going past people's front doors 24 hours a day. If that is the outlook of a Government who say that they have green policies, thank goodness they do not have the opposite to green policies, or they would double the amount again.

I ask the Minister to consider even at the eleventh hour keeping the quantity to 50,000 tonnes. He should give the kiddies and mothers who live round these developments a break. That is not asking a lot. Unless pressure has been put on the Minister—I do not know people who do such a thing—he should limit the amount to 50,000 tonnes. That should be enough in any area. I ask the Minister to consider that again when the Bill goes to another place.

10.53 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth: For the past two and a half years, as parliamentary private secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), I have by convention been unable to participate in coal debates. Therefore, I seek the opportunity of a newly won liberation to support the Bill which has been brought to the House by my right hon. Friend. As he knows, I represent a number of miners in the Cannock Chase coalfield.

I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) said about the Bill showing the Government's commitment to the coal industry. To write off £5,000 million of accumulated debt represents a substantial commitment, and I challenge any hon. Member to suggest that the Government do not care about it. Those who work in it should understand that, as a result of the munificence of the taxpayer, the industry is being restructured. It will be put on a proper financial footing, which is only fair and proper after it has dramatically improved its productivity.

It must be recognised that the redundancy payments are more generous than those that have been offered by other industries. Those payments are the latest in a long line of investments that the Government have made in the industry. Hon. Members mentioned investment in private mines. There is no doubt that my constituents have benefited from the Government's investment in the coal industry.

I welcome the liberalisation measures in the Bill. It gives Conservative Members much pleasure to see the Labour party so vociferously opposing clause 4. Whether it will extend its opposition to other clauses is another matter, but I believe that the liberalisation measures are modest.

Conservative Members understand the sincerity of the views expressed by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) and other Labour Members. We recognise that they hold heartfelt opinions about the industry in which they worked and in which they saw their friends killed. I hope that they do not believe that Conservative Members give safety a lower priority than they do, because we believe passionately in it. I honestly believe that the Labour party cannot argue that it is in favour of giving safety the high priority that it alleges it does when it is prepared to countenance the continuation of private pits that employ only 30 men, which cannot be economically viable unless they operate old-fashioned and dangerous techniques.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done well in bringing the Bill before the House. It will greatly benefit the coal industry in the private and public sectors.

10.57 pm

Mr. Allen McKay: I shall begin where the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) left off—with the writing off of the coal industry's debts.

Labour Members welcome anything that will improve the industry's debts, but the Bill should be put in perspective. The industry has incurred most of its debts on redundancy payments and pension provision. When the Government talk about writing off its debts, they are talking about writing off its social costs.

No figure has been given for the amount of debt that will be written off. Some of the money that has been allocated will be spent on continuing to pay for the debt. It has not been said when and how the debt will be written off. That point must be answered.

We have been asking for help for the nationalised coal industry for the past two or three years. It does not require much thought to realise that this is an enabling Bill for the privatisation of the coal industry in the next Parliament, should the Government be re-elected.

The Secretary of State did not fully answer the question about the managers of private mines. A manager does not merely to to university, gain a degree and have a class 1 mining certificate. He also has to go through a period of apprenticeship, and he must work in every facet of the colliery, before he can obtain the practical experience to go with his academic experience and his degree. Where will the managers come from for the expansion in private mining? They will not be plucked out of thin air. The managers who have been made redundant from British Coal and to whom I have spoken are adamant that they will not go into the privatised mines. Where will they come from, and how?

The Secretary of State also did not answer the question about electrical and mechanical engineers. He did not say whether an electrical engineer or a mechanical engineer would be in charge, and whether one would be in charge for the whole 24 hours or whether one would be in charge for each shift.

I want to return to what my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) said about the viability of the mechanisation of private mines. Who will pay the capital costs? The only reason why the industry was capitalised and mechanised was that it became a nationalised industry. In the old days, the private owners could not afford that mechanisation. What makes the Secretary of State think that the owners will be able to afford mechanisation? How will they obtain a return on the tremendous capital costs of mechanising even one coal face?

I want to see the legislation on opencasting tightened up now that the Government have increased the amount of coal that can be taken in that way. A mine in my area has gone through the usual stages and will hold up the industrial development of the area for the next eight to 10 years. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) believe that it will cause huge devastation to the locality. There is the prospect of opencasting in the valley, and the people on the periphery of the valley will not be able to ignore the noise and the dust, because there will be no baffles.

In addition, the River Dearne will have to be redirected, which we certainly do not want. Following the huge opencast executive applications are a number of small private applications which will devastate the whole area. Some of the areas were opencast areas in the 1950s. As a result of new technology, opencasting can go deeper, so we shall have opencast applications time and time again, if we are not careful.

As for subsidence, we must debate the Waddilove report on the Floor of the House. That would be only justice. We should debate the recommendations, the form of compensation and the need for compensation. All my constituency is devastated because of mining subsidence, although the collieries that caused that subsidence are closed. Who is picking up the cheque for the repairs that need to be carried out?

Should this Government return to power and privatise the mines before the Waddilove report is debated, and before compensation arrangements are effectively tidied up, who will pay the costs of mining subsidence? The people in those areas want an answer to those questions. We have asked them time and time again, but we have never had an answer. It is time that all the cards were put on the table so that we can see what will happen to the mining districts, and especially to the mining communities.

11.3 pm

Mr. Lofthouse: I want to point out to the Secretary of State that, although I welcome any financial assistance for the British coal industry, I regret the amount of finance that has been made available for redundancies, because I wish that it had not been necessary. Whatever the argument over the total numbers, it is a fact that thousands of men will lose their jobs. We should bear in mind that fact, and the fact that, as I have often said in the House, the average age of these young miners is 34. There is no cushion of weekly payments, as the redundancy

[Mr. Lofthouse]

payments will be based on a lump sum. Many of those young men are burdened by large mortgages, and the present interest rates do not help.

In January 1987, the Select Committee on Energy said clearly that the industry should never again be run down so rapidly without a policy co-ordinated by the Departments of Energy, of Trade and Industry and of Employment to cushion the blow and limit the social consequences.

Since 1985, when the rundown began, some mining communities, including my own, have had not one farthing of Government assistance in attracting alternative employment. Only about three weeks ago, I accompanied a deputation to the Department of Trade and Industry and met the Minister for Industry, who was very sympathetic to our problems in the mining communities—certainly to those of my own constituency—but told us clearly that he could offer us no assistance whatever because our areas had not been zoned as having intermediate area status.

Thousands and thousands of jobs have gone, and we had no assistance at all. That cannot continue. One is forced to think—it is certainly what my constituents think—that the reason why the Government are not interested in helping our areas is purely political. The Government know full well that, even if they help us to attract industry, it will not win them any votes. It will certainly not win them Pontefract and Castleford. Nevertheless, the Government have a moral obligation to give some assistance to the communities that their policies have wiped out.

Has the Secretary of State any plans to help the thousands of young miners who will lost their jobs? Does he plan to have discussions with his colleagues to try to decide whether the areas can be helped to find jobs for these young men? If he has no such plans, the Government's policy is immoral and they have kicked the miners in the teeth. If there are no signs of help, my constituents' suspicions will be confirmed. I suggest that the Secretary of State and the Minister should give a lead—unlike their predecessors—and show that they have some feeling for the mining communities.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

PETITION

NHS Reform

11.7 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I wish to present a petition from Cornish residents, to bring to the attention of the House our concerns about the National Health Service and the Government's proposed reforms. The Cornish people are overwhelmingly opposed to the Conservatives' plans.

This week, a Liberal Democrat survey of local doctors showed that 90 per cent. believe that the reforms will be detrimental to patients. My petition carries 82 signatures, each of which represents 100 signatures on the health petition organised by local Liberal Democrats that I have already presented to the Department of Health. That means that 8,200 of my constituents in all call on the Government to abandon their proposals, and a further 100,000 people have signed the Liberal Democrat petition nationwide.

I welcome this opportunity to bring our opposition to the attention of the House, and I hope that Ministers will begin to respond to the overwhelming concern felt by the people of Britain.

To lie upon the Table.

Radiation Overdoses (Compensation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

11.8 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I have sought this opportunity to raise the matter of compensation arrangements for patients damaged by radiation overdoses at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital in Exeter. That hospital looks after the radiation side of treatment for people in my constituency of Devon, North and a further five constituencies in the south-west of England.

Since the problem arose, several questions have been asked in the House and several comments and statements made, of which the most apposite was that made by the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), two years ago. She said that Exeter health authority

"intends to deal with claims as expeditiously as possible in a way which will cause as little distress to patients and their families as the circumstances will allow. The Authority has instructed its solicitors to reflect this desire."—[*Official Report,* 13 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 753.]

That was two years ago, and time passes. It passes quickly in this place, but it passes slowly on a sick-bed. Recently, I asked my hon. Friend the Minister of State what had happened about claims for excessive dosages of radiation. I wanted to know how many had been settled, what ranges of payments had been made, and how many cases remained to be settled. I also asked whether the Minister would list how many settlements had been made. What was the highest? What was the lowest? Finally, I asked the Minister to list the number of payments that were made to staff who were sacked. Of course, two of the staff were actually sacked for negligence or professional misconduct.

Sadly, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, answering all those questions, which were of great importance to my constituents and to my colleagues in the area, said that all those matters were for Exeter health authority as far as they affected patients or their representatives. The two physicists who were dismissed received severance payments. Those details are confidential to the parties concerned.

The Minister of State told me, "Don't ask the Minister, ask the health authority." The health authority, which has been in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), keeps saying, "Everything is confidential." There comes a time when we must take confidentiality by the scruff of the neck and ask, "Is this merely a smokescreen? Is confidentiality merely the excuse for obscurity—the excuse for no action?"

The history of this sad case in Exeter is straightforward. In February two years ago—23 months ago from now, to be exact—a new radioactive cobalt source was fitted and calibrated to one of the machines used to treat patients who have problems or expected problems with cancer. The machine was calibrated with a 25 per cent. excess in the dosage. Every person who received treatment received 25 per cent. radioactivity over and above the basic dose.

There is no secret about that, except that it happened in February. Nobody checked that the equipment had been properly calibrated. It does not say very much for the physicists—they have gone with severance payments. It says very little, for the administration—quite a few of them have gone elsewhere without penalty. It says very little frankly, for the consultants or the doctors who treated patients who had been damaged, and damaged over a period of five months.

It came to pass that, in July 1988, after five months, the machine was rechecked. It should have been checked months before, but it was not. No one was penalised, except the poor patients. But then, of course, they trusted our Health Service, the consultant, the person who administered the treatment, and the nurses. Several of them spoke to the nurses and said, "I was told that it would not hurt, but it hurts. I was told that it would not burn, but it burns." One of my constituents was burnt through the breast into the back and was given, gratis, a bottle of calamine lotion and told to apply that. That does not reflect tremendously well on the quality of the care administered in that place.

Patients complained to the nurses, and some of the nurses mentioned it to the doctors, but their complaints never reached a consultant. According to the Thwaites report, not one consultant was aware of the damage done and not one consultant was aware of the complaints. I do not know why the medical hierarchy is so scared of consultants—one never speaks to them. My constituents and others were damaged for life, their life expectancy was shortened, and no one paid any attention to their complaints or queries. It is the old business—the expert knows best.

In July when the calibration was rechecked, the 25 per cent. mistake was not found, but thank God—I say that sincerely—on 12 July 1988, Exeter health authority agreed to enter into some form of national check on the equipment in use. That special check—not the routine checks, because there was none, and not a random check after five months—found the fault.

What happened then? The brief answer is, nothing. There was clearly a "fox in the henhouse" in that organisation, but the patients and the Members of Parliament knew nothing. No one was told anything for some time. Then a nurse—I do not know her name—got in touch with a national newspaper, asking whether it knew about what had happened. The paper did not know, but checked with a local reporter on the *Exeter Express and Echo,* who checked with me. I had not heard about it. The long and the short of it was that when the paper telephoned the hospital and said, "We're going to break this story," all of a sudden a press report was issued and a meeting held—all with such speed that all my constituents, and those of other hon. Members, also learned from local radio and television that they might have been terminally damaged.

But even then the matter was not taken as seriously as it should have been. It was a case of, "Oh well, it is an overdose, but don't worry. It'll be all right." One of my constituents was told, "Don't worry, my dear, your name isn't on the list," but she recognised on television the piece of apparatus on which she had been checked. She said, "That is the piece," and was told, "Oh yes, you are on the list." Just imagine—a young woman who is in the depths of despair is told, "You aren't on the list of those damaged,"—thank heavens, happiness—but she sees the very machine on television. What sheer inefficiency.

The then Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South was very straight and said, "Yes, there has been a mistake. Yes, the Health Service—us—is at

[Mr. Tony Speller]

fault. Yes, we accept our responsibility and yes, restitution will be made." At that stage, all of us thought that something would happen swiftly.

In fact, two men were sacked. They were sacked because their machine had overdosed and because it had not been checked, but was found wanting after someone else had checked it. They were sacked, but they were paid in compensation sums that I cannot discover. The Minister says, "Ask the health authority," but the health authority says, "It's confidential." Although it is public money, the amounts are confidential. Rumour has it—I say no more than that—that one of the men received about £50,000 and the other about £40,000. They will not tell us, so I cannot prove it. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us, because those figures put into pretty shabby perspective some of the offers made to my constituents.

The employees were not prosecuted and as far as I know, they were not disciplined. They work elsewhere, but no restitution has been made to those affected, except good money to those two men as restitution for being sacked. In the businesses in which I have been involved, if one is sacked, one leaves, but not with a lot of money.

Although I speak basically of my constituents, the picture is larger. The health authority identified 217 people who were treated during the period of overdosing, of whom, as at the end of last week, 121 are dead; and 96 remain. I do not deny for a second that many of those people were terminally ill, and no one is suggesting for a moment that there has been some vast killing. That is not the case, but none the less, folk were damaged. Professor Joslin, the specialist brought in by the health authority, says that about 33 people are at no risk at all, so we are down to about 60 people.

The problem is always that there is confusion. We cannot find the details. All that we can tell is that the health authority hopes to pay out what it calls PSA claims —which stands for pain and suffering allowances. It is now two years since that pain and suffering was inflicted, but the health authority only hopes to have the claims finalised by April. The pain and suffering is not finalised, but I repeat that the health authority hopes that the claims may be. The health authority admits liability. Indeed, in answer to a question in the House, I was told that insurance was not needed because the funds had been found from the authority's own resources.

Perhaps therein lies the core of the problem, because a pattern is apparent to me. There is a great dragging of feet in paying these poor people, although there is no doubt about liability. It is not like settling a claim for a car crash when, if one side has not filled in the form, its company will not pay out the loss. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton suggested way back in December last year that we should talk about some form of independent panel or assessor to put zip into the process. There is no zip whatever in the health authority.

It is not difficult to argue about why a claim cannot be paid. It is the old Catch 22. The health authority says, "Until you make a claim, we cannot pay you." The people who have been damaged and their lawyers say, "We cannot make a claim until we obtain the medical details that you hold. You who injured us hold the records that prove how much you injured us." The position changes as the weeks and months progress. The effects of radiation on a body that is perhaps already damaged inevitably change. We cannot expect the position to be static. That is why I appeal to the Minister to provide for an instant payment. I do not care how it is worked out. Perhaps there should be three bands of payment, which will not be a final payment.

Today I was talking to lawyers from the United States of America. I described the case of my constituent who was burnt through the breast to the back. I asked what damages they would seek. They said that they would not seek tens of millions, but certainly they would seek millions. I understand that the tacit verbal offers going around are about £5,000 for the blighting of a human life and for the people who can no longer work. If that is true and if no one has been punished, it is a disgrace to us all.

There were 217 injuries. Fewer than 100 of those people survive. How many settlements have been made in the 18 months that have passed since the problem first became known? Fewer than 10 settlements have been made. Some people have died. Of my eight constituents who were involved, five are dead. Perhaps their widows or families will be compensated, but that is no consolation to the person who has gone or to the family. The money is needed now. That is why I appeal to the Minister to think of some form of payment that can be made now. He might create three bands of payment. I am not an accountant, but perhaps they can be payments of £5,000, £10,000 and £20,000. The final payment will be much higher, but for goodness' sake, let us, as a nation and as a Health Service, pay something to those people now.

A claimant taking us through the courts would probably finish up with a six-figure payment. If, as I suspect, the men sacked for inefficiency were given £50,000, it will be hard to deny the person damaged twice that sum.

I conclude by saying that the compensation paid instantly was to those who moved from their jobs. It is strange and unreasonable that those who were sacked took the money with them but those who were injured are still waiting. Some payment must be made to those who were injured. We are talking about £1,000 here and £5,000 there. I do not say for a second that my hon. Friend the Minister and the health authority do not accept the problem. The problem is that they will not expedite it. The wheels of the law grind almost as slowly as the wheels of medicine.

I have spoken to the lawyers who represent my constituents. They say that they are doing what they can, but that they are waiting for papers from the health authority. The health authority says that it would like to pay, but that it is waiting for the claims. No paper, no claim. No claim, no paper. That is the top and the bottom of the argument.

Somewhere along the line, we the Government, not the health authority, must take the bull by the horns and do something to help the people injured who still live—we hope, healthily. Some are women who are young by my standards, healthy, strong, able and determined. They are not likely to die, praise God, but they are likely to be damaged. They are not likely to have to leave work but they may never work as they did. Their career and family opportunities have been damaged by us and by our Health Service. It is not fair that we the Government, who care for our people and our constituents, should allow the health authority to get away, almost literally, with murder.

11.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) has once again done a great service to his constituents by securing this Adjournment debate supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) who also has a great constituency interest in the matter. The matter has been of continuing concern to him and to other hon. Members in neighbouring constituencies.

I am aware of my hon. Friend's concern that everything possible should be done to speed up the negotiations between Exeter health authority and the patients or their representatives in securing agreed compensation payments. However, as the House will appreciate, it is a matter of great sensitivity and confidentiality, and not one in which I or my Department are directly involved, although we are indirectly involved.

Negotiations are taking place on the wake of this most regrettable incident in the radiotherapy department of the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital early in 1988, on which my predecessor answered questions in the House in July of that year. The incident led to the accidental overdosing of 207 patients undergoing radiation treatment. The circumstances surrounding the incident were investigated by an independent panel of inquiry led by Professor Sir Bryan Thwaites, who subsequently reported to the health authority in December 1988 with 21 recommendations, all of which are being implemented by the health authority.

I hope that my hon. Friends have seen that report. The preface to that report is signed by the chairman of the Exeter health authority. It is dated 6 December 1988 and in it he says:

"I wish to express my deepest sympathy to everyone affected and to record here my lasting regret that an incident such as this ever occurred. Unfortunately, what these reports"—

he is referring to the reports of a committee of inquiry—

"or indeed, any inquiry into such a regrettable incident, cannot do is to lessen the anguish which has been experienced by the patients and families who discovered that they were involved."

I am sure that my hon. Friends would associate themselves with those remarks.

Following the incident, the health authority acknowledged that the overdosing had been caused by negligence on the part of its employees failing to calibrate the equipment properly, and invited every patient affected, or their executors, to make a claim against the authority.

My hon. Friend touched upon the severance payments of the two physicists involved. They were payments consequent upon their dismissal for negligence over the affair. There are no legal suits against the health authority and no legal prosecution was considered possible against the two individuals involved.

As I have explained previously, the severance payments involved are confidential to the parties involved, but I am advised that it is speculation that the sums involved were of the order of £40,000. I can tell my hon. Friend that the figure that he mentioned is greatly over-estimated. I understand how my hon. Friend feels about those payments but they were to avoid any prolonged appeal process which would have prevented the posts being refilled as soon as possible. It was a simple matter of priorities, and the continuing care and safety of the patients came first.

At national level, the Standing Medical Advisory Committee's sub-committee on cancer subsequently set up a sub-committee on quality assurance in radiotherapy which is hoping to report by the end of the year. My predecessor also wrote to regional chairmen on the sensitive handling of untoward incidents in the best interests of patients, following the lessons learned at Exeter.

In addition to the Thwaites report, from which I have quoted, a confidential medical risk assessment for the health authority was carried out by Professor Charles Joslin of Leeds university on each of the patients affected, initially through the medical records of the patients concerned. That assessment has formed the basis of the health authority's early work on the claims.

Of the 207 patients originally affected, I am sorry to say that 121 have since died, but not, I hasten to add, necessarily earlier than they would have done had they not received the overdose. The House will realise that they were all suffering from cancer. Of the 86 survivors, 35 are thought to be at insignificant risk from the overdose, in the main because only a small part of their treatment was given on the miscalibrated machine.

I understand that the position at the beginning of this year was that there had been claims from a total of 103 patients to date, of which 95 were still to reach final settlement. However, a variety of payments to 65 claimants have so far been made. The number of claimants who have had their claim finalised and to whom a full agreed payment has been made is eight. A further seven claims have been met in settlement of

"pain, suffering and loss of amenity".

Interim payments have been made to 50 other eligible claimants, and the total so far paid out is more than £400,000 in varying amounts according to the degree of physical harm judged to have been done by the radiation overdose.

Thirty-three of the remaining 38 claims where no payment has yet been made—including one claim which was subsequently withdrawn—were on behalf of patients assessed to be at insignificant risk. A further five claims are in respect of deceased patients assessed to have been in a low risk category, which are still under consideration and in respect of which no payments have yet been made.

My hon. Friend will, I am sure, appreciate that settlements are bound to take a little time even though the claims are not being pursued in the courts. Legal representatives of the patients have to decide whether to advise pressing for early settlement or to delay pursuing a claim until the client's medical condition is clearer. This has to be entirely a matter between the patients and their legal advisers. Some effects may be long term, while others may be short-lived. Meanwhile, the health authority stands ready to register any further claims and pursue them with all diligence.

While the health authority is willing to do all that it can to expedite matters, it nevertheless has a duty to be fair and scrupulous in weighing claims, since it has a duty to the taxpayer as well as to the claimants. The nub of the issue is to determine the amount of damage caused by the excess radiation, since radiation treatment itself is intended to be damaging to cancerous cells, but inevitably there is peripheral damage to health tissue, and a great deal of painstaking work has gone into that.

In claims of this kind, there are two kinds of damages. The first is for pain, suffering and loss of amenity; and the

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

second is for special damages to cover such things as the need for domestic help, taxis, dressings and so on. It is the former that will usually be the larger amount and the subject of considerable debate. Those special damages—the second class to which I referred—can be derived from medical evidence, actual costs incurred and life expectancy tables. It is clear that some legal advisers are, perfectly legitimately, holding back on the second issue until they are fully clear about the implications for their clients.

The health authority has therefore, with the full agreement of the solicitor who is co-ordinating the claims, separated the two sets of damages in order to speed things up. Meetings are being held with legal representatives of both sides to settle at least the pain, suffering and loss of amenity claims as quickly as possible, and the health authority is anxious that all those claims can be settled by the end of April.

Mr. Speller: Will all claims be settled or just those for pain, suffering and loss of amenity?

Mr. Freeman: If I may finish the paragraph, I shall be happy to answer that point.

If the claims are not settled, it will not be from want of will on the part of the health authority.

My hon. Friend asked whether all the claims would be settled or just those in the pain, suffering and loss of amenity category. I cannot give him an assurance that all claims in the second, so-called special damages, category will be settled within that timetable. That is partly because, as I have said, I understand that for perfectly legitimate and reasonable grounds the advisors acting for the patients involved wish to assess various other factors. Therefore, I am advised that the authority is not in a position to estimate whether that second category of claims can be settled by the end of April. As to the second category of damages, on which I am not in possession of comprehensive advice tonight, I shall write to my hon. Friends the Members for Devon, North and for Honiton, with an estimate of the timetable for settlement of the claims.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I thank my hon. Friends the Minister and the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) for allowing me to intervene. Everyone is concerned about the excessive length of time involved. I made the suggestion to a previous Health Minister and to the health authority's chairman that there should have been established immediately a panel comprising a leading Queen's counsel or judge concerned specifically with compensation, a specialist—someone of the calibre of Mr. Joslin—in cancer, and an insurance specialist concerned specifically with the aspect of compensation for medical accidents.

My proposal was that such a tribunal should quickly review every case and make a recommendation for compensation. No legal rights would be taken away from the individual, and if he or she then wanted to continue with the legal process that had already been under way for some considerable time, they would be at liberty to do so.

Had that been done, many of the claimants would have received money before they died and have enjoyed the mental benefit of being free from anxiety. The health authority's chairman is concerned because many of those involved are worried about the publicity that their own cases have attracted.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider using a mechanism such as I have described to achieve a settlement on any appropriate occasion in future? I feel sure that my hon. Friends the Minister and the Member for Devon, North, and Mr. Murray French, Exeter health authority's chairman, want to do whatever they can to help the patients concerned.

I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to reveal that he has said privately to me, and to publicise from the Floor of the House tonight the fact that any person in the queue who is concerned at the delay, and believes it to be the fault of the health authority, should contact him personally.

Both he and I believe that much of the delay has been woven by the lawyers. I am sorry to have to say that, but while certain of the lawyers have stated that they have been working for nothing, I hope that their fees will amount to no more than 10 per cent. of the value of the settlements —so that they are seen to live up to their word. Leaving that to one side, can my hon. Friend the Minister see his way to finding a solution more quickly?

Mr. Freeman: In the one minute remaining to me, I give my hon. Friends two assurances. I am advised that there is no dilatoriness on the part of the health authority and that the matter is one for resolution between it, its patients, and their legal representatives. I share the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton. I take a close interest in the matter, and I will make further inquiries and write to both my hon. Friends if I can add anything further to tonight's brief debate.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER MANCHESTER (LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM) (NO. 3) BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

BROMLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL (CRYSTAL PALACE) BILL

Ordered,

That the proceedings of 7th December 1989 on consideration of the Bromley London Borough Council (Crystal Palace) Bill be null and void.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

English Estates

1. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of English Estates.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): As already announced, a consultant's study is looking at a variety of aspects of English Estates' activities.

Mr. Cunliffe: Given that his father was a founder director of the enterprise as long ago as 1936, does the Secretary of State accept that there must be some remorse and resentment because the Government may dismantle the corporation in the near future when the consultant's report is produced? Will the Secretary of State make a statement on that? About 5,000 factory units provide a large amount of employment in areas such as the north-west that are experiencing industrial decline. At 1989 prices, since the last year of the Labour Government —1979—the north-west has suffered to the tune of about £180 million through lost regional selective assistance and regional development grants.

Mr. Ridley: I shall take the hon. Gentleman's points in the reverse order. First, 1979 was a bleak time indeed for the north-west and the regions, but the situation has greatly improved since we have had 10 years of sound Conservative Government. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement of that. Secondly, I have no intention of dismantling English Estates. It might be of value to use the large amount of capital that is invested in factories in more productive directions in future, but that will not affect the factories themselves. Thirdly, I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tribute that he paid to my father for responding to the needs of the time when he assisted in setting up English Estates. I, too, intend to respond to the needs of the time in the most helpful way possible.

Mr. Trotter: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the headquarters of English Estates is on Tyneside. May I draw his attention to the considerable part that English Estates has paid in the success story of the transformation of industry and commerce in the north-east? In particular, I commend the quality of management of English Estates. We should retain that asset in future.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I agree that the cradle of English Estates' birth was in the north-east, and its activities there have been immensely beneficial to that region. Needs and requirements change at all times, and it is correct that we should look at how best to help the regions, particularly through the vehicle of English Estates and, if necessary, make changes. I have not received the consultant's report, but when I do I shall report to the House on the Government's conclusions on it.

Mr. Caborn: Hon. Members are interested in what the Secretary of State has said, but there are bleak times ahead for small and medium-sized businesses. It has already been pointed out that English Estates operates about 5,000 small and medium-sized businesses around the country, with a value in excess of £400 million. Will the Secretary of State give a clear commitment that English Estates will not be privatised and that, when he receives the consultant's report, he will consult widely with people who have been assisted and people who, in future, will look to English Estates to help small businesses with a technology base?

Mr. Ridley: I do not believe that there are bleak times ahead for small and medium-sized businesses in this country. The future holds great prospects, provided that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are kept out of office.

Mr. Barry Field: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the considerable success of English Estates in my constituency, the only county in the United Kingdom that is a development area under the Rural Development Commission. Might an alternative be for English Estates to divest itself of its property on the market and start all over again in areas where private enterprise is still not always providing the nursery units that are essential to the Government's policy of self-employment? The Government have achieved a tremendous record in start-up businesses and self-employment—the largest number in the history of the country.

Mr. Ridley: The function that English Estates has performed so valuably has been to provide factory space, both large and small, managed and unmanaged, in areas where the economic situation was so unfortunate that the private sector was not prepared to do that. However, that situation has changed in many parts of the country, but not in all. We now want to see how best the large capital that is employed by English Estates can be deployed for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

Cars (Import and Export)

2. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cars were imported into the United Kingdom in 1988; and how many were exported.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): A total of 1·357 million cars were imported and 261,000 exported in the period under review.

Mr. Ashton: Does the Minister agree that those figures are appalling and that they are 27 per cent. worse than when the Government took office? When will the Government get tough, in the same way as the Governments of France, Italy and the USA, against the Japanese imports that pour into this country? Why do we give subsidies to Nissan and allow Toyota to come here to Derby to steal the skilled labour force at Rolls-Royce—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Of course that happens, that is why Toyota came—to take the skilled labour force at Rolls-Royce. Why do the Government have a policy of selling off Austin Rover at rock bottom prices to British Aerospace and of using the car industry for the profits of their friends? Why can we not have the same sort of restrictions that we have for farming? Why will the Government invest in and protect farming, but not do the same for manufacturing industry?

Mr. Redwood: The Labour party, in power between 1974 and 1979, presided over a massive increase in import penetration of cars into this country from 27·9 per cent. to 56·3 per cent. Under the Conservative Government, import penetration has stayed around the 56 or 57 per cent. mark. The Government's policies have seen a remarkable influx of inward investment by three leading Japanese car producers and we are on target for a major expansion of car production in this country. We may well see it expand in this decade from 1·3 million cars to around 2 million cars. That is the best answer of all to the hon. Gentleman's question. Our economic policies are working and Conservative Members welcome the new investment from Japanese companies because they have skills and jobs to offer us.

Mr. John Townend: To what extent does my hon. Friend estimate that the decline in the British car industry was due to the actions of the trade unions, which refused to accept new industrial practices and favoured restrictive practices, go-slows and strikes? To what extent does he think that the Japanese decided to invest in this country because we have a Government who believe in private enterprise and the open market?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. However, the trade unions were aided and abetted in their destructive policies in the 1970s by wrongful Government policies as well, which gave exactly the wrong signals to the car industry. The 1980s have proved much better and we now have a firm base of sounder industrial relations as a result of the new labour relations law, which has proved attractive to inward investors.

Sir David Steel: Does not the Minister accept that the consumer faces a problem nowadays because the brand names no longer state clearly whether the cars are made in Britain? Nissan cars are made in Newcastle, Peugeot in Coventry and Ford cars are possibly made in Spain or in West Germany. Will he encourage the manufacturers that wish to promote British goods to put the necessary stickers on their windscreens?

Mr. Redwood: I thought that the right hon. Gentleman and his party—whatever it may be called—welcomed the integration of the European market. It has long been the case that various manufacturers that assemble in the United Kingdom also import components for their cars, and sometimes whole vehicles. It makes sense for a company such as Ford to choose where to produce in the European Community. We obviously welcome more investment from that company and expansion of the car lines that it thinks are best suited for this country.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend accept that over the years many of us have fought the importation of cars, especially from the Japanese, who would not allow our exports into their country? However, if we continue with what looks like happening now, when the Ford workers here are demanding a 14 per cent. increase, compared with the Ford workers in West Germany who have accepted 3 per cent. with much greater productivity, many of us who have said that we should not allow car imports must recognise that the British people have a right to buy cars and that if the Ford workers in the United Kingdom will not work, the British people should still be able to buy cars that might mean more imports and lost British jobs.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend speaks from experience. He is right that it is in the hands of Ford managers and workers to set the right level of pay in relation to output and productivity. I hope that they can settle on a good level of pay, which reflects the underlying improvement in productivity. That is the way to protect and expand jobs and to give the customer a good deal.

Mr. Henderson: How does the Minister square his previous comments on the supposed recovery of the British car industry with the trade deficit in automotive products of £6·5 billion for the first 11 months of this year? Does he accept that the principal cause is that cars such as Vauxhalls and Fords are stuffed with components made in Europe? Is he prepared to open talks with companies such as Ford and Vauxhall and to insist that they increase the sourcing of components from the United Kingdom?

Mr. Redwood: I want companies here to make the best commercial decisions. That is the way to secure jobs and a good package for the costomer. The hon. Gentleman should note that several major investments in British components manufacturing have been announced as a result of our success in attracting assemblers and new car production. The important point about the 1980s is that import penetration did not rise, but the total market expanded. That is why we have imported more cars. People are better off under a Conservative Government and they choose to use their purchasing power to buy new cars.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extraordinary and appalling that Opposition Members do nothing but criticise and knock the car industry although there is good news on the horizon? Was not the only contribution that we ever had from that lot, the £400 million investment in Dundee being stopped by their paymasters in the Transport and General Workers Union?

Is it not the case that, as a result of inward investment by Japanese car manufacturers, there will be a massive increase in car exports from Britain in coming years? Does my hon. Friend agree that there is now a serious threat from eastern Europe and that we must ensure that the economic and industrial conditions here remain attractive to those who wish to invest in this country?

Hon. Members: Too long.

Mr. Speaker: That was a long question and it leads to a long answer, which is problem.

Mr. Redwood: I agree with my hon. Friend that the trade unions have a role to play in helping, rather than hindering, inward investment in Britain. I agree that the industry should remain competitive. I am not surprised at the attitude of the Labour party. It belongs to the wining and dining school where wining is spelt with an "h". It believes that it should issue lunchtime directives to car companies. When it tried that policy in Government, it met with disaster.

Washing Machines

3. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of washing machines supplied by imports.

Mr. Redwood: Imports of washing machines are estimated to be 38 per cent. of home market sales by value in 1988—the latest full year for which figures are available.

Mr. Graham: During the past 10 years have not the Government presided over the decimation of the electrical manufacturing industry in Britain? Are they proud of the fact that the British public have to rely on foreign goods to clean their dirty linen? When will they take action to bring manufacturing of electrical goods back to Britain and allow the British public to do their washing in British washing machines? When the trade figures are published on Friday, will the Minister ponder that we have a massive import bill, while thousands of unemployed men and women are desperate to work to produce much-needed electrical goods, which would reduce the import bill?

Mr. Redwood: I am pleased to say that most British people still wash their dirty washing in British machines rather than machines imported from overseas. There were high imports in the 1970s. The Government have a sound and firm economic policy that will allow companies to compete and to manufacture the things that people wish to buy. Naturally, I wish the washing machine industry and other British industries every success.

Mr. Roger King: Does my hon. Friend agree that the only way in which British manufacturing can compete is by producing better goods than those produced by overseas competition? Does he share my delight that the consumer magazine *Which?* has judged a British washing machine, the Hotpoint 800 series, as joint best value and best buy? For once, it is clear that we can fight back with the right type of goods at the right price.

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted to hear that news and I hope that my hon. Friend's message has been heard more widely, beyond the House.

British Steel

4. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about his use of the golden share in British Steel.

9. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about his use of the golden share in British Steel.

Mr. Ridley: The answer is none.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Secretary of State accept that the golden share was introduced to protect vital national interests? In the Scottish context, that means the preservation of the Scottish steel industries. Is he aware that British Steel is starving Ravenscraig and its associated works of investment and that, without that investment, any paper guarantees given are worse than useless? Therefore, will he make representations to British Steel to ensure that investment is forthcoming in the Scottish steel industry?

Mr. Ridley: The purpose of the golden share in British Steel was to protect an industry, which had been badly damaged by a long period of public ownership, for a limited time against unwelcome takeovers when it emerged into the private sector. The circumstances where it would have been appropriate to use that golden share have not arisen. The golden share is not available for the purposes suggested by the hon. Lady. It was made clear at the time, and I make it clear again, that the Government had no intention of using that golden share for any purpose other than that for which it was first introduced.

Mr. Sillars: Is the Secretary of State aware that we are concerned that, in a privatised British Steel, the Scottish plants might be subject to unwelcome elimination? Although British Steel lied in the first instance, it has now confessed that, along with the Davy Corporation, it is storing a second-hand Japanese plate mill at Lackenby. Although the right hon. Gentleman might say that he has no responsibility as the golden share owner, does he accept that he has responsibility as the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? Therefore, will he press upon British Steel that, should it go for a single-plate strategy, it should be at Motherwell and not at Lackenby?

Mr. Ridley: I understand that the chairman of British Steel recently reaffirmed that the company statement of 3 December 1987 on the future of the Scottish plants still stands. There is no way in which I can intervene—it would be quite wrong of me to seek to do so—on where plate capacity is located or what happens to a particular plant.

Mr Batiste: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the concept of the golden share is alien to the work of the stock market? It depresses the value of shareholders' investment and it could have extremely damaging effects on the pension funds that are largely invested in the companies concerned. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government have no plans to extend the use of the golden share and that, unlike the Labour party, they will never extend the golden share into the private sector?

Mr. Ridley: I have come to agree with my hon. Friend even more strongly since the publication of the Labour party policy review, which states:

"The Golden Share already establishes the principle of separating voting rights from the other incidents of equity ownership".

That means that the Labour party thought it had a precedent for telling companies what to do and for overriding the interests of the share owners, without compensation, in the interests of pursuing policies that have been seen to fail in eastern Europe.

Mr. Favell: Will my right hon. Friend pass on the congratulations of my hon. Friends to the management of British Steel on making it profitable at long last? It is now one of the most profitable steel manufacturers in western Europe. Under no circumstances should it turn itself back into a charitable institution as suggested by the Scottish Nationalists, the hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars).

Mr. Ridley: I shall pass on the comments of my hon. Friend, who paid tribute to the management of British Steel for turning it into one of the most successful and profitable companies in the world since it was freed from the shackles of public ownership. I reaffirm that the Government have no intention of doing anything that might prevent that highly successful British company from conquering world markets.

Mr. Shore: Now that the Government have so recklessly handed over to Brussels the right to decide—to veto or approve—transfrontier mergers and takeover bids, will not the golden share now take on added importance as our one remaining defence against unwelcome takeover bids that are against the national interest?

Mr. Ridley: Neither of the right hon. Gentleman's propositions is true. First, the Commission has power, and has been using it under articles 85 and 86, to clear or not clear mergers without reference to the United Kingdom authorities on monopolies and mergers. The total confusion about that matter has been brought to an end. Secondly, the golden share in British Steel has only a relatively short time to run, after which it expires. British Steel will defend and protect itself by the excellence of its economic performance—a concept unheard of by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the privatisation of British Steel made all the shares golden shares, and they have been profitable? Compared to the other steel industries throughout the European Community, British Steel's record, once the dead hand of Government was taken away, has been one of enterprise. We can congratulate it on its excellent progress.

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend that the only share in British Steel that is not golden is the one held by the Government.

Dr. Bray: Is the Secretary of State aware that the undertakings given by British Steel about the steel industry in Scotland have to be read carefully? Will he do as the Secretary of State for Scotland has recently done and ask British Steel to explain its plans in Scotland? Is he aware that the trade gap last year and the increased plans for motor car production in the United Kingdom point to a continuing need for steel in the future? It would help greatly if the Secretary of State asked British Steel to update its commitments in that sector.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has seen a policy by which British Steel was nudged, asked, interfered with, intervened in, pushed, pressed and generally mucked about by Government over 20 years with disastrous results. That policy was replaced by one through which the Government privatised it and allowed it to get on with running its own business, and it has subsequently shown itself to be one of the most successful steel companies in the world. I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman wants to return to the policies of eastern Europe, which is what he is advocating.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Secretary of State confirm that all respectable forecasts for world and European demand for steel in the 1990s confirm that there is a viable future for the steel industry in Scotland, England and Wales? Will he confirm that not only has he received representations about the golden share—he has received them from me—but that the trade Minister of the day in 1988 said that the purpose of the golden share—the Secretary of State has set up more golden shares than any other Minister—was to prevent takeovers and the rundown of British Steel capacity? Therefore, will he join me and his colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland in supporting the detailed plans for new investment in Scottish steel? Will he assure the House that normal regional grants will be available to prevent another great industry from being run down?

Mr. Ridley: The point that I want to get across to the hon. Gentleman is that British Steel is now a highly successful corporation. I wish to allow it to take decisions about where to invest and how to plan its business. I believe, with great humility, that British Steel knows the answers to those questions much better than I do and, I suspect, than even the hon. Gentleman does. That is why he should join me in encouraging British Steel to do what it believes to be right, in its commercial interests. I should not for one moment go further than that. The British Steel special share is time limited.

Manufacturing Industry (Defence Sector)

5. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to help the defence sector of manufacturing industry to seek alternative products in view of the military implications of developments in eastern Europe.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Douglas Hogg): My Department has no such plans.

Mr. Bennett: I thank the Minister for that answer, which is a bit of an improvement on his answer last time, when he was extremely glib.

Does the Minister accept that the major problem in Britain is that more than 500,000 people are employed in the defence industry which, in the past three years, has earned the country an average £1 billion in foreign exchange? Does he accept that if the defence talks and the changes taking place in eastern Europe continue, our defence manufacturers will have to look for alternative products? The Government should be assisting them in that and encouraging them to look for peaceful collaboration in eastern Europe.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is at least persistent: he asked precisely the same question on 1 November 1989. That suggests that he is running out of ideas and in need of early retirement.

The motive behind the question has absolutely nothing to do with industrial strategy. The Labour party is up to its old tricks of cutting defence expenditure but trying to make it sound respectable. If anyone doubts that, he should bear in mind the fact that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is a long-standing unilateralist who prides himself on having voted against the Defence Estimates long before the relaxation in international tension.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that the defence industries have a good record of diversifying into other commercial products, and that that diversification is being held up only by damaging strikes of the sort from which British Aerospace is suffering at Preston near my constituency?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The Labour party is committed to a form of central economic planning. Page 88 of its policy review says on the subject:

"A Labour government will therefore consult unions and employers about the establishment of an Arms Conversion Agency which, within Labour's national industrial strategy, could take on the special role of providing new industries and new jobs."

That is the sort of central economic strategy and planning that eastern European countries are throwing away with contempt.

Mr. Hoyle: Will the Minister return to the peaceful developments in eastern Europe and confirm that since 1979 our trade with almost every country in eastern Europe has gone into deficit? This flatfooted Government have been left at the starting line while the West Germans, the Japanese and most of our other competitors have been building up trade with eastern Europe. What will the Government do about that?

Mr. Hogg: Let us focus on the real issue; let us not waste our time with red herrings of the sort advanced by the hon. Gentleman. The Opposition say that they are better at industry than the major companies which have been doing so well in the defence sector. That is rubbish. There may be a case for adjusting markets and seeking new products, but that is a matter for the companies concerned, not for Opposition Members.

Mr. David Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom defence industry has been a major success over the years and that that is one reason why democracy is breaking out all over eastern Europe? Does he agree that defence is a legitimate purpose for any country, and that British defence exports have helped to support the defence capabilities of many countries? Does he further agree that 500,000 jobs in the industry would be jeopardised if Labour came to power and implemented the proposals in the question of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)?

Mr. Hogg: It is much worse than that. The Labour party conference committed itself to a reduction of £5 billion in defence spending, or a 30 per cent. reduction in Britain's conventional defence capacity. That would lead to massive unemployment.

Ms. Quin: Does the Minister recall the Prime Minister saying that Mr. Gorbachev was a man whom she could do business with? Given that, is it not very disappointing that the Department of Trade and Industry seems to have been so unsuccessful in taking advantage of the new industrial opportunities in the large market of 420 million people in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union? Is not the Government's policy one of unilateral industrial disarmament, and are they not failing to take advantage of the new market that is on offer?

Mr. Hogg: I am sorry that the hon. Lady, who I always thought was a rather respectable character when it came to the point, should be speaking in terms of unilateral disarmament of any kind. I clearly remember what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about Mr. Gorbachev, and I have no doubt that the relaxation in international tension is due, at least in part, to what the Prime Minister has done in that connection. I also remember what the Prime Minister said about the dangers of relaxing our defensive capacity until we see how this matter will end.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend examine the speed at which his Department issues defence export licences? Delays in issuing those licences are a brake on successful export industries, notably in my constituency. Does he agree that the best thing for our defence export industries and especially for the Property Services Agency, which is being privatised, would be to allow them to compete internationally for the excellent defence-related services that they provide?

Mr. Hogg: I am concerned at my hon. Friend's suggestion that there is unreasonable delay in the DTI over issuing licences. If my hon. Friend has specific points, I should be pleased to hear them. I hope that he will give me or my colleagues the details of the complaints.

Mr. Speaker: We are making slow progress today. If we had briefer supplementary questions we might get briefer answers and could make more progress.

Northern Development Company

6. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what grant he proposes to offer to the Northern Development Company in 1990-91.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *rose—*

Hon. Members: Oh, no.

Mr. Hogg: I know that hon. Members will enjoy this. As I told the House on 6 December in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), I expect to announce the level of grant in March.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Minister accept that his answer has more twists in it than the Lambton worm? We do not have a development agency in our region. We have built one ourselves using the resources of local people. We need another £2·5 million over the next three years to promote the second industrial revolution in the region. We want to do it for ourselves, but the Government will not give us the money. The Minister should spare us the lectures and put the cheque in the post.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is an engaging character, but in two respects he does himself no credit.

First, as he has not told us about the very substantial increase in DTI funding for the Northern Development Company over the past few years, I shall do so, In 1981-82 funding of the NDC was £230,000. In 1989-90, inclusive of core funding, it is £1·182 million, which is a fivefold increase.

Secondly, unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's region has fallen by 3 percentage points during the past 12 months. The hon. Gentleman might have mentioned that.

Mr. Trotter: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge the self-support provided by the region to the Northern Development Company and the funding provided by local firms and local authorities? May I remind him of the development corporation's success story, and ask him to support it on a longer-term basis? I point out to my hon. Friend the difficulties of budgeting for only one year at a time, and ask for his support for the suggestion that there should be a three-year finance programme.

Finally, may I ask my right hon. Friend to recognise the excellent support——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I asked for briefer questions, and the hon. Gentleman has asked at least three.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend deserves some good news, and that is what he shall get. As to the rolling programme to which he refers, he will know that on 2 October 1989, I wrote to the regional development organisations accepting the proposal for a three-year funding programme which meets precisely the point that my hon. Friend so eloquently put.

Manufactured Goods

7. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the increase in import penetration of manufactured goods from 1979 until the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: Import penetration in manufacturing industry rose from 27 per cent. in 1979 to 36 per cent. in the year ending March 1989.

Mr. Soley: Is it not a disgraceful record for the Government of the world's first industrial power to turn the manufacturing trade surplus of £1 billion achieved under the previous Labour Government into a £20 billion deficit this year? Although the service sector is important, the Government must understand that we cannot rely on it alone. We should follow the example set by the Germans and Japanese, who plan for, support and invest in their manufacturing industries. Why have the Government failed so abysmally?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman does not appreciate that although our commitment to the European Economic Community means rising import penetration, it means also an increasing proportion of exports. Both have risen because of increasing European and worldwide trading. Six Community countries have a higher import penetration than the United Kingdom, but that does not mean that those countries or Britain have weak economies. It means instead that we are benefiting from a more open and competitive market, that our customers have greater choice, and that British businesses have more discretion in whether to produce for the home or export markets. The important point is that unemployment has fallen dramatically and is well below the EC average—it is particularly low in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Living standards have reached new records, and consumers have unprecedented choice.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my hon. Friend remind the Opposition that manufacturing exports have increased by 40 per cent. since 1986, whereas manufacturing output fell under the previous Labour Government, as did our share of exports? Does my hon. Friend agree that protectionism is no way to make British industry more efficient and competitive? Will he commit himself to dismantling the pernicious gentlemen's agreement that limits car imports, and so put timely pressure on the unions at Ford?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right to say that the open trading system offers more prosperity than restrictions—as the events unfolding daily in eastern Europe show. Car imports are a matter for EC deliberation and not specifically for the British Government, and they will be debated within the Community's Councils.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The Minister will be aware that one way of overcoming high import penetration is to assist British regional development in areas where unemployment is high and incomes are low—such as my own. Will he study the example of the Bretons, who tackled the problem very successfully? They enjoy a thriving export business, but only on the basis of a regional development fund and agency.

Mr. Redwood: Our policies have been much more successful in reducing unemployment than those of many other European countries. It is well below the EC average as a consequence of our open market and competitive policies. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we already have a regional policy. The main contributors to improved prosperity are an open trading system and sound economic policies that allow rapid growth of the sort seen in this country in recent years.

Mr. Grylls: Will my hon. Friend give more help to smaller companies, many of which could win exports if given greater encouragement through the British Overseas Trade Board and the commercial departments of British embassies? Will he also examine the potential of eastern Europe, and ascertain whether our commercial departments there could be expanded to help British exporters, as it is difficult to export to the East at present?

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important subject. There are a number of initiatives to encourage exports. The DTI has an export initiative for smaller companies, which should get in touch with regional offices if they would like help.

I and my right hon. and hon. Friends are active in taking companies and industrialists to see the opportunities in eastern Europe. Extensive briefing is available from our embassies and from the DTI in London and the regional offices. There are enormous opportunities in eastern Europe for British business, and we would welcome companies taking up our offer of advice and help here and in the embassies abroad.

Information Technology

8. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in information technology with Japan.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): According to the latest figures available from the business statistics office, the United Kingdom had a trade deficit with Japan in manufactured products of the electronics and information technology sector of £1·8 billion in 1987 and, provisionally, £2·2 billion in 1988.

Mr. Bidwell: Why is a major competitor like Japan ahead in production, and why are we, who are often in the forefront in invention, lagging behind? The Government appear to be unable to resolve that major problem. Is the Minister aware that there is a major deficit with Japan, much of it in high-technology goods? Does not that require urgent action by the Government and why do they not get on with it?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman highlights the important phenomenon that all the major OECD countries, except Japan, have a trade deficit in information technology. The sad truth is that most countries are unable to compete with Japan and certain other countries in that sector, partly because the Japanese have been very successful in identifying the sector and promoting it. Our export performance, which, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, is excellent, is across a wide range of goods. I see no incompatibility between our excellent performance across the range and the Japanese specialising, for example, in information technology.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my hon. Friend share my disturbance at the deficit with Japan? Will he note that in my constituency several companies in this sector are selling successfully into the Japanese market, which seems to show that what companies need most is not Government assistance but being based in Esher?

Mr. Forth: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the fact that companies in his constituency are capable of developing and making products in this sector which can be exported everywhere, including Japan. There are many such cases throughout the United Kingdom. I see no reason why, with a liberal economic regime and liberal Government policies, a low tax base and a skilled and trained work force, companies should not be able to compete in the sector and export throughout the world, including Japan.

Dr. Moonie: Will the Minister try to answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell)? What does his Department intend to do about the problem other than beating its breast and sitting on its hands?

Mr. Forth: A moment ago I told the House what it is appropriate to do: we shall continue to provide an invigorating economic climate in which companies are free to make their decisions about investment, to develop their products and to seek the most effective markets for them. I hope that the Government will not propose a latter-day interventionist policy of the sort which people throughout eastern Europe have realised, belatedly but welcomely, is a total failure. We hope to continue the excellent trend of policies that we have established over the past 10 years to liberate our industries and give them every opportunity to continue to succeed.

House of Fraser

10. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding publication of the report on House of Fraser.

Mr. Ridley: I have received a number of representations, the great majority of which are in favour of my publishing the inspectors' report into the affairs of House of Fraser Holdings plc. I will do so as soon as possible.

Mr. Taylor: It is five years since the alleged irregularities and fraud took place, and 18 months since the previous Secretary of State received the report. Nothing can be done about alleged wrongful transfers of assets because of the previous Secretary of State's decision not to refer the issue to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is almost an insult to open government and justice not to publish the report and not to tell people exactly what went on?

Mr. Ridley: As I have already told my hon. Friend, I will publish the report at the earliest moment consistent with the even-handed administration of justice.

Mr. Heffer: How early is the earliest possible moment? Is the Secretary of State aware that many of us who knew little about the matter until we saw television programmes have been shocked at what has been happening? Is it not time that not only the House but the entire population had a proper report of what happened in that case?

Mr. Ridley: How early is as soon as possible? It is as soon as I can do so. The hon. Gentleman should reserve judgment until it is possible to publish the report, which I have already said I will do as soon as that is appropriate in the light of possible proceedings.

North Devon Manufacturers Association

11. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance he is giving to the North Devon Manufacturers Association.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Through my south-west regional office, which maintains excellent relations with the North Devon Manufacturers Association, my Department has supported and will continue to support events sponsored by the association whenever possible.

Mr. Speller: Will my hon. Friend accept my thanks and congratulations on the good work of his Department in sponsoring a genuine multinational, locally based collection of industries, which is leading the way in skills training, information technology and happy co-existence to provide a good basis for prosperity in north Devon?

Mr. Hogg: I accept my hon. Friend's comments. Our efforts have been very successful. I recently studied the unemployment figures for the Barnstaple and Ilfracombe travel-to-work area and for Bideford, and then contrasted the figures for November 1984 with those for November 1989. In November 1984, the respective figures for Barnstaple and Ilfracombe and for Bideford were 14·7 per

cent. and 17·2 per cent. In November 1989, the figures were 6·7 per cent. and 8·1 per cent. That is a dramatic improvement.

Mr. Madden: What representations has the Minister received from employers in Devon about the difficulties that might face their employees should they be forced into short-time working? Is the Minister aware that, as a result of changes in Government regulations, if an employee earns more than £43 a week on short-time working he is prevented from claiming unemployment benefit for the days that he is not employed?

Will the hon. Gentleman urgently investigate the impact of the regulations in Devon and elsewhere? Will he ensure that the Secretary of State for Social Security changes the regulations soon so that they do not force short-time workers to be penalised in that way?

Mr. Hogg: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but none of the members of the North Devon Manufacturers Association has made representations to that effect. However, they are pleased with the substantial improvements to the infrastructure in north Devon and, in particular, the large sums of money that the Government are spending on improving road links—for example, the £109 million spent on the north Devon link road.

Exports

13. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the actions he is taking to improve the levels of British exports.

Mr. Ridley: One year ago today my noble Friend Lord Young of Graffham launched a package of measures offering a wide range of help, advice and support to firms at each stage of the exporting process. Staff in the embassies and regional offices are always available to give information and advice.

I am encouraged to note that the volume of non-oil exports in the three months to November 1989 was 13 per cent. higher than a year earlier.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend's news is much appreciated. He will no doubt recognise the importance of the 20 per cent. increase in exports last year, and he is to be congratulated on his recent announcement on the Export Credits Guarantee Department. Is he aware of the importance of the export credits guarantee to the north-west of England? Can he give us a timetable for the implementation of his plans?

Mr. Ridley: I am glad that my hon. Friend recognises the remarkable export performance of British industry in the past year. It represents a remarkable gain in our share of exports, to which the whole House will wish to pay tribute.

On the ECGD, my announcement before Christmas will have the effect of giving added impetus to the credit insurance industry in the long term by making sure that credit insurance will be available to our exporters within and without the Community. It will be necessary for legislation to be introduced, but I cannot estimate when it will be introduced. Apart from that difficulty, the Government will proceed with urgently required plans for the future of the ECGD as soon as possible.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: What would be the impact on unemployment nationally if the Government's export promotion allowed the balance of payments to trade in surplus?

Mr. Ridley: I could not be expected to answer that off the top of my head. The balance of payments includes the capital account, which produces a large amount of inward investment—about £1·5 billion from Japan alone last year—and which in turn is a major contributor to United Kingdom employment. The calculation that the hon. Gentleman seeks is somewhat wider than he would like to acknowledge.

Mr. Burt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that exports will increase in the years to come as the significant investment in manufacturing, domestic and foreign, comes on stream? Does he further agree that this is a sign of great confidence in our economy, and that if Opposition Members truly wished to support their constituents and their jobs, they would welcome that inward investment instead of carping about it, as they often do?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right. In addition to the 13 per cent. volume increase in exports in the past 12 months, export order books have been showing a distinctly healthy trend, even in the past few months. British exports in the future will embarrass Opposition Members because they never like to hear good news.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Secretary of State confirm that we have not only the biggest trade deficit of all our European competitors but the highest interest rate and the worst inflation, and that that is hitting exporters? What will he do to prevent Britain from becoming the only country in Europe, in the run-up to 1992, according to CBI figures, in which manufacturing investment this year is falling?

Mr. Ridley: I would not accuse the hon. Gentleman, in the words of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), of being sufficiently clever to sit on his hands and beat his breast at the same time, but he was attempting to do something very similar in that supplementary question. Investment is keeping up extremely well and, in addition to the list of factors that he suggested, we have the lowest taxation on industrial payroll companies. Why does he wish to add a 0·5 per cent. payroll levy, which would raise a further £1 billion from British industry, thus severely debilitating it at a time when he says British industry needs help not hindrance?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Is my right hon. Friend aware that we must increase our manufacturing exports and that, to achieve it, the Government cannot ignore the need for a strategy for manufacturing industry? Is he further aware that unless we increase our manufacturing exports, our balance of trade deficit will continue, and there will be ongoing pressure on the pound, which will contribute to inflation and the country's economic problems?

Mr. Ridley: We have a strategy for manufacturing industry, and that is to let companies get on with the job without interfering with them. I suspect that that played a large part in the highly successful performance of British exports to which I referred.

Regional Assistance

14. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the value of grants paid by his Department in pursuit of regional assistance plans during 1989; and what was the level of such assistance in real terms during 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In 1989 expenditure on regional assistance in England totalled £326·6 million; in 1979 the figure was £297·6 million. Expressed in terms of 1989 prices, the expenditure in 1979 was £594 million.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister deny that the combined total from regional assistance and regional development grants was £1,130 million in 1979 and £470 million last year? Given the enormous increase in economic and environmental needs, does the Minister realise that that is an example of negligence and irresponsibility?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has failed to analyse the component elements of the figures. We have discontinued regional development grant, and quite right too, because it was an automatic grant which took no account of the jobs created, or of need. We are relying on regional selective assistance, which is based on need, jobs created and economic viability. That is the way forward.

Sawmilling Industry

15. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Industry what representation he has received about overcapacity in the sawmilling industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Apart from the points that my hon. Friend raised in his recent correspondence with my Department, I am not aware of having received any other representations about overcapacity in sawmilling.

Mr. Gill: In view of my hon. Friend's answers to my question and to the preceding one, what assurance can he give the House that regional selective assistance will not lead to displacement and overcapacity? Does he agree that such commercial decisions are best left to the market?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend illustrates the value of having moved away from regional development grants to regional selective assistance. When considering applications for regional selective assistance, one can take into account displacement in employment opportunities and overcapacity in existing plants. That was not the case with regional development grants.

Hong Kong

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on my visit to Hong Kong from 13 to 16 January.

I went to show this country's continuing commitment to Hong Kong, to meet a representative cross-section of the community, and to discuss the issues of prime importance to Hong Kong in the period before 1997—the operation of the nationality package, which I proposed to the House on 20 December, and the pace and extent of democratisation in Hong Kong.

I also discussed the problem of the Vietnamese boat people, and visited a refugee camp and a camp at which boat people are screened for refugee status.

Hong Kong has become the world's 11th largest trading entity because of the unique combination of British administration and justice, and the talent and energy of its people. The immediate sense of fear caused by the events in China last June has lifted, but those events dealt a substantial blow to Hong Kong's self-confidence, and the exodus of the talent which is needed to keep Hong Kong prosperous has continued. We believe that it is vital that those people should stay.

Everyone to whom I spoke—in the Executive and Legislative Councils, one of the district boards, the business community, public servants and other groups—had hoped that the package that I proposed on 20 December would have made provision for more people. But they also welcomed what we had proposed as a measure that would give key people the confidence to remain in Hong Kong. They recognise that it was not an easy step to take, and they are following carefully the discussion in this country. They all hoped that it would be possible for Parliament to give its approval and for the scheme to begin to operate. I assured them that the Government were fully committed to the proposal.

The second issue that we discussed was the repatriation of Vietnamese boat people. No one in Hong Kong involved in the repatriation takes satisfaction in what had to be done, but the result achieved was necessary. Having seen the camps for myself, I am more than ever convinced that return to Vietnam, in carefully controlled conditions, is preferable to camp life, with no hope of resettlement elsewhere.

Hong Kong has paid a heavy price for its principled policy of first asylum. We cannot expect it to receive this year the same number of boat people—over 30,000—that they received last year. There is nowhere for those boat people who are not refugees to go. The policy of repatriation is therefore the right one, and I hope that this may soon be endorsed by the international community.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) and to Lord Ennals for their thorough and expert report on the first 51 who were repatriated before Christmas. I would welcome monitoring by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and other agencies, of all who are repatriated in the future.

No one in Hong Kong seriously disputes the validity of the joint declaration as a basis for Hong Kong's future after 1997, but confidence in the concept of "one country, two systems" was undermined by the events of last June. Since then the Chinese Government have reaffirmed their commitment to the joint declaration, and I believe that we must make it work.

An important element in that is the extent and pace of movement towards democracy in Hong Kong before and after 1997, which as I have discovered, is the subject of intense concern and debate in Hong Kong, and we are discussing it with the Chinese Government; those discussions are continuing, and I would prefer not to go into detail today. I can say, however, that our goal is to set a system in place—beginning with elections to the Legislative Council in 1991—which will satisfy Hong Kong's aspiration for democracy and which will endure after 1997. *[Interruption.]* There seems to be some disarray on the Opposition Benches.

I hope to be able, after further discussion, to announce a decision within the next few weeks.

As all who know it agree, Mr. Speaker, Hong Kong is the economic success story of a region that boasts several economic miracles. As you look across the border into China you see that that economic success has spread to the neighbouring province of the mainland. China is Hong Kong's largest trading partner, and Hong Kong is also one of Britain's biggest markets in the region. All that could continue after 1997—and the plans are dramatic—or it could be lost.

The future of 5·7 million people after 1997 depends on three things. First, it depends on the talent and energy of Hong Kong's own people, and they are not in doubt. Secondly, it depends on the attitude of the Chinese Government, who need to do much more to reassure Hong Kong. But dialogue has been re-established, and we must do our best to maintain it. Thirdly, Hong Kong's future depends on Britain, as the responsible sovereign power until 1997.

After last June, the House rightly voiced its support for Hong Kong—and that, of course, must mean more than words. The people of Hong Kong are realists: for example, they accept, although reluctantly, that we cannot give passports to all. They look to us, as the sovereign power, to make the necessary decisions over the coming years, and to follow an active and understanding policy towards Hong Kong. I hope that I convinced them that we shall do so.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): We thank the Foreign Secretary for making a statement to the House so soon after his return from Hong Kong. Four questions arise from his visit, from today's statement and from the statement made in Guangzhou today by the deputy director general of the Basic Law drafting committee.

First, what are the Government's intentions with regard to the progress of democratisation in Hong Kong? Everyone now accepts the timid inadequacy of the Government's decision in February 1988 that only 10 members of the Legislative Council should be directly elected in 1991. Opposition Members took the view that the first elections should have taken place in 1988. After the Tiananmen square massacre, we urged an increase in the number of next year's directly elected members to 30, with a full 100 per cent. by 1995.

The Government recognised the need for an increase, but they have done absolutely nothing. They have therefore left the field free for decisions by the Peking Government, who, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, have proposed only 18 directly elected members by 1997

—the year of the handover. OMELCO—the Hong Kong representatives—asked for 20 next year as a prelude to 30 by 1997 and the full 60 by 2003. The Foreign Secretary in Hong Kong gave an elliptical off-the-record interview in which he said that there would be 20 by next year, but he did not look further than that. Today he has given the House no information whatsoever, and that is simply not good enough.

The right hon. Gentleman said today that we are the responsible power. He said in Hong Kong that it is a decision for us and for the Government of Hong Kong to make. What does that mean? Will the Government have a phased programme of democracy in Hong Kong—not just elections next year but an increased number before the handover? He must at least tell the House clearly today.

Secondly, what has happened to the Bill of Rights? The right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, the present Leader of the House, who is sitting beside him, said on July 13:

"The proposed Bill of Rights will ensure that there is one fundamental legal text which sets out all the rights and freedoms that the people of Hong Kong currently enjoy." —[*Official Report*, 13 July 1989; Vol. 156, c. 1169.]

He promised that it would form part of the existing law and continue after the transfer of sovereignty in 1997.

As we know, the draft Bill of Rights has been thrown out by the Executive Council in Hong Kong as inaccurate, and reports from Hong Kong during the right hon. Gentleman's visit stated that the Government were now playing down the Bill of Rights. Today he has said not a single word about the Bill of Rights. Will he make it clear to the House? Is the Bill of Rights now expendable, or are the Government proceeding with it? We must know.

Thirdly, what international discussions are taking place on the boat people and when will they be resumed? Have the Government of Vietnam indicated whether they are ready to receive more boat people if they are sent forcibly? What action are the Government taking to provide incentives for voluntary repatriation? What action are the Government taking to provide direct economic aid for Vietnam, which is the most sensible way of giving the Vietnamese confidence to remain in their own country as it is assisted to escape from its abject poverty?

The right hon. Gentleman said in Hong Kong that he had not yet had time to read the Amnesty International report about the treatment of the boat people. He will know that that report alleges partial strangulation, kicks and beatings of boat people by Hong Kong police and that a boat person died as a result of indiscriminate kicking and the use of batons. Those are grave charges by an organisation of international repute.

Will the right hon. Gentleman set up an independent inquiry into those allegations, and will he re-examine the screening procedures, which Amesty International says contain critical shortcomings?

Finally, has the right hon. Gentleman seen the statement today by Mr. Lu Ping, the deputy secretary general of the Basic Law drafting committee, which he made in Guangzhou in which he is reported as saying that under the Basic Law top officials in Hong Kong's post-1997 Government will not have the right to live abroad and in which he further says that Hong Kong residents with British passports will not be allowed to seek British consular protection while in the territory after it returns to Chinese rule. Is that not a torpedo right through the Government's ill-conceived plans to award United Kingdom passports to 50,000 so-called key people? Does not the statement made on behalf of the Chinese Government mean that, if the British Government's plan is enacted, everyone awarded a passport will inevitably seek to come to Britain before 1997, thus making nonsense of their claim that the purpose of their plan is to anchor those people to Hong Kong?

Everyone in Britain has welcomed the magnificent moves to democracy in eastern Europe. Are the people of Hong Kong to be denied that clear progress to democracy that has been won by the Poles, Czech and Romanians? That would be a sorry epitaph to British rule in Hong Kong, and we look to the right hon. Gentleman to reassure the House and the people of Hong Kong.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) asked four substantial questions. First, he asked about the progress to democracy. It is certain that that will start with elections to the Legislative Council next year, and from a substantially higher base than that proposed in the White Paper in February 1988. Hong Kong will start next year on that substantial road. I gave no figures in Hong Kong, and I have given no figures to the House, because we are still seeking what is clearly the best solution, which is that that start next year, and then in the elections in 1995, should continue after 1997, and for it to be incorported in the Chinese provisions. If someone is contemplating standing for election to the Legislative Council, it is clearly desirable and makes sense to have that upward curve, if possible, to ensure that the process which will certainly start next year will assuredly be continued after 1997.

We have been discussing that in Hong Kong and with the Chinese Government, but those discussions have not yet finished. I said in Hong Kong, and in the House today, that as soon as they have finished—they must end before long—I will let the House know. It would be a great mistake to take a decision that made impossible the longer-term progress to democracy, if such progress is attainable. If it is not, as I said in Hong Kong, we and the Hong Kong Government will have to take decisions and announce them for 1991 and for 1995.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman asked about the Bill of Rights. That idea was first put forward by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President of the Council. It has been taken up in Hong Kong, and its institutions are considering its text. The drafting of the Bill of Rights is a matter for the Hong Kong Government. The Chinese have not made any representations to us, but if they want to comment on the draft Bill once it is published, they will be entitled to do so. That matter is progressing through the institutions of Hong Kong.

With regard to what will happen after 1997, the two United Nations covenants on human rights will, as the joint declaration makes clear, continue to apply to Hong Kong after 1997. There is no dispute about that, and that provision is fully reflected in the current draft of the Basic Law.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman asked about the boat people. He asked for specific information about the next meeting of the steering committee in Geneva. I have been told today that it will be held on 23 and 24 January, about a week later than was originally supposed. I hope that the international community will agree at that meeting to accept in practice what is already accepted in principle —that the right place for Vietnamese who are not refugees is Vietnam. As the right hon. Gentleman said, while it is

[Mr. Hurd]

absolutely right to encourage voluntary return—as the right hon. Gentleman knows, we and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are doing that—that has not proved sufficient, and therefore repatriation is necessary.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the Amnesty report. Obviously the detailed criticisms in it must be considered by us and by the Government of Hong Kong, as I said in Hong Kong yesterday. Several of the incidents in the Amnesty report have already been investigated by the Hong Kong Government, and the criticisms have not been accepted. I visited the Hai Ling Chau camp yesterday and saw something of the screening. Obviously it was not a thorough inspection, but I was impressed by the initial interview, which was relatively short, and the three hours or so that were spent actually examining the detail. I was impressed also by the way in which, in the camp, it was stated in English and in Vietnamese that there was a clear right of appeal.

The right hon. Gentleman's final point dealt with Mr. Lu Ping's statement. I imagine that I have read the same account as the right hon. Gentleman read. We have looked at that point—it came up while I was in Hong Kong. Under Chinese law, full citizens of another country are not dual citizens. It follows that, in the case of United Kingdom citizens, they are entitled to our consular protection throughout the world. Hong Kong Chinese who are not full United Kingdom citizens are in a different position.

Article 74 of the joint declaration makes it clear that the Government of the special administrative region—the SAR—of Hong Kong may employ British and other foreign nationals in the public service after 1997.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he conducted his recent visit to Hong Kong with great skill in appallingly difficult circumstances? Frankly, those circumstances are not being helped by the attitude of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

My right hon. Friend spoke the other day about a through train to the future for the people of Hong Kong. Does he accept that the best through train is one marked "freedom and democracy" and that, therefore, his statement today that he will set in place a system of democracy that will satisfy Hong Kong's aspirations is extremely welcome?

Will my right hon. Friend enlighten the House on an important matter about the Opposition's policy? I realise that Opposition policy is not his responsibility, except in the sense that all policy statements in the House are part of the central problem of Hong Kong. Is it correct that the Opposition are now in favour of giving British passports to everyone in Hong Kong?

Mr. Hurd: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. As he knows, there has been a concentration and focus on the figures for the number of democratically elected legislators in the Legislative Council in 1991, which is an important point. The point may have been somewhat obscure, but, in any case, the start to be made next year in democracy in the Legislative Council in Hong Kong will be an important event. It will start from a more substantial base than was suggested and discussed even as short a time as two years ago. The best way is to proceed from that base after 1997. That is why it is sensible to discuss these matters with the People's Republic, as we are doing. If that is not possible, at the end of the day, we will need to make our own decisions.

For fear of wearying the House, I did not press the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about Labour policies, because it takes an awfully long time to do so. I am in total confusion. No doubt there will be opportunities to explore that matter. Sometimes the right hon. Gentleman oozes sympathy, and sometimes he says that there is nothing to be done. From all his foggy phrases, I get the strong impression that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have no interest whatever in a sensible future for Hong Kong.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I join the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) in congratulating the Foreign Secretary on the personal skill and diplomacy with which he did a difficult job in Hong Kong. However, is not the outlying situation in Hong Kong unchanged? There is no change in the hard facts of Hong Kong's position, for confidence in Hong Kong still rests on a slender thread. Does the Foreign Secretary realise that maintenance of that confidence now depends on his being very tough on two matters: first, democracy, the Bill of Rights, and the Communists in Peking; and, secondly, passports and those who pander to racism in his own party? Does the Foreign Secretary accept that what Hong Kong needs is both of those—not one without the other?

On the issue of the boat people, the Foreign Secretary said that the voluntary repatriation programme was not going fast enough, but is it not the case that UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme has already repatriated 1,100 people peaceably to Vietnam without any of the brutality of the forced repatriations? That figure is 20 times more than the Government's programme has achieved. Indeed, another 1,300 people have applied for voluntary repatriation. Surely the Foreign Secretary now realises that this is not the time to press ahead with another brutal exercise in forced repatriation, which would not only damage Britain's name and prevent a multilateral solution to the problem, but would probably impede the process of voluntary repatriation which is proving so successful.

Mr. Hurd: I came back with two main thoughts impressed on me by the people of Hong Kong. The first was, as the right hon. Gentleman has said, the enthusiasm among articulate Hong Kong Chinese for greater democracy and for a start towards democracy. The second was their wish to get away from the constant hostile statements from Peking. It will not be easy, but we have to try to reconcile the two messages that I received so clearly.

I have detected no racism on the Government Benches about this matter—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] No. What I have detected—I have tried to read the speeches and to listen to the broadcasts carefully—is a natural anxiety about the consequences of what we propose for immigration in this country. I do not find that anxiety objectionable, and it is because of that anxiety that we have made our package what it is. If we had brushed aside that anxiety as of no importance, of course, we might have gone much further in the direction that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has suggested, but we have not. We have tried to strike a balance, which, as I have said, is disappointing to almost

everybody in Hong Kong but which we believe is a reasonable balance, taking into account the reasonable preoccupations here and the reasonable expectations there.

As I have said about the boat people, voluntary return is the best thing and I am glad that voluntary returns are taking place. However, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdon) knows perfectly well that the disadvantage and drawback of that is that very few of those who are screened out and who it is decided are not refugees are volunteering. That is why—*[Interruption.]* It is true. That is why we decided before Christmas to send back 51, and that is why, as I have said several times, unless there is a more dramatic change on the horizon on the part of the international community than is clear at the moment, we shall have to continue that policy.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): May I join in commending my right hon. Friend for the manner in which he handled a visit in the course of which he was bound to be open to criticism from one quarter or another, whatever he said or did? Does he agree that the predominant concern in this matter is the interests of the people of Hong Kong? In those interests, will he proceed with the package of measures that he has already outlined, confident that he will have the support of the vast majority of his hon. Friends? Accepting that the reality is that the Chinese Government will be taking over Hong Kong in 1997, is it not clear that antagonising them would be counterproductive? At the same time, in his discussions with the Chinese Government, will my right hon. Friend be robust in representing the interests and aspirations of the people of Hong Kong?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. On his first point, every right hon. and hon. Member must accept that we have a continuing responsibility to Hong Kong and to our own constituents. Indeed, many of our own constituents have or will have substantial interests in and connections with the continued success of Hong Kong, so I do not think that there is a contradiction when it comes to the point.

I entirely agree with the way in which my hon. Friend put his second point. Every time one goes to Hong Kong and looks at the geography, the food, the water, the history and the law there, one sees clearly that its future is connected with China. That means a dialogue, but it does not mean simply finding out what the Chinese want and then doing it. Until 1997, we and the Hong Kong Government have our own responsibilities, and we intend to discharge them.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that in the long term—I do not pretend that it is a short-term solution—the only way to stop the flow of refugees from Vietnam is to end the trade, aid and credit embargo organised by the United States in which most countries, including Britain, participate to a greater or lesser extent? Has he noted the recommendation in the report by the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) and Lord Ennals that Britain should resume aid to Vietnam? No one would pretend that that alone would solve the problem. What steps will the Foreign Secretary take to persuade the United States to end its war against Vietnam?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman makes a point which, as he said, figured in the report published yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) and Lord Ennals. Vietnam may be opened up to aid. The process of voluntary return and of repatriation is already accompanied by some help to Vietnam, although on a small scale. That may continue and develop, but the hon. Gentleman knows the difficulties.

The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that it is not an immediate solution. The immediate solution lies in continuing voluntary returns, as the report said, and in making it clearer than it now is to people in Vietnam that to get on a bus or a boat to Hong Kong is not a road to resettlement in the West for those who are not refugees. The solution also lies in the international community accepting that repatriation of people who are not refugees is regrettable but necessary, that returns should be monitored, that monitoring should not be confined to those who return voluntarily and that it has implications for financial and reception arrangements in Vietnam.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a high proportion of so-called boat people have made their way from north Vietnam to Hong Kong either through Chinese coastal waters or overland through China? Does not that call into question the competence and integrity of the Chinese Administration, which must be the key to the future of Hong Kong?

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend is perfectly right. The numbers arriving in recent months have been low because of the season. Most of those arriving recently have come, at least in part, overland. Clearly a traffic is developing and money is being made from it. People do not enter Hong Kong by land because if they did so they would be sent back immediately as illegal Chinese immigrants. I saw that happening one afternoon in Hong Kong. They make the last part of the journey by boat.

My right hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to the responsibility of the Chinese Government, which we have impressed upon them continually. They have given assurances, and it is up to them to carry them out.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The right hon. Gentleman said that Parliament would be invited to give approval to the scheme. When will that be? Can he assure the House that any such legislation would be regarded as constitutional and, therefore, would be taken in its entirety on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman asks legitimate questions, but they are not for me. My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President of the Council will have noted the right hon. Gentleman's two points.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend has visited the camps for Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong. Does he now realise just how difficult the conditions are for those people and how unwilling they are, even in those conditions, to return to Vietnam? He also paid tribute, rightly, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) for his report calling for wider economic aid to Vietnam. Does he accept that it would be easier for many of us to accept the policy of compulsory repatriation if he took the imaginative step, perhaps in the first instance, of offering jointly to fund the non-governmental organisations which

[Mr. Jim Lester]

already have programmes in the poverty-stricken areas of north Vietnam? Might that be one way of making compulsory repatriation more acceptable?

Mr. Hurd: As my hon. Friend knows, I am keen that the NGOs should help to monitor what happens to people who return to Vietnam. If they came forward with particular schemes along the lines that my hon. Friend describes, I should certainly consider them.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): When the Foreign Secretary referred to progress towards democracy, he spoke of a formula that would satisfy Hong Kong opinion and that would endure. It would be remarkable if both those criteria could be met. The heart of the matter, as I am sure the Foreign Secretary knows, is that a formula that will satisfy demands for democracy in Hong Kong is not likely to endure because it will not satisfy the Chinese. When faced with that dilemma, how will the Foreign Secretary's mind move? Above all, we want to hear from him that he will give greater priority to satisfying the demands for democracy in Hong Kong than he will to appeasing the people in Peking.

Mr. Hurd: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman used the word "appeasing" in his analysis. We have no interest in appeasing the authorities in Peking as there is no particular Sino-British interest that is greater than, or outweighs, the future interests of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is the largest and heaviest component in our relations with China, and so it will stay.

We are simply concerned with what arrangements will start democracy in Hong Kong in a substantial way and which will endure. The right hon. Gentleman knows the history of this matter and he knows that democracy will start from a substantial point. The right hon. Gentleman knows that 10 directly elected seats in the Legislative Council were proposed in the joint declaration and that 10 were embodied as the starting point in last year's White Paper. I believe that everybody—I stress everybody—accepts that now the starting point will be substantially higher than that. That much has been achieved, and the right hon. Gentleman is one of those who helped to persuade us to achieve it. That much is under our belt, and it represents a big success.

I hope that we can go further and that we can reconcile the two considerations that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. I do not know whether that will be possible, but, when we know, we will tell the House.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a most welcome part of his statement was the fact that a large number of people in Hong Kong reluctantly accept that it is not realistic to offer a right of abode in this country to all those people who hold British dependent territory passports? Does he agree with the estimate given by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that those passport holders could amount to 5·25 million people by 1997? Is not this in stark contrast with what appears to be the official policy of the Opposition—certainly it is the policy of the leader of the Liberal party—that all those people should be given a right of abode here? That means that about 8,000 people with a right of abode would be imposed on every constituency.

Mr. Hurd: As I understand it, that is certainly the view of the leader of the SLD and, although I believe it to be a foolish policy, he has maintained it openly. Whenever anyone suggests what is the policy of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) bounces up and down and denies it. We have no idea about the policy of the Labour party; sometimes the right hon. Gentleman gives one impression, sometimes another. As the discussion continues, perhaps he will be able to come off the fence.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): An enduring future for Hong Kong depends upon agreement with China and with the Peking Government. All experience shows that that requires infinite patience, great determination and a readiness to continue to push a point long after most people would have thought that it had sunk home. In view of that, will the Foreign Secretary continue to argue that holding key workers in Hong Kong until the date of transfer offers the real prospect that they will continue to remain under the Chinese Government? Similarly, will the Foreign Secretary resist the blandishments to go further than the first tranche of democratisation in 1991, on which it looks as though there is a good chance of an agreement with China? Will he wait and hope for further agreement with China on an increased element on democratisation in the second tranche?

Mr. Hurd: We have discussed the nationality package with the Chinese Government for the reasons the right hon. Gentleman has given. They have made public their concern about the package, but we have begun to persuade them that, if they want, as the joint declaration sets out, a stable and prosperous Hong Kong in 1997, a package on those lines is essential.

On the second point, I note the advice which the right hon. Gentleman gives. We shall return to this matter as soon as the possibilities for the best way forward to democracy become clearer.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the undertaking given by the Opposition to repeal any legislation allowing 50,000 families the right of abode in this country would precipitate a major crisis in Hong Kong if ever the Labour party came to power? Does not that show that the policy statement of the Labour party spokesmen on this matter is the most cynical, demagogic and opportunistic that we have ever heard from the Opposition—and that is saying something?

Mr. Hurd: Ninety per cent. of Labour party policy is obscure and the remainder is irresponsible.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North West): Will the Foreign Secretary end the uncertainty by making a statement about the fate of the 670 tonnes of elephant ivory currently held in Hong Kong? I understand that the Foreign Office has taken over responsibility from the Department of the Environment with regard to the possibility of entering reservations to the CITES agreement. Will he say whether that reservation will be entered by 18 January? I hope that the answer will be no, but, if it is yes, does the Foreign Secretary realise that he will be condemning to death many more hundreds of elephants?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman's last observation was nonsense because Hong Kong has already banned imports of ivory. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's other, reasonable question is yes. The Government, on behalf of Hong Kong, have today entered a six-month reservation to the CITES agreement which provides for listing African elephants in appendix 1 of the convention. The reservation will apply only to Hong Kong and will allow Hong Kong traders time to dispose of their legally acquired ivory in an orderly fashion and enable workers and carvers to find alternative employment. After that, Hong Kong will be part of the agreed system. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that will be a considerable advance.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my right hon. Friend make it clear to the people of Hong Kong and the Government of the People's Republic of China that they could have given no greater total commitment to the future of Hong Kong—economic, political and free—than that they were prepared to court electoral unpopularity by undertaking to let into this country as many people as they have?

Mr. Hurd: I have done so and it is clearly understood in Hong Kong. The people there follow our proceedings and discussions with great interest and—when they hear remarks which show a total lack of realism at what is happening there—anxiety.

Last summer, three major matters were pressed on my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President when he was in Hong Kong: first, nationality; secondly, repatriation of the boat people; and, thirdly, the movement to democracy. We have taken the first crucial and difficult decisions on the first two issues. I have answered questions about the third, a decision on which will come pretty soon.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I find the Foreign Secretary's statement totally inadequate. After hearing about his expensive and well-publicised visit, I expected a bit more. Was he or his governor—who recently visited the Chinese Government—able to extract a guarantee from the Chinese Government about the security of the British citizens in Hong Kong after 1997? I say that particularly in view of statements from the Chinese Government about the peaceful demonstrations in Hong Kong which have occurred. I should like to know precisely what the Foreign Secretary's position is on that issue. Is it not a fact that the British Government are totally bankrupt of ideas on the Hong Kong issue and are merely following behind the coat tails of the Chinese Government?

Mr. Hurd: The Chinese Government are certainly concerned about some expressions of free opinion in Hong Kong. The Government and the governor of Hong Kong have made it clear to the Chinese Government in many ways that an important aspect of Hong Kong is precisely that there is free expression there. If the Chinese intend after 1997 to incorporate into China a lively, vigorous and developing Hong Kong, they must accept that there will be freedom of expression and clear and rapid movement towards democracy. These are conditions of the prize; they are set out clearly in the joint declaration.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Can my right hon. Friend give the House any information about representations that the Government may have made to Commonwealth countries in which there is space and opportunity to prevail upon them to offer passports to Hong Kong residents who may wish to leave after 1997?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, indeed. Since my statement on 20 December we have made representations to Commonwealth Governments and to many other friendly Governments encouraging them to follow our lead and introduce schemes of the kind that we propose, which are designed to keep key personnel in Hong Kong—for example, people working for companies belonging to these countries. The French already have such a limited scheme, as does New Zealand in one respect, and we are doing what we can to persuade other countries which could introduce such schemes to do so. My hon. Friend may have seen that Congressman Solarz has proposed such a scheme in the United States Congress.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to have regard to the subsequent business. The House knows that there is an important debate and a 10-minute Bill, and that the debate must end at 7 pm before we go on to private business. I shall call three more speakers from each side and then I am afraid we must move on.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): The Secretary of State said that the fear engendered by the events of 4 June has lifted somewhat in Hong Kong, but will he confirm that there remains among its population an underlying fear and apprehension of the Peking regime, which is unrepentant about the events on 4 June, and confirm that they have cause for that fear?

Recently the head of the supreme court in China stated as a matter of policy that the Communist party is above the law. Given that background to the fear and apprehension, how does the right hon. Gentleman think the House should reply to questions such as I heard in Hong Kong? I was asked how it is that in my part of western Europe tears of joy are shed at people in eastern Europe escaping from Communist tyranny, and the people of eastern Europe are invited to join the European Community, which would give them the automatic right of abode in any part of the community, including the United Kingdom, yet we are prepared to consign Hong Kong to the Peking regime with inadequate protection in terms of a democratic structure.

Mr. Hurd: It is true that there continues to be an underlying anxiety. It has lifted a little because contacts have resumed in various ways. At lunch yesterday, I sat next to a young business man who had just returned from Peking, where he had been well received by the Prime Minister.

This underlying anxiety does not lead any of the Hong Kong Chinese to whom I spoke to question the fact that the joint declaration and the system being erected under it is the only realistic way forward for Hong Kong. Hong Kong wants us to make sense of the concept of two systems in one country, and the observations that the hon. Gentleman quoted will not apply in the special administrative region of Hong Kong.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend concede that, if nearly 250,000 people come here from Hong Kong with the right of abode, that will permanently and irreversibly change the

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

nature of the British people? If this step is to be taken and my right hon. Friend's Bill receives a Second Reading, does he agree that the measure should be considered by a Committee of the whole House?

Mr. Hurd: The first matter is one on which every right hon. and hon. Member must make his own judgment—first, as to the likelihood of it happening; secondly, as to the consequences for the country if it did happen, given the people involved, their backgrounds, professional experience and so on. That is not a matter on which I would seek to educate my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend's second point is not a matter for me. It is the second time it has been made, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House is present listening.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): It is clear that nothing that the Foreign Secretary is free to do will reassure the people of Hong Kong who are terrified about what might happen to them in 1997. His belated concentration on extending democracy to the people of Hong Kong must be looked upon by realistic people in Hong Kong as some sort of attempt by the Government to slide out of their responsibilities and to say. "Now that you have some measure of democracy, our responsibility is a little less than it used to be." Is not that the realistic situation?

Mr. Hurd: No. That suspicion was not put to me, and I do not think that it is in anyone's mind.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): is my right hon. Friend aware that in this difficult situation, which I know something about having recently visited China and Hong Kong, he has a duty to the people of England as well as to the people of Hong Kong? Is he further aware that mass immigration has been continuing for a long time to many parts of this country, including my own area? His proposal is for further mass immigration. Will that be acceptable to the mass of our people, and is it right that the Government should allow it? Is not his prime duty to maintain the social cohesion of this ancient and small island?

Mr. Hurd: I entirely accept, to quote my hon. Friend, that we have a duty to the people of England as well as to the people of Hong Kong. Given my hon. Friend's background and knowledge of both sides of that equation, I should not have thought that he would find those interests in contradiction.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Will the Foreign Secretary clarify a matter that was raised earlier? If public servants and people in public office accept citizenship before 1997, will the Basic Law deprive them of or debar them from public office after that time?

Mr. Hurd: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would look at article 74 of the joint declaration, which covers that point.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend said that all the people that he spoke to in Hong Kong about his package of 20 December were disappointed that the number of people to be allowed to come here was not greater. He will note that I have a motion on the Order Paper for debate on Friday. It completely supports the Government's proposed package but expresses a similar concern about the number. Has my right hon. Friend's package of 20 December had time to begin to restore confidence, or does he think that he may need to increase the number?

Mr. Hurd: I made it clear in Hong Kong that I did not see any possibility of increasing the number. Members of the business community, civil servants and many others who raised the matter with me on Monday would have liked the number to be greater, but they accepted that it was as much as we would be able to implement. They made clear that my proposal of 20 December would be of substantial value in keeping key people in Hong Kong.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry that it has not been possible to call all the hon. Members who wished to participate. I shall carefully note the names of those hon. Members who have been rising and will give them some precedence when we debate this matter again.

BILL PRESENTED

Security Industry

Sir John Wheeler, supported by Sir Marcus Fox, Sir Geoffrey Finsberg, Mr. Ivan Lawrence, Mr. Michael Shersby, Dame Janet Fookes, Mr. John Greenway, Sir Eldon Griffiths and Mr. Tony Worthington, presented a Bill to require the creation of an inspectorate to regulate the employment of uniformed guards and personnel in the security industries; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 26 January and to be printed. [Bill 55.]

Adoption (Amendment)

4.23 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a statutory code of practice for adoption agencies; to amend the Adoption Act 1976; and for connected purposes.

In seeking the leave of the House to amend the Adoption Act 1976, I recognise that I am in a privileged position. I am the father of three small children and in 10 weeks' time I shall be the father of a fourth. We are lucky to be able to have children more or less to order while many couples are desperate to have children of their own and are not so blessed.

Just before Christmas, I visited Basildon hospital to play the role of Father Christmas. I was taken to the special baby care unit and shown eight babies. One of them had been born at 24 weeks and I am delighted to tell the House that that baby is doing well. In another cot was a big bruiser of a baby weighing 9 lb 15 oz. He had no name on his identification tag. The nurse told me that he had been born only that day and that a couple had been found who would give him their love. That certainly put the Christmas festivities into context for me.

The latest figures for England and Wales show that in the past year 69,249 children were in care and 7,390 children were adopted. Behind those stark figures lies in every case an individual human being who perhaps experienced the loss of both parents or a broken home, or who is simply unwanted. We tend to hear about the sensational cases of children being taken into care or of couples seeking to adopt. Those cases grab the headlines and tend to concentrate one's mind. I am concerned about the vast majority of cases—those that may be described as the ordinary cases.

I am anxious that the present system should overlook no one. It is difficult for people with their own children to imagine the heartbreak that childless couples can experience during the adopton process. It can be a traumatic time for couples who have been trying to have their own baby for a number of years, and who are ruled out of consideration as adoptive parents because of their age.

Most organisations involved in adoptions agree that the greatest demand is for babies and that there are not enough babies for those who wish to adopt them. Although there are enough children to meet the demand for them, sadly they do not always meet the requirements of prospective adoptive parents.

One would have to be very hard not to be moved by the details in the files of children waiting to be adopted. The smiling photographs are usually accompanied by personal details, and the overall message is of asking a family to give their love. There must be room for improvement in a system in which a boy of eight has been moved 38 times; in which some children spend all their time in care and are never matched to prospective adoptive parents; and in which other children are simply overlooked.

The overriding consideration in approving adoptive parents is the extent to which the adoption agency is satisfied that the applicants have the capacity for love, understanding, patience and flexibility that are required to meet not only the universal needs of a growing child but the specific needs of the child in question. Such considerations can include a child's physical or mental handicap, or degree of emotional disturbance, or behavioural disorders. A child may need assistance in understanding his or her origins in an unhappy or unsavoury relationship, and may also need help in learning about his or her racial or cultural origins—which may be very different from those of the adoptive parents.

Adoption agencies, rightly, wish to satisfy themselves as to the health, vigour, imagination and other capacities of the adoptive parents during the subject's childhood. But I much regret any discrimination on the ground of age, especially when it is directed at grandparents. I pay a warm tribute to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), who has been active in representing the interests of grandparents. Age is certainly being used as an instrument of control by some adoption agencies. My parents may have been considered by some as relatively aged, but I do not believe that I suffered from it.

Adoption law is complicated. The Children Act 1975 was consolidated into the Adoption Act 1976. A requirement of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, which came into force in 1984, was that an adoption panel be set up. The new structure comprised seven family placement panels, each serving two adjacent social service areas. The linking was based on geographical proximity and attempted to amalgamate areas with a high population of children in care with those with a smaller number.

The panels have several functions which include fulfilling the criteria laid down in the regulations regarding the adoption of children, approving or rejecting applications from all families and individuals offering permanent substitute family care, ensuring that the child's feelings and wishes are taken into consideration and that she or he is appropriately prepared for placement, and examining all short-term placements that are expected to exceed two months' duration.

The Bill will require adoption panels to produce regular reports to the adoption agency which will include a review of their policies, range and volume of work and, perhaps more importantly, will require that the children's cases are reviewed, ensuring that in future no child is overlooked. As the system operates now, there is no uniformity among adoption agencies. They should publish widely their policies and practices, and the range and volume of work that they have undertaken annually. Sadly, there are children, particularly in inner-city areas, who have no individual attached to their case. The code of practice that I suggest would require those with responsibility for such matters to report back regularly on progress in finding homes for the children; then appropriate action would be agreed.

The temptation for some individuals, remembering the graphic pictures of children in Romania, is to go abroad, bring the children into the country and then seek adoption orders. I am advised by adoption agencies that that practice is causing particular difficulties.

The specific purpose of the measure is to improve the efficiency of matching prospective adoptive parents to suitable children. As I believe that I am the last Member to have spent the night seeking the privilege of introducing a ten-minute Bill, I can think of no finer cause for legislation. I very much hope that the House will support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Amess, Mr. Tony Banks, Mrs. Rosie Barnes, Mr. Harry Cohen, Sir

[Mr. David Amess]

Geoffrey Finsberg, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Ken Hargreaves, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Simon Hughes, Sir Charles Irving, Mr. Ray Powell and Miss Ann Widdecombe.

ADOPTION (AMENDMENT)

Mr. David Amess accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a statutory code of practice for adoption agencies; to amend the Adoption Act 1976; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 30 March and to be printed. [Bill 56.]

Parliamentary Pensions

[Relevant documents: The Review Body on Top Salaries' Report No. 26, Review of Aspects of the Parliamentary Pension Scheme and other Matters (Cm. 362), and the Report of the Government Actuary on the Valuation of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund as at 1st April 1987 (HC 317, Session 1988-89).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

4.33 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): As colleagues will know, I had hoped that it would be possible to hold this debate well before now. Indeed, on several occasions last year, we tried to arrange it, but other business meant that it had to be put back. I apologise for that. Now that we have a chance of considering these important issues, I look forward to hearing the views of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

As the House knows, parliamentary pensions are a matter of extreme technicality. I do not pretend to understand their more subtle aspects, so perhaps my speech will be longer than it should be. I apologise for that.

There are three distinct topics to consider. The first is the Top Salaries Review Body report on the parliamentary contributory pension scheme. The second is the TSRB recommendations on the pensions of certain office holders —the Prime Minister, you, Mr. Speaker, and the Lord Chancellor—and on ministerial severance pay. The third is the Government Actuary's report on the state of the parliamentary pension fund with its recommendation for a reduction in Exchequer contribution.

Before dealing with the recommendations in the TSRB report, I should like to put the matter in context by reminding the House that the parliamentary pension scheme is generally regarded, by United Kingdom standards, as a good scheme, providing a reasonably generous return for hon. Members. I do not claim that it is the best that could be found, but in most respects it is on the right side of the average. As the House is in the position to set its own terms—with a significant contribution from the taxpayer—that is the right position to adopt.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way, but I need to make a coherent presentation and listen to colleagues thereafter.

Under our scheme, benefit accrues faster than under most other public and private schemes. It is right for us to consider the scheme from time to time, as we are doing today, and I attach considerable importance to hearing the views of hon. Members. In July 1987 my predecessor invited the TSRB to undertake a review of the parliamentary pension scheme, the pensions of certain office holders and ministerial severance pay.

The recommendations that resulted fell into two categories—first, those solely affecting the parliamentary scheme on which the trustees were consulted and which are capable of being implemented by secondary legislation; and, secondly, those relating to Ministers and office holders which we accepted in May 1988 but which require

primary legislation before they can come into effect. I shall also mention the consequences of the recent Government Actuary's valuation report.

When I do that I shall be honouring a commitment given in 1987 to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) that all reports by the Government Actuary on the parliamentary pension scheme will be debated. The right hon. Gentleman is the chairman of the trustees of our pension scheme. We are all grateful for the work that he and the other trustees do on our behalf. In some respects, the recommendations of the Government Actuary take automatic effect under section 5 of the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1972.

In 1987, hon. Members from both sides of the House raised a number of points on the scheme, which were put specifically to the TSRB. They included early retirement arrangements, resettlement grants, service as an MEP and hon. Members' contributions. The TSRB largely restricted its review to those issues. In paragraph 56 of the report, it took the view that the parliamentary pension scheme was basically a good one. However, it recommended two important improvements intended to ensure that it continued to meet the special circumstances of parliamentary life and remain consistent with good practice elsewhere.

First, the report recommended that the death-in-service gratuity should be increased to two years' salary. After consulting the trustees, I am maintaining the proposal of my predecessor that that change should come into effect from 1 May 1988. That date ensures that all deaths during the present Parliament are covered. Although that issue was not originally put to the TSRB, its recommendation brings the scheme into line with practice elsewhere. It also offers practical help where it is most needed. I know that hon. Members from both sides of the House are concerned about the position of widows. I warmly commend that change.

The second change recommended by the TSRB concerns early retirement arrangements. As the House may know, at present a pension may be paid earlier than the age of 65—the normal retirement age—providing the retiring Member is at least 50 years old. The pension paid is less than the accrued pension payable from 65, to reflect the longer period over which it is expected to be paid. If a Member retires at a general election, subject to fulfilling certain conditions, those arrangements may be modified.

Concern has been expressed about what are felt to be anomalies in these arrangements. Differences of treatment can occur in the level of pension arising from small differences in age and length of service, and that is why we asked the TSRB to examine them. The TSRB recommended revised early retirement arrangements for those retiring at a dissolution under which a full accrued pension would be payable. When the pension is brought into payment before the Member reaches pensionable age, it will be subject to an abatement to be calculated on a broadly actuarial basis, and that achieves a desirable and fair tapering.

The TSRB also suggested that the House consider whether those arrangements should apply at times other than at a dissolution. My predecessor met the trustees last year and agreed that there should be a single set of arrangements for those retiring at a dissolution and at other times. I endorse that and believe that this rationalisation represents not just a simplification of but a useful improvement to the scheme.

The TSRB also considered whether service as an MEP should count towards the qualifying period for early retirement. The House may recall that several Members raised that issue during the passage of the 1984 Act. The TSRB noted that although periods of service as an MP and an MEP may be aggregated for the purpose of establishing entitlement to a pension, they may not be so counted for the purposes of the qualifying period for early retirement. It took the view that the essential purpose of the early retirement arrangements for MPs should be to assist those whose parliamentary career had been exclusively in this House, and it concluded that an extension of the arrangements would not be appropriate.

Several hon. Members have made representations to me arguing against the view of the TSRB and arguing that, as service as an MEP can be counted for all purposes except early retirement and that because the nature of the MEPs' and Members' pension schemes are so similar, the current arrangements are anomalous.

That point is reinforced in the minds of those who advance the argument by the fact that the European salaries and pension arrangements for MEPs from this country are consistently kept in line with those of Members of this House, rather than with those of other Members of the European Parliament.

I have gone into the matter in detail because I shall be interested to hear the views of the House on that issue before finally deciding whether, in this respect, to accept the TSRB's recommendation.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): The essential point appears to be made on page 6 of the TSRB's report, where it says:

"It can be argued that the occupation of MP and MEP are so closely allied".

That seems to accept that the two jobs are closely allied —that MPs and MEPs are doing similar jobs, are taking similar risks and are working under similar conditions.

Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman will also examine appendix G relating to resettlement grants for MPs. If an MP and an MEP spend 15 years in the parliamentary process and the MEP has spent five years in the European Parliament, he will receive only half the resettlement grant. It seems ludicrous that if two people came into politics in 1979, one should get twice as much as the other.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That may be a valid point, but the hon. Gentleman's intervention and its detailed nature confirms my initial wisdom in deciding not to give way during my remarks. I did so on this occasion only because there appeared to be a natural break in the proceedings. The hon. Gentleman's point deserves consideration, but I wish to deal at this stage with the scheme itself.

A further point, not considered by the TSRB, is the problem of excess contributions. Some Members continue to make contributions even though they have bought the maximum number of years to which they are entitled and thus cannot benefit from their extra contributions. That arises from the 1984 Act, which provides for a limit on the annual amount of pension of two-thirds of final salary. That is the limit with which all non-statutory occupational pension schemes must comply to qualify for tax relief.

When my predecessor met the trustees in June last year, he promised to consider the matter. Several possible ways to alleviate the problem suggest themselves, although I hesitate to define, let alone explain, them. I have examined

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

a number of them and none is without difficulty. Further consideration is necessary, and I propose to pursue the matter with the trustees in search of a satisfactory solution.

Apart from parliamentary pensions, the TSRB was invited to undertake a review of the pensions of certain office holders and of ministerial severance pay. The TSRB recommended the introduction of severance pay for Commons Ministers on broadly the same basis as that already provided for Ministers in the other place. That represents a simple recognition that an abrupt and significant financial adjustment may have to be made by an hon. Member on relinquishing ministerial office in whatever House and for whatever reason.

The TSRB's proposals would involve a single payment of a sum representing three months' net loss of parliamentary income on loss of office for whatever reason except death in service. In cash terms, that will be between £3,000 and about £7,000, depending on the rank of the Minister concerned. It is right to emphasise that that proposal was supported by both sides of the House when it was put to the TSRB as well as by the TSRB itself. As my predecessor made clear in May last year, the Government endorse these proposals.

Three senior office holders—the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker and the Lord Chancellor—are not members of the parliamentary pension scheme. They have their own arrangements under the 1972 Act. For some time we have been aware that their arrangements contained anomalies. The TSRB has recommended that the pensions of all three of the great office holders should be fixed at half final salary, that the Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker should be able to participate in the parliamentary scheme and that restrictions on pension increases should be uncapped.

We have accepted that package of recommendations, which are not directly part of the parliamentary scheme. Their implementation, along with the proposals for severance pay for Commons Ministers, requires primary legislation, which we shall introduce in the near future.

The main issue in the Government Actuary's report is the recommendation that the Exchequer contribution should be reduced to 4·4 per cent. I shall try to assist the House by sketching out the background to that proposal, although I approach documents prepared by actuaries with considerable foreboding.

Under section 5 of the 1972 Act, every three years the Government Actuary must make a valuation of the assets of the parliamentary contributory pension fund specifically for the purpose of determining the residual Exchequer contribution. The current report, laid before the House on 27 April last, reports a significant improvement in the finances of the fund. On that basis, the Government Actuary has calculated that the notional standard contribution should be 20 per cent. of salary.

On that basis, the Exchequer contribution, after deducting the 9 per cent. of salary payable by Members, would be 11 per cent. That 9 per cent. plus 11 per cent. is not much different from the 22 per cent. recommended by the Government Actuary in his preceding report. It is the long-term total cost of the scheme to keep liabilities and assets in balance.

The Government Actuary is not required to make any recommendation about the level of Members' contributions. The increase to 9 per cent. in 1983 was made to take account of the improved rate of accrual in the scheme and, as hon. Members on both sides will recall, the House approved a rate of 9 per cent. Collectively, we accepted that because we believed it to be a realistic level, given the estimated cost of the scheme after incorporation of the improvements suggested by the TSRB. That level of contribution was included in the 1984 Act and is generally in line with other fast accrual schemes in the public service.

The fund has now accumulated a significant surplus. There are two reasons for that: first, the performance of the fund's investments, for which the skill and care of the trustees and their agents are to be highly commended; and, secondly, the very high level of contributions made by the Exchequer in recent years, for reasons which I shall explain, to a total of 18 per cent.

In determining the Exchequer contribution required, the standard contribution of 20 per cent. can and should be adjusted to take account of the surplus. By long-standing convention—not just in this scheme but in the overwhelming majority of similar schemes—such a surplus is normally used to reduce the employer's contribution—*[Interruption.]* That is the position. In this case, that is the standard contribution payable by the Exchequer. The Government Actuary has recommended an Exchequer contribution for the year beginning April 1989 of 4·4 per cent. of salary, and has recommended that that rate should be maintained for the next eight years. As a result of the provisions of section 5 of the 1972 Act, the recommendation took effect automatically from that date.

There have been some misunderstandings on this question, and it may help if I explain the background more fully. Section 5 provides for the Exchequer's contribution to be calculated in accordance with the Government Actuary's evaluation. My study of the statute, about which I hesitate, confirms that. Under that section, the recalculation of the Exchequer's contribution takes effect when the Government Actuary's report is laid before the House. In the present case, the Government Actuary's report covered the three years from 1 April 1987, and recommended a lower contribution with effect from 1 April 1989.

As far as I am aware, in previous years there has been no suggestion that the recommendations of the Government Actuary should be altered or rejected. The 1972 Act does not provide for that possibility. However, I acknowledge that we have not previously been confronted with a surplus in the fund—certainly not on this scale—or with a recommendation that the Exchequer should reduce its contribution. With that in mind, my predecessor gave the commitment that the House would have an opportunity to debate the Government Actuary's report before any decisions were taken.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: May I just finish my point?

I regret that that may have misled the House into believing that the Government Actuary's recommendations would not take effect in the usual way. It appears that that is not the case and, although we are having a debate on the subject, the recommendations automatically took effect for the year starting April 1989.

Mr. Ashton: Will the Leader of the House give an estimate of how much the Exchequer will save over the next eight years by cutting its contribution?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I would not like to give an estimate, but I think that I am right in saying that the surplus was £7·4 million. The reduced contribution is not designed to eliminate that, but to bring it back to a level that would sustain a contribution of 11 per cent. from 1989 onwards.

Mr. Ashton: Was it over £20 million?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No. The total surplus to be reduced over the next eight years is £7·4 million, after which a normal contribution of 11 per cent. would be introduced. An Exchequer contribution of 18 per cent. for several years generated the balance, and has resulted in the recommendation that its contribution should be lower from now on.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): Does the Leader of the House agree that the anomaly is that the Government Actuary can look only at the Exchequer contribution and not at Members' contributions? If the Actuary had been able to consider both contributions, he could have come up with a more sensible proposition.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Actuary is permitted to look only at the Treasury contribution as a result of the provisions of the 1972 Act. However, I would not want him to conclude that a dramatic change would necessarily result from the scrutiny of both contributions. If the greater part of the surplus was accumulated because of the high contribution of 18 per cent. by the Exchequer, that would have to be reflected in any recommendations from the Actuary.

I readily acknowledge that we are in dangerous waters on this issue. Against the factual background, I shall offer hon. Members some insight into the considerations which I think were taken into account in the most recent redesign of the system. Whatever hon. Members may say now, under the 1972 Act the Exchequer contribution was clearly intended to be the residual. It is normal for valuation changes to reflect on the employer's contribution rate since that is normally regarded as the residual, rather than the employee contribution.

In our case, the employer is the Exchequer, and its contribution was designed by the legislation to be the variable and to take account of any changes in economic trends. The Exchequer contribution has been as high as 18 per cent.—13 per cent. plus a 5 per cent. deficiency payment—since the previous evaluation report. The proposed dip to 4·4 per cent. to keep the fund in balance can be seen—this is the argument behind the legislation—as a temporary compensating relief for the higher Exchequer contribution of earlier years. The contribution was assessed in 1984 with the same aim—to keep the fund in balance.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The Government contribution being reduced 11 per cent. to 4·4 per cent. was a twist.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Unusually, I did not catch the hon. Gentleman's intervention, although I have no doubt that it was an intelligent one.

During contribution holidays—as they are described—the bulk of public and private schemes leave employee contributions unchanged, as it is generally agreed that fluctuations in the employee rate are undesirable because they give rise to uncertainty.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Before I give way to my hon. Friend, I appreciate that the House may argue that the figure of 9 per cent., which was an advance on the originally recommended figure of 8 per cent., suggests that there may have been some over-enthusiasm of judgment on the part of the House.

Sir Peter Hordern: I accept what my right hon. and learned Friend says about the role of the Government Actuary, and about the 1972 Act. However, the Review Body on Top Salaries has a different attitude. In successive reports it has been suggested what the relationship between the Treasury contribution and the employee's contribution should be. It has recommended the level of Members' contributions, and that level has differed from time to time. Last year's TSRB report was unusual because it accepted 9 per cent. as though it had no power to recommend otherwise. If it had recommended, as I think it should, that Members' contributions should have been significantly lower, which would have been proper according to the Actuary, all would have been well. Perhaps we shall have the opportunity to debate that later.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend draws attention to an issue that I have already foreshadowed. In justice to history and to the previous legislation, I should expand the underlying rationale.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the hon. Member will forgive me, I should come to a conclusion.

In favourable economic circumstances, it is not unusual for the employer's rate to fall and to be lower than the employee's rate. That certainly happens in the private sector and the public sector. The question is whether the right balance has resulted from the original legislative provisions, and the impact of the Government Actuary's report and the TSRB recommendations.

I have given in full the arguments for following the Government Actuary's recommendations, as we have done in the past. I do not think that they are likely to be set aside, but my mind is not closed. I should be foolishly over-confident if I closed my mind on any aspect of this matter. If the House expresses a clear view or preference for any improvement in the scheme, including changes in the contributions structure, I and the Government accept that the TSRB should be invited to consider all such suggestions for improved benefits.

I emphasise that any consideration by the TSRB would have to include the central question of who is to pay and what is the fair basis for payments in the long term. I think the whole House would wish that.

I hope that the process of considering possible future recommendations in the light of today's debate will not stand in the way of implementing the outstanding recommendations of the TSRB's 26th report. I visualise, after this debate, the relatively early introduction of two pieces of legislation: first, regulations to implement the TSRB recommendations for all Members of Parliament, including the revised early retirement arrangements, the improved death-in-service grants, and any other recommendations that result from tonight's discussions—for example, revised arrangements for Members of the European Parliament; and secondly, a Bill to implement

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the changes affecting the three most senior office holders and severance pay for Ministers and office holders, except for the Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker.

I wish to ensure that, after the passage of those two pieces of legislation, any further changes that might arise from the next round of TSRB considerations can themselves be implemented by secondary legislation to avoid the need for more than one Bill on the subject in the current Parliament. I am anxious that we should give ourselves the freedom to proceed through secondary legislation: it may already be in our power, but I am not confident enough to say so in terms.

We have a good scheme, and we should build on it as the TSRB report recommends. Many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House clearly hold strong views on some aspects of the scheme, and—as I said at the outset—I look forward to listening to those views with care and attention.

5 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I thank the Leader of the House for his introductory speech. I remind him and the House that we are discussing a House of Commons matter, not a party-political matter. The House has overturned recommendations and decisions made by past Governments, and hon. Members on both sides of the House have often had to make difficult decisions themselves. Public reaction is often ill-informed, and it is therefore important that we examine this matter in some detail.

I consider the TSRB report disappointing and negative. It does not take account of the problems faced by Members and the staff of the House, and by their dependants. Far from improving matters, the report—coupled with the Government Actuary's report—makes them worse. When I gave evidence to the TSRB, I presented what I considered to be relevant but modest proposals on behalf of hon. Members who are asking not for benefits in excess of those given to other sectors, but to be treated on an equal basis with both the private and public sectors. There is no need for me to apologise for such a request; compared with the salaries and pensions in other European and Commonwealth Parliaments, our proposals are extremely modest.

The Leader of the House said that we had improved our position, and so we have. It was only in 1964, however, that a pension scheme for Members of Parliament was initiated, and we all know of hon. Members on both sides of the House who left after that time and experienced considerable financial difficulty. Slowly, we built on the scheme, and I hope that we shall continue to do so.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is not one of the most disappointing features of the report its failure to deal adequately with widows' pensions? Many hon. Members do not come to the House until they are in their 30s or 40s, but the widow of an hon. Member who was here for 15 years may be left, in her early 50s, expecting no more than £3,900. The figure should be doubled so that widows receive a realistic pension. That is what worries us most of all.

Mr. Orme: I agree, and other hon. Members will doubtless develop that point.

I hope that the Leader of the House will take note of the strong feelings of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Before I deal with the more contentious issues, let me say that the proposal to increase the death-in-service grant to two years' salary is a welcome improvement. I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it should be retrospective to the beginning of the Parliament.

I support the view of the House of Commons trustees that it is not necessary to have two schemes to deal with early retirement: that, in my view, would lead to confusion. A single scheme should apply, whether the retirement takes place during a Parliament or at its dissolution. Again, I feel that any scheme proposed by the TSRB should be retrospective to the beginning of the Parliament. Normally, the TSRB reports only once in each Parliament. In this instance representations were made very early in the Parliament, but only now—when, as the Leader of the House has acknowledged, we are nearly halfway through the Parliament—are we discussing the report.

The limited proposals regarding ex-Ministers, the Speaker and former Prime Ministers are indeed very limited, and should have been part of a package dealing with the central issue of Members' contributions and pensions. I shall say more about that later.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) mentioned widows' pensions. Widows' and widowers' pensions are still extremely low—lower than the normal industrial level. I could quote cases of real hardship among hon. Members on both sides of the House, and in some instances that hardship is still being experienced. I believe that the pension should be increased from half the amount of the pension for which the former Member was eligible to a minimum of two thirds of that amount. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris)—who is chairman of the trustees—catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, he will no doubt develop that subject further.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The report talks of increasing death-in-service grants and widows' pensions from one to two years' salary but refers to payment of a Member's salary for one year "or" repayment of the contributions made. Does that mean that those who receive the repayment will not receive the increase, or that someone whose spouse receives a lump sum will lose the repaid contributions?

Mr. Orme: I am afraid I cannot answer that question, but it is important and will no doubt be examined. I also noticed that passage in the report.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): We all realise that the pension scheme does not give widows a fair deal. If the Lord President had said at the Dispatch Box that the Government's contributions would not be reduced from 11 per cent. but that widows would be given a bit more, he might have been rather better off. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that the staff of the pensions department, Mr. Jim Dobson and Mr. Tony Lewis—whom I welcome back after his illness—are doing a first-class job on our behalf?

Mr. Orme: I agree, and no doubt when the Leader of the House reviews today's debate he will take into account the points made about widows and widowers.

Severance pay—or resettlement grant, as it is now known—is not affected by pension proposals, although it was discussed by the TSRB. It is funded directly from the Exchequer. Many hon. Members, however, have raised with me questions about both the amount paid to Members with a short period of service and the cut-off point at 65 years of age. Payment at present is equivalent to six months salary for those with less than 10 years' service, rising on a graduated scale to a full year's salary for those aged 55 and over with 15 years' service. The simplest and most socially just solution would be to assist those Members who have completed only a short period of service by making an upward adjustment and raising the cut-off point for all Members.

The modest suggestion that MEPs' pension rights should be treated differently from those of Members of Parliament is clearly unjust and wrong. There is a direct link between the pension contributions of MEPs and Members of Parliament, and the suggestion that they should be able to aggregate their pensions should be acceded to. I note the point about resettlement grants made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes).

Certain problems have caused great distress to the dependants and staff of a deceased Member. It is completely wrong that any payments due to staff should be linked to the estate of the deceased and that the staff are asked to leave the House on the day following a Member's death because no proper structure exists to deal with that eventuality.

When a well-known Conservative Member died fairly recently, his secretary did not receive her salary or her P45 from the executors of his estate until long after his death. She had to take out a bank loan to cover her necessary expenses pending settlement of her salary from the estate. I stress that no blame whatsoever is attached to the family of the deceased, but right hon. and hon. Members will agree that that is a ridiculous system which must be changed.

A number of hon. Members have rightly mentioned the salaries and working conditions of staff in the Palace of Westminster. Although that goes wider than the immediate issues raised by the TSRB, the House must not overlook those important matters.

On Members' pensions, the House will be aware, as the Leader of the House has made clear, that a decision to deduct 9 per cent. of salary was upheld by the review body. However, that brings no increased benefits except for minor adjustments as outlined in paragraph 40 of the TSRB report. Paragraph 32 of the Government Actuary's report makes the startling suggestion that the Treasury contribution be reduced to 4·5 per cent. That flies in the face of what is accepted in industry in the private and public sectors, where the employer normally pays two thirds and the employee pays one third.

The Government Actuary makes that proposal based on the Treasury contribution and the healthy state of the fund. The report of the Government Actuary is extremely one-sided because he is not empowered by legislation to comment on Members' contributions, only on the Treasury contribution. That proposal turns the basis of our pension scheme upside down.

The Exchequer contribution is based on a multiple of two with a 9 per cent. contribution from the Member. That means that the Treasury contribution should be 18 per cent. producing a total of 27 per cent. The Actuary proposes reducing the Treasury contribution to 4·41 per cent. leaving the Member's contribution at 9 per cent., thereby reducing the total contribution to 13·41 per cent. —a dramatic reduction from 27 per cent.—all with effect from 1 April 1989.

To bring the scheme in to line with accepted practice, the Treasury contribution should be 18 per cent. making the total 27 per cent. Given the present state of the fund, nobody is suggesting that. Before the implementation of the Actuary's report, the Member will contribute 9 per cent. and the Treasury will contribute 13 per cent.—well below the usual factor of two.

If some readjustment is needed because of the high level of the fund, either the benefits should be improved or there should be a reduction of the Member's contribution as well as that of the Treasury. For instance, there could be a reduction of 2·5 per cent. in the Member's contribution, bringing it down to 6·5 per cent., and the Treasury contribution could remain at 13 per cent. Alternatively, the Member's contribution could remain at 9 per cent. and widows' and widowers' benefits should be improved accordingly.

The Leader of the House raised the matter of excess contributions. The position needs to be examined, because eventually many hon. Members will be making contributions when they can get no increased benefits because they will have reached the limit.

It is worth putting on record the fact that our salary is based on 89 per cent. of a senior principal grade. It is estimated that, when wage negotiations are taking place, civil servants' contributions are based on 6 per cent. Where is the "fair comparison"—the term used in such negotiations—for hon. Members?

A substantial increase in contribution, no increase in benefit and a dramatic reduction of the Treasury contribution, which in the short term, could have a detrimental effect on the fund cannot be right. Therefore, I hope that the debate will make the Lord President aware of the strong feelings in the House. We are asking only for natural justice which has not been obtained through the current TSRB report or by the Actuary's recommendation.

If necessary, some of the issues could and should be referred back to the TSRB. The House will certainly want to discuss the matter in more detail before any final decisions are reached.

5.17 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): I have read the Government Actuary's reports for 1984 and for 1987. There seems to be some illogicality in our approach to Members' pensions. According to the 1984 report, the Member was paying 9 per cent. and the Exchequer was paying 18 per cent. The 1987 report suggested that the Member paid 9 per cent. and the Exchequer 4·4 per cent. In the meantime, the fund has grown from nearly £42 million to more than £84 million, so it has doubled in the past three years. The real bone of contention is what should be done with the surplus.

In a private occupational pension scheme, if the fund increases in value to more than 105 per cent.—that is a 5 per cent. increase—the scheme must get rid of that surplus. There are two ways in which that can be done. Either the employer can take it out of the pension fund or it can be used to provide a contributions holiday. If the employer

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takes out that surplus, the company pays 40 per cent. tax—the rate is higher than corporation tax. That is Government fiscal policy which was imposed because, quite rightly, the Government thought it unfair that an employer could take money out of a pension fund—which belongs partly to the employee—without any penalty and do nothing for the employee. Consequently, companies refrain from taking any surplus out of occupational pension schemes because of the 40 per cent. immediate tax liability, which has nothing to do with the company's profits, is payable irrespective of losses and is entirely different from corporation tax.

If that is the logic of the Government—and I am sure that they have not changed their logic—in our pension fund, which in many ways is analogous to a private pension fund, why does the employer or the Exchequer effectively take the lot without any penalty? In many cases, when there is a surplus in the private sector after revaluation, the contribution holiday is invariably shared between the employer and employees. Alternatively, the pension benefits are improved. I agree with the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) that, irrespective of the Top Salaries Review Body, it would be a good idea for hon. Members to consider increasing widows' benefits. In addition, something should be done to help our ex-colleagues who are suffering hardship.

Figures up to last year show that Members contributed 9 per cent. and the Exchequer contributed 18 per cent. I cannot understand the logic of the Government's argument, because, in those circumstances, one third of the surplus belongs to hon. Members and two thirds belongs to the Exchequer.

I welcome the Leader of the House saying that he will discuss with the trustees the possibility of their contribution continuing after a Member has achieved full entitlement. I remind my right hon. and learned Friend that, under the state pension, if an employee continues working after 65 the employer continues to pay his contribution, but the employee ceases to pay his national insurance contribution. That could be the yardstick for hon. Members who have paid their contributions and reached full entitlement. The Government should follow the same system as the state retirement scheme, whereby, when an employee reaches full entitlement, he makes no contribution but the Exchequer continues to pay.

I pay tribute to the trustees of the pension fund and their advisers for achieving the excellent result of doubling the size of the fund over the past three years. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that they have done an excellent job.

There is an anomaly in how we deal with the fund's surplus. It is funny that, if there is a deficit, one tries to brush it under the carpet, but when there is a surplus, arguments ensue. I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend said that his mind is not closed to the possibility of bringing the system more in line with the logic of private pension schemes.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am listening carefully to what my hon. Friend is saying, but he may be under a misapprehension about the scale of the surplus above actuarial liabilities—I am not challenging the legitimacy of his argument—which was £7·4 million. The fund is much larger than that, but I should not like there to be any misunderstanding about the scale of the surplus.

Sir William Clark: I agree that the surplus is immaterial. I am asking why we do not follow the example of private occupational pension schemes. What matters is not the amount of the surplus but the principle involved. If a private employer removes the surplus from a pension fund, he is heavily taxed above the rate of corporation tax. Consequently, his only alternative is a contribution holiday, during which the employers' contribution is not always reduced but is usually shared between him and his employees. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will consider that.

5.24 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I am most grateful to the Leader of the House for referring so kindly to my role and work and that of my fellow trustees on both sides of the House.

The House will expect me, as chairman of the managing trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension fund, to give their views on both the Top Salaries Review Body's proposals—some good, some less so—and the report from the Government Actuary on the valuation of the fund, in which he recommends a cut in the Treasury's contribution from 11 per cent. to only 4·4 per cent.

As trustees who are selected by the House to manage the fund, we try our best to improve its provisions in the interests both of Members, past and present, and their dependants. There have been many improvements over recent years in which the trustees have taken the leading role, including a faster accrual rate, the age-service conditions for early retirement at a general election and the provision for ill-health retirement pensions.

There is, however, a very strong and urgent case for further improvements which are now threatened, notably by the Government Actuary's recommendation that has cut the Treasury's contribution to only 4·4 per cent. I must therefore very strongly emphasise that it is ultimately for the House to decide, not the Actuary or the TSRB, if and when further improvements should be made. The scheme is a statutory one and Members have it within their power to improve its provisions.

The staging of this debate on a motion for the Adjournment does not permit of any amendment by which the House can make decisions today on the TSRB's proposals or the Government Actuary's recommendation. The House may think that this is curiously contrary to the spirit of an undertaking given on behalf of the Government by the right hon. Member for the City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), who was then Minister of State, Treasury, during the passage of the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1987:

"time will be made available for a debate on an amendable motion before any regulations amending the scheme are made under clause 2."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1987; Vol. 116, c. 371.]

This debate may not be strictly covered by the letter of that undertaking, but I know that its spirit encouraged many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to hope that today's debate would take place on an amendable motion, preferably with an all-party amendment tabled by the managing trustees.

That has not been allowed to happen and I shall therefore set out the views of the trustees and also give the

House our advice on the response that it should make to the two reports where they affect our remit. I stress the word "our" remit, as some of the TSRB's recommendations go beyond the trustees' responsibilities: for example, those on severance pay for Ministers and resettlement grants for Members.

Soon after they were published, the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor made it clear that he proposed to accept the TSRB's proposals, and to give them legislative effect. It has to be said that he could hardly have done anything else, given the very tightly drawn terms of reference that he had dictated to the TSRB. Nevertheless, the trustees were grateful that the death-in-service benefit was soon to be raised to the level prevailing in most public-sector schemes—two years' salary. This is an improvement which we have advocated for some time and I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's decision to give it retrospective effect.

We also welcomed the proposed further improvements to the early retirement provisions. They will give many right hon. and hon. Members more flexibility over retirement and will mean that more of our colleagues between the ages of 60 and 65, who have fewer than 20 years' service, will no longer face the agonising decision of whether to take an actuarially reduced pension or to defer drawing their pension until they are 65. That is something for which the trustees, with others, have long campaigned. On a personal note, I should like here to pay tribute to the late Brynmor John, who took so informed and constructive an interest in the scheme, and whose loss to the House is still felt very deeply by all his parliamentary colleagues.

The trustees are much less happy about the recommendation that the Member's contribution should remain at 9 per cent. I should explain, for the benefit of those who were not Members at the time, that the figure of 9 per cent. was not the actuarially assessed cost of the revised pension package then agreed, but rather a device to deal with a revolt over parliamentary pay among the Government's Back Benchers in July 1983. In the view of many, the figure of 9 per cent. was not only incomprehensible but reprehensible.

The latest survey of occupational pension schemes, by the National Association of Pension Funds, shows that in 1988, across the board, employees contributed 4·4 per cent. to the cost of their pensions and employers 8·8 per cent.—precisely twice as much. On that basis, in our scheme, Members would pay 6⅔ per cent. and the Exchequer 13⅓ per cent. Yet we have been paying 9 per cent. since January 1987, and to eliminate the fund's surplus—which that needlessly high level of personal contribution has helped to create—the Exchequer's stake is now reduced to less than half of the Member's contribution. That is shabby.

Under the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1972, the Government Actuary is required to determine the contribution from the Exchequer that is needed to balance the scheme's assets and liabilities. This means—and it is essential for it to be very clearly understood by the House as a whole—that the scheme cannot stay in surplus, no matter how well the investments perform.

The House needs to understand, too, a little of the history of the pension arrangements for Members, which were first introduced with effect from 16 October 1964. While contributions had to be made to the fund only from that date, pension accrued in respect of up to 10 years—later increased to 15 years—of service prior to that date. The cost of that concession—and the Act was quite specific—was to be met by a deficiency contribution from the Exchequer, payable over 25 years. It is important to bear in mind that the 1965 Act provided for the review, and the variation up or down as necessary, of Members' contributions and/or of benefits. Under the 1972 Act, which restructured the pensions provisions, the accrued pension rights of Members then in service were improved, at a cost to be borne by the Exchequer.

In his first report, on 27 November 1973, under section 5 of the 1972 Act, the Government Actuary indicated that the deficiency contribution to fund pensions in respect of service prior to 1 April 1972 was to be payable over 25 years from 1 January 1972. It was assessed at 7·75 per cent. in that report, had fallen to 6 per cent. at the valuation as of 1 April 1984, and has now disappeared some eight years early.

When the pension accrual rate was increased under the 1984 Act, the Government promised Members the opportunity to purchase a limited number of added years at a special price—40 per cent. of the cost—which is why the facility became known as "subsidised added years". The balance of the cost—60 per cent.—was to be borne by the Exchequer. I have to report to the House that no such contribution has been made to be fund.

All this means that the current membership is meeting the balance of a deficiency contribution which was intended to be a charge on the Exchequer. It also means that the subsidised element of the added years facility, which the Government said would be borne by the Exchequer, is effectively being paid by the current membership, some of whom did not take advantage of the facility. Others were not even Members when it was on offer. How then, with justice, can the Leader of the House possibly refuse to accept a reapportionment of contributions as between Members and the Exchequer?

The House will wish to note that improvements in the scheme are now effectively vetoed, since successful investment management merely results in a reduction in the Exchequer contribution. The more the trustees succeed, the more they benefit not members of the scheme but the Exchequer.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I appreciate the trustees' work in the matter, but is it true that they could have predicted a surplus accruing over the three years of the review? Would it not have been in order for the trustees to recommend extra payment of pensions, widows' benefits and so on before the three years had elapsed, so that the £7·5 million surplus could have been spent before this Government review?

Mr. Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As the fund's performance improved, we made repeated representations in support of improvements. We gave evidence to the TSRB about a shopping list of improvements that we thought were necessary. I shall refer to some of them as I proceed. If I cannot give way again, it is because I want to conclude my speech as quickly as I can although I am, of course, giving the House what is in the nature of a report from the managing trustees.

I ask the House, in considering whether and when to use its own ultimate power to alter the scheme, also to take very careful note of the fact that our scheme compares

[Mr. Morris]

most unfavourably with others, in terms both of the proportion of its costs paid for by Members and of some of the benefits that it provides.

There are many precedents for sharing the benefits of the contributions holiday that the Treasury is now set to enjoy in relation to our scheme. For example, the *Daily Express* on 4 May last reported Reed International's proposal to distribute some of the excess funds in its pension scheme, which gave some employees a 90 per cent. rise in pensions.

More recently, it was reported by the *Financial Times* that, as a result of surpluses in British Rail's pension fund, employees were to pay only a 5 per cent. contribution. In addition, the report states:

"substantial improvements in benefits have been made, in respect of both lump sum payments and of benefits for past service".

The trustees of the parliamentary scheme are acutely aware of the insistence, on both sides of the House, that widows' pensions must be increased. This debate is an opportunity to make the Government aware of that insistence and to offer suggestions for giving it effect. For the trustees, I must point out that, with the present surplus and continuation of a 9 per cent. contribution, we could meet the request by my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) to increase forthwith the maximum widow's pension from 50 per cent. to 66⅔ per cent.

Such an increase ought certainly to have the wholehearted support of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury who, in the debate on the Finance Bill on 12 July, said:

"The really unsatisfactory feature of pensions provision is the millions of ordinary scheme members who do not receive a pension anywhere near the maximum allowable under the tax rules".—[*Offical Report*, 12 July 1989; Vol. 156, c. 1074.]

The widows of our former colleagues, many of whom live in straitened circumstances, can be added to those millions.

As of now, the maximum widow's pension that can be awarded is of the order of £8,000, but I must stress that very few, if any, widows of Members can expect anything like that sum. For anyone to do so, until relatively recently, her husband would have had to serve continuously in Parliament for 40 years. Given that the average parliamentary career is no more than 17 to 18 years, a widow's pension under our scheme will average no more than £3,000. At his death in 1984, the widow of a former colleague and very close friend of mine, with total service of over 20 years, was entitled to less than £50 a week. That, too, is shabby.

Referring to the pensions paid to Members' widows in a debate on 27 April 1987, Sir Anthony Kershaw, then a trustee of the fund and the Conservative Member for Stroud, said:

"It is an absolute disgrace that this should be tolerated and even to speak of it ought to give one a sense of shock.—[*Official Report*, 27 April 1987; Vol. 115, c. 104.]

That is but one compelling reason for resisting the reduction of the Exchequer contribution to less than half that paid by Members.

As the House knows only too well, Members do not enjoy security of tenure. The nature of the job in today's world is stressful and imposes a very heavy strain on family life. It is for these, among other reasons, that the trustees want the TSRB now to be asked to look again at the basis for determining widows' pensions. The trustees are advised—and here I pay tribute to my fellow trustee, the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), who has worked long and very painstakingly on comparisons with other schemes, and who I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, hopes to catch your eye—that current best practice in private sector schemes is to provide a widow's pension of up to two thirds of the former employee's pension.

That is what we seek and we urge the House to support a two thirds pension for widows. But it will require a re-examination of the basis upon which our scheme is funded and administered. There is evidence, as I have shown, taking occupational schemes as a whole, that costs are borne in the proportion of 2:1 as between employers and employees. On that basis, even at 11 per cent. the Exchequer is already paying far too little. The TSRB has on three occasions recommended that Members' and Exchequer contributions should be fixed in the ratio of 3:5—and the trustees see no reason why that ratio, given in response to references made to the review body by successive Leaders of the House, should not be accepted.

We must ensure that, when the fund is in surplus, the Exchequer is not the sole beneficiary. It must surely be only fair that the membership of the fund ought to see some benefit, whether by way of higher benefits or reduced contributions. I am mindful also of the claims of existing pensioners.

In a further reference to the TSRB, the trustees want the review body to be asked to consider the following changes to the fund. First, contributions to the fund should in future be shared between Members and the Exchequer in the ratio 3:5.

Secondly, the Actuary's triennial report on the fund should in future recommend what the percentage rate of the Member's contributions should be for a further period of three years, on the assumption that benefits continue unchanged.

Thirdly, it should be for the House to decide, if the triennial report shows the fund to be in surplus or to have an emerging deficit, whether there should be a variation in the benefits provided, in the rate of the Member's contribution, or both.

Fourthly, if the House decides on a variation in the benefits provided, the Actuary should recommend what the percentage rate of Members' contributions should be for a further period of three years, having regard to that decision.

Fifthly, regulations to give effect to any decision of the House as to benefits, and to the appropriate recommendation of the Actuary as to contributions, should be made under the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1987.

Given these changes in the scheme, Members would be much better served and their dependants much better protected. At the same time, the trustees would no longer be placed in the position of seeing all their work to improve the scheme's assets result in a lower contribution from the Exchequer alone.

The TSRB might well also be asked to compare our scheme to other parliamentary schemes across the world. To give but one example, Australia has a parliamentary scheme which is infinitely better than ours.

I am glad to have been able to indicate both the current restraints on the trustees of our scheme and the way forward if we are to achieve the improvements we seek, not least for Members' dependants. I hope not only that my

proposals will be given due attention by both sides of the House, but that they will soon be translated into practice. The House has the power to make that happen.

To conclude, I must place on record, on behalf of the trustees and, indeed, all Members and their dependants, our appreciation of the quiet and painstaking, but unseen administrative work of Jim Dobson, Tony Lewis, Moreen McColl and all who work and have worked with them so unstintingly to help members of the scheme, past and present, and their dependants. The House as a whole owes them its gratitude.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The debate must conclude at 7 o'clock and as I understand that at least a dozen hon. Members will be seeking to catch my eye, I very much hope that we can have brief speeches.

5.45 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I start by congratulating the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on his work as chairman of the parliamentary trustees. We have met often and have thought carefully about the recommendations that we have made. We have met my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House on a number of occasions and have made proposals to strengthen and improve the existing provisions of the fund.

I begin by saying something about the nature of our fund because outside this place it may be thought that we are concerned only with improving our own conditions at taxpayers' expense. It is important to recognise the distinction between a funded scheme and a pay-as-you-go scheme. The Civil Service has a pay-as-you-go scheme and the benefits are paid according to need. It is not a funded scheme; it does not come out of the investments that have resulted from contributions made by the employer and the employee. That is an important distinction, because we are not asking for more money from the taxpayer. We are talking about how best to reduce our demand on the taxpayer—whether that should be done by reduced contributions from hon. Members or by improving and increasing the benefits available to hon. Members and their dependants. As I have said, it is an important distinction.

I welcome very much what my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House has said and his proposal to refer the debate to the TSRB. We should bear it in mind not only that the fund has done very well under the investment advisers and managers whom we are happy and fortunate to have, but that when it was last valued —the subject of the Government Actuary's report—it stood at about £87 million. However, the latest valuation is £104 million. It is a triennial valuation and as the last one was made in 1987, the next is due this year. We should ask the TSRB to look again at this whole business, because it is clear that the substantial surplus upon which the Government Actuary reported has been exceeded by recent movements in the value of the fund. That appears a good reason for an urgent review of the fund and of our benefits.

Our scheme is a funded one and hon. Members contribute 9 per cent. That is the highest rate of any funded scheme in the country. I may be wrong, but I have made extensive searches and I have not yet come across a funded scheme in which the employees pay such a high contribution. I shall return to the comparisons later because some of those other provisions are more in line with what we should be doing.

It is important to view the 9 per cent. employees' contribution in relation to what the employer pays. I agree with what the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe said about how we reached the figure of 9 per cent. in the first place. It was a great mistake. It was done rather quickly, and probably rather late at night, without anyone fully realising the consequences.

Even though 9 per cent. was decided in a moment of aberration, it is curious that the TSRB did not consider the matter seriously in the context of the total contribution made. The TSRB's latest proposal was that the total contribution required was 20 per cent., not 22 per cent. On all previous occasions, the TSRB said that the relationship between the Government's contributions and Members' contributions should be three eighths—that is, three parts Members' contributions and five parts Government contributions. That was the case in 1976 and 1983.

Only on this latest occasion did the TSRB accept the 9 per cent. contribution from Members' as correct without considering its role. That is regrettable. The role of the TSRB was to decide what contributions were appropriate for employers and employees. I hope that when it considers the position again it will revert to its former responsibility for judging what contributions should be made by Members and the Treasury.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House that in some respects our scheme is good. We have an accrual rate of fiftieths rather than sixtieths. That is right because in general new Members of Parliament join the House in their early 40s. Sometimes they join earlier, but that is the most common age. A large number of accruals need to be made in a comparatively short period. Our scheme is not like an ordinary company-funded scheme which members can expect to join at 20 and have a long period of service. As we mostly join at 40, it is right that we should have special consideration. Fiftieths are a proper proportion.

Regrettably, there is a great deal of difference in the experiences of hon. Members. Some of us have a long period in the House and others have a short time. The turnover is significant. I asked one head of an actuarial department of a large insurance company his opinion of our starting rate of 9 per cent. He said that he could not advise any new member of any scheme that he ran to accept such a large contribution. That is a fact worth knowing.

Our scheme should reflect the nature of its membership. On the whole, we enter it late and, for some at least, there is a rapid turnover. It is important to ensure that our scheme does not provide any advantages that are not available to others in the private sector. The difference is that we pay for our contributions and we have a separate fund to which we have contributed. It is in every way our fund. The benefits that we receive come from our contributions. That is not the case with civil servants who do not have a funded scheme. However, like us, they have guaranteed index-linking. That is another advantage of our scheme.

Civil servants have some prospect of promotion. We live in a curious place which can be described only as a beehive. One spends one's early years here as a drone. Then the queen bee picks one up and one becomes a

[Sir Peter Hordern]

worker. Then, before one knows what is happening, one ceases to be a worker and becomes a drone again. What sort of basis is that on which to evolve a properly run pension scheme? It is difficult to keep up with the whole business. That would not be acceptable in the Civil Service. It would not be allowed for one moment. Nor would the prospect of total extinction by an ungrateful electorate be acceptable in the Civil Service.

We have real problems in adjusting the scheme to what is proper and fair. It is fair to compare our contribution rate with the high contributions paid by firemen and the police. As I said, ours are the highest contributions to any funded scheme that I can find. It is true that firemen and the police make a higher contribution.

Mr. Orme: They have early retirement.

Sir Peter Hordern: As the right hon. Gentleman says, the reason is that they have early retirement. For example, the police retire at the age of 50. If people retire early, they can look forward to another career but for hon. Members who retire at 60 or over, the market for employment is strictly limited. Their case is not the same.

Mr. Ashton: Some of us may not have the chance to speak tonight. The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned severance pay, about which he is an expert. What about the peculiar circumstances of a person aged 49 with 15 years' service who receives six months' severance pay and has to look for another job? That is ludicrous. Have the trustees considered that and decided to increase the severance pay?

Sir Peter Hordern: We have indeed considered that, and we have made recommendations. I have no doubt that we shall do so again.

I now come to the proposals that are appropriate to our scheme and those on offer in comparable public sector schemes. The police pay out sixtieths. After 20 years that is reduced to thirtieths. Policemen and women gain a particular advantage from staying in the police for over 20 years. They reach a smaller proportion than we do.

The previous proposals of the TSRB were that Members' contributions should be about 7·5 per cent. and Treasury contributions 12·5 per cent. That is the range that the TSRB normally considers. I hope that it will reconsider the matter and perhaps revert to that range. If not, we could consider what improvements could be made to the benefits and retain our 9 per cent. contribution. I believe that we should adopt that course. We would still make the highest contribution of any funded scheme.

The benefits paid under our scheme should be a model for other privately funded schemes. I shall refer to other more or less comparable schemes. British Airways has a scheme which, like ours, is fully index-linked. Members contribute 5·24 per cent. The employer pays 2·5 times as much. The retirement age is 60. The death-in-service benefit is three times the salary. We propose, as the House knows, a death-in-service benefit of twice the salary of the person who dies.

In the British Airways scheme, widows will receive two thirds of the full retirement pension of the member. In the British Gas scheme, the employee pays 6 per cent. and the employer pays 6 per cent. Again, it is index-linked and the death-in-service benefit is two years' salary. There are good provisions for ill health in service, too. Widows receive only half the pension but there are early retirement provisions. The same is true of British Telecom. At British Coal, the contribution by members of the staff salary scheme is 6 per cent. At present the employers are having a five-year holiday, or it would be 12 years. The House will note that the Treasury is to have an eight-year rather than a five-year holiday. Mineworkers' contributions are 5·25 per cent. of salary, and the employers pay the same. At British Telecom, the employee pays 6 per cent. and the balance of the costs paid by the employer is between one and a half and two times the employee's contributions.

It is clear that our 9 per cent. contribution is high compared with all the other schemes. I suggest that the TSRB undertakes a serious comparison with other sectors which have fully funded schemes—for example, the local government service scheme where the contributions made by the employees are substantially lower than ours and where the benefits are significantly better.

It is important that our scheme demonstrates, in relation to our contributions, that we care to provide benefits, especially for those widows and widowers who come after us. Given the nature of our careers in this place, it is wrong for those who depend upon us to be subject to the whims of the electorate and other matters; nor is it right that they should be given such a low proportion of the final pension of a Member.

I am sure that hon. Members will suggest many other benefits that should be considered. In my opinion, the sooner the TSRB meets to consider the proposals and puts our scheme on a proper basis comparable with other public schemes, the better the House will be served.

6 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) on his speech and, especially, on the research and background work he has done on our behalf. He presented his case in a reasoned manner. I hope to present a case that is as well authenticated as that presented by the hon. Gentleman, but it is a slightly more indelicate one. Frankly, hon. Members have already been taken for a ride and have been ripped off by the Treasury—hon. Members may have gathered that from the information that they have already received.

We should reject out of hand the suggestion that the Treasury contribution should be dropped to 4·4 per cent. To substantiate my claim of a rip-off, it is important to look at the background to the case, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has done. The hon. Member for Horsham was involved in at least one meeting in the mid-1980s to which I want to refer when we were negotiating the previous arrangements. In my then role as deputy shadow Leader of the House, I attended with Lord Dormand a meeting to negotiate, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) does today, on behalf of the parliamentary Labour party. It is important to remember what was suggested at the time of the previous settlement and negotiations.

The TSRB proposed a substantial pay increase for hon. Members and an increase in our pension contribution from 6 per cent. to 8 per cent. to bring our contribution into line with the notional contribution then being taken into account in Civil Service pay. That proposal did not

appeal to the Government and they rejected it—it was a political decision. They said that they were unwilling to go along with the proposed pay increase. Then the negotiations began. The Government were not only against the pay increase, but they wanted our pension contribution to be increased by 50 per cent. They wanted it to increase from 6 per cent. of salary not to 8 per cent., as recommended by the TSRB, but to 9 per cent. The outcome of those negotiations was a settlement on which we lost on both scores. I am sorry to say that the then chairman of the 1922 Committee, Mr. Edward du Cann, did not play a particularly beneficial role on behalf of hon. Members in those negotiations. I am afraid that he sold out hon. Members, as we lost on both scores.

In exchange for the pay increase that had been recommended for that year by the TSRB, we were told that we could have that increase over four years. For three of the four years, we lost the pay increase that we were due to have and, in the meantime, we also did not receive the further annual increments that one would have expected on the basis of that pay increase if it had been awarded at the threshold level. Therefore, on pay, we lost out twice. So that the Government should make us the great concession of paying our pay rise over four years, Edward du Cann felt that we should pacify the Government by giving them something in return—the 9 per cent. pension contribution.

Together with Lord Dormand I went to a meeting with the then Minister of State at the Treasury and the then Leader of the House—I believe that that was the meeting at which the hon. Member for Horsham was also present. I remember well my incredulity when I demonstrated, mathematically, that the extra percentage increase from 8 per cent. to 9 per cent. was unnecessary. The Treasury Minister, of all Ministers, said to me that he did not think that we should be discussing such matters on an actuarial basis. Of course he did not, because the figures were against him. I prophesied that, if we pursued that course, the pension fund would, inevitably, make a surplus. We are now discussing the very surplus that the Treasury said would not arise. I am not suggesting that that percentage increase was the sole cause of that surplus, but it had an important effect.

Now the Treasury has said—this is where the rip-off comes—that it should have full benefit of the surplus and that its contribution to the fund should be reduced from 11 per cent. to 4·4 per cent. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in common with the rest of us, have already been taken for a ride by the Treasury. We should ignore the 18 per cent. that the Leader of the House quoted, as there are all manner of elements in that figure that have nothing to do with our on-going pension scheme. One need only consider what the Government Actuary said in paragraph 28 of his 1987 report:

"The Exchequer contributions are much lower than those recommended in my 1984 valuation report."

In other words, we were made to pay more for our pensions than the TSRB had recommended while the Treasury is already paying lower contributions than the Government Actuary suggested. Although the pension fund surplus has nothing to do with the Treasury fulfilling its commitments, it wants the full benefit from it. In the wake of such richness, the poetic unpleasantness of the du Cann settlement becomes apparent.

In paragraph 28 of his report the Government Actuary states that one reason why we have a surplus in the pension fund is we did not have a pay rise and, because of that, our envisaged pension rates were lower. Therefore, when assessing the future liabilities of the fund, the Actuary noted that the liabilities were lower than they otherwise would have been. Part of the fund's surplus arises from the fact that we gave up part of our pay rise and accepted an increase in our contributions to the pension fund.

The Government will shelter behind the fact that the Actuary has made a recommendation to them. My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East and other right hon. and hon. Friends have already pointed out that that recommendation provides no such shelter because the Actuary, by statute, is required to express the Treasury contribution as a balancing sum against the going rate of contributions from Members.

The Government Actuary has said that the Treasury should contribute 4·4 per cent. to the fund, but he has not said that that contribution is necessarily or morally the correct proportion. He is just doing what the statute requires. The Actuary has said that, for the fund to meet its future liabilities—as long as we presume that Members go on paying at 9 per cent.—the Treasury needs to pay a 4·4 per cent. contribution only. That recommendation is arithmetically correct, but it has nothing to do with a value judgment as to how that surplus should be distributed. The Government are trying to shelter behind that recommendation when presenting their case.

The surplus should be distributed among the Members; we should receive the benefit. The surplus is probably bigger than the Treasury has admitted. In paragraph 31 of his report, the Actuary says, in essence, that, because his valuations are not carried out in the way that they would be for normal private pension funds, our surplus is smaller than it would have been if he had valued it on a normal basis. Therefore, we have a surplus which the Treasury says is about £7·4 million. The Actuary agrees that it is, but says that it would be more if he applied the rules which apply to every other pension fund.

Therefore, we can afford to look seriously at some important changes which should be undertaken. First, we should look at the possibility of a lump sum on retirement, as applies under many pension schemes, instead of just a lump sum if a Member is unfortunate enough to lose his or her seat. We should consider the possibility of applying a one-fiftieth formula to serving Members in the pre-1983 period. At present, the one-fiftieth formula goes back only to 1983. Many of us have early payments which are evaluated on the one-sixtieth formula. We should look at the possibility of the accrual rate for those whose payments do not reach the ceiling by the time they are 65 continuing beyond their 65th birthday to the full statutory ceiling. That is not possible under the present system. I think, as do all hon. Members, that the 66 per cent. widows' benefit is long overdue.

I shall make one final, cynical point. The Leader of the House slipped in and glossed over an important procedural suggestion. He talked about it being for the convenience of hon. Members and the House to have just one Bill during the life of a Government, and then umbrella legislation—orders based on the Bill—for carrying out other changes during that Parliament's lifetime.

I urge hon. Members to bear in mind what my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe said. He said that we are the people with the power eventually to decide the scheme's shape. However, if we allow the Government to switch to using subsidiary legislation, we cannot amend

[Mr. Alan Williams]

it. Therefore, the occasions on which we as Members have the opportunity to table amendments to what the Government might propose will be limited.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not want there to be any misunderstanding about this. When I discharge my functions in such matters I regard myself pre-eminently as the Leader of the House rather than as a member of the Executive. As we exercise the responsibilities of the kind described by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), we are exercising the powers of the House over taxpayers' resources and therefore it is important that we carry them out fairly and honourably.

When I made my suggestion I wanted not to deploy a covert objective of an ex-Treasury Minister, but to say that if we proceed expeditiously with the matters before us which have been largely agreed—almost all of which are capable of implementation by secondary legislation—we must be sure that we do not lose the opportunity to deal with further matters of that kind because they cannot be dealt with by secondary legislation.

I seek to ensure that we have the ability to do what the House wants us to do. I think that the existing primary legislation gives us that ability, but because of the curiosity the timing of the Government Actuary's report and its impact on what is happening, I made the suggestion. I did so not as a gamekeeper lurking in a Treasury role but as the Leader of the House.

Mr. Williams: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I am sure that none of us would challenge what he has said. In view of his comments about protecting our interests, he probably will not press any further the proposal relating to a single Bill. While he quite rightly says that almost anything any of us wants could be achieved under secondary legislation, a Bill would mean that proposals for change could come from anywhere in the Chamber. However, only the Government can initiate secondary legislation and what they initiate cannot be amended. Therefore, it is vital not to allow this procedural change to slide through, because it will severely limit our ability as Back Benchers, of whatever party, to influence the shape of the future of our fund.

6.16 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): I wish to propose two improvements to our pension scheme. First, I echo what every speaker from the Back Benches and the Opposition Front Bench has said: we clearly should have two-thirds widows' pensions. That is the standard form in all good, new commercial pension fund arrangements and it is long overdue for this House. I hope that the Leader of the House has noted the unanimity on this issue and that the Top Salary Review Body will bear this in mind when it considers the proposal.

Secondly, the scheme should be improved by the qualifying length of parliamentary service to enable a Member to receive a full pension being substantially reduced. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said, at present Members have to serve in the House for between 33⅓ and 40 years, according to whether they were elected before or after July 1983, to qualify for the full pension.

As the hon. Gentleman also said, the average term of service in the House is about 17 years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) said, some hon. Members stay here for a much shorter time. My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham and I have been here almost since the Flood and, like our beloved leader, we hope to go on and on and on. But everyone cannot hope to do that, and it is unsatisfactory that such a large proportion of hon. Members can never hope to receive anything like the full pension.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe also said that many other Parliaments have much better schemes, in terms of a variety of benefits, than ours. He was absolutely right to mention Australia, but it is not only the Australian Parliament which has a better scheme. In Australia, a Member of Parliament qualifies for a full pension of three quarters of his final salary after 18 years of service.

When I was preparing for this debate I asked the Library to find out the qualifying periods in the two leading Commonwealth Parliaments and the two leading EEC Parliaments. It is interesting to make a comparison with those other Parliaments, bearing in mind the fact that our qualifying period is between 33⅓ and 40 years. Canadian Members of Parliament qualify for a full pension of three quarters of their average salary in the best six years, payable after 17 years service. French Members of Parliament receive the full pension after 22½ years service at a minimum age of 55. West German Members of Parliament can receive a full pension after 16 years of parliamentary service and at the age of 55.

Those figures for the two leading Commonwealth and EEC Parliaments present an extraordinary contrast with those for our own. I suggest that the qualifying length of parliamentary service to obtain a full pension on retirement here should be reduced to 20 years. Even then, because of the average length of service of 17 years, most Members will not be able to attain it.

In the past, various arguments have been advanced against the suggestion that our pensions are insufficient. One was that it is possible for Members who are not members of the Government to hold other paid occupations at the same time and thus obtain other pension rights. I have been able to do that, but only because I have been excluded from Government service. Other Members who are active and punctilious in their attendance at morning Committees find it extremely difficult to have other paid employment.

From reading the newspapers, one sometimes gets the impression that some of the outside jobs that my colleagues take on might have been better avoided. I do not believe that the argument that other paid employment is available stands up to examination.

It has also been argued that, after Members leave this House, they can find very good jobs. One reads of special cases of particularly famous Members who find highly remunerated posts after leaving the House, but that is extremely rare and is becoming rarer. Having discussed this with former Cabinet Ministers, I can say with some insight that even they are finding it very much more difficult to obtain employment, partly because there are far more ex-Cabinet Ministers about now.

It is argued by the Treasury—its favourite and understandable argument, known as the "open-door" argument—that my proposal would open the door to similar demands in the public service for pensions after much shorter periods of service, but that is not valid.

Parliamentary service is unique. I speak as one whose majority in my first constituency was 164—after three recounts—so I know that survival here depends not on how good a constituency Member one is but on the geographical area that a Member happens to represent and on the whims of the Boundary Commissioners, who may appear on the scene at any moment and take away 25,000 devoted constituents and replace them with 25,000 political opponents. These are terrors that civil servants do not have to face.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham rightly said, most Members enter the House in their forties so it would be appropriate for them after 20 years to reach the full pension of two-thirds of their final year's salary.

Finally, I echo what has been said so well by many hon. Members about the actuarial position of the fund. The fund is in surplus, as we have heard and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham explained clearly, it is funded, not pay-as-you-earn. As the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe pointed out, the usual practice is that the employer contributes twice as much as the employee. The new extraordinary proposal is that this should be reversed: we should continue to contribute at 9 per cent.—one of the highest contribution rates for employees in any funded pension fund—and the Treasury contribution should be reduced to 4·41 per cent. It has already notionally been reduced to that figure as of April 1989. So, far from the Treasury paying twice what we pay, we pay twice as much as our "employer", which is wholly unjustifiable.

It must also be borne in mind that, until recently, the Treasury contributed 18 per cent., so the suggestion of a 4·41 per cent. rate means that its contribution will drop to less than a quarter of what is has recently been.

I hope that the Leader of the House will sympathetically consider these points and ask the Top Salaries Review Body to look at the suggestions of a two-thirds pension for widows and widowers and a 20-year qualifying period of service, and that my right hon. and learned Friend will ask the TSRB to treat these and our other recommendations with urgency so that its report can be submitted to the House in time for legislation this Session.

6.25 pm

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): I congratulate the Leader of the House on arranging this debate, belated and twice postponed though it is. I wonder whether the press, who are so anxious to suggest that Members of Parliament put their own benefits and salaries first, would care to consider that the top salaries review report that we are discussing dates from May 1988, while the more important Government Actuary report on the valuation of the pension fund was ordered to be printed on 1 April 1987. If we had waited another nine weeks the next report would have come out, with more up-to-date figures.

It has been amply demonstrated by hon. Members who have spoken that for the considerable contribution of 9 per cent., which takes some matching anywhere in the country, we do not get value for money. Now we find that in 1987, almost three years ago, the Actuary's valuation of the assets in our fund showed that it was £5·4 million in surplus. When suggesting a reduction in the Treasury's contribution, he extrapolated figures for 1989, by when he said that the fund would be £7·4 million in surplus—after, by his own admission, having undervalued the assets. If the figure that the Actuary puts on the assets is correct, the true surplus three years ago was more than £13 million.

The considerable surplus must be distributed in one way or another—our contribution is certainly too high—and I strongly object to the Treasury taking the surplus for itself by reducing its contributions. There are several proposals about what could be done with that surplus.

Setting aside any improvement in our own conditions, what about hon. Members who retired or lost their seats early and whose pension is based on a salary which, it is now admitted, was very much less than it should have been? The pensions are tied to those lower salaries and some former hon. Members are drawing totally inadequate pensions. We should look at that. I know that it is difficult because there are all sorts of legalities and regulations in our pension fund, but after all it is our money. The 9 per cent. that we pay is clearly ours and any contribution from the Treasury could reasonably be considered as deferred wages. The report talks about the 6 per cent. in addition that the Treasury has paid. That was not paid to us and has nothing to do with us, but was paid because of the inadequacy or non-existence of a previous pension fund.

I shall be brief because other hon. Members want to speak. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) mentioned the resettlement allowance. I understand that that allowance is paid to hon. Members for any reason—voluntary retirement or perhaps the loss of a seat—up to the age of 64, provided that they retire at a general election. The timing of a general election is not a matter for Back-Benchers. The decision is made elsewhere. The position that I am outlining does not apply to me, but I know several hon. Members to whom it does apply. The timing of the general election could mean the difference between £26,701 and nothing, and one day could make that difference. The rule should be that the resettlement allowance will be paid to any hon. Member who retires or loses his seat, provided that he does so not later than the first general election after his 65th birthday. That would mean that every Member would have the opportunity to decide for himself whether to retire and receive the resettlement allowance.

Mr. Ashton: Does my hon. Friend agree that one problem is that the resettlement grant is paid out of the Consolidated Fund, not out of the pension fund, and that we have no say in it? Surely it would be better to pay that from the pension fund by using some of the surplus and to let the House decide? That would be much better.

Mr. Lamond: My hon. Friend is right. I was about to make that point. If we had it in our control we could use some of the surplus for the purpose that my hon. Friend mentioned.

The calculation of the resettlement allowance is complicated. It takes account of age and length of service and those matters can vary considerably. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw drew attention to the anomalies. The calculation should be much simpler. It should be one month's salary for every year of service in the House irrespective of age, perhaps with a minimum of three months' salary or some such set amount. That would make the calculation much simpler and fairer.

[Mr. Lamond]

I want to see some fairness extended to people who were in this place before us and whose pensions are inadequate. I hope that the possibility of using the surplus, which is our money, will be considered.

6.34 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I declare an interest in paragraphs 30, 31 and 32 of the TSRB report. I shall be brief so that other Members who wish to take part in the debate will have a chance to do so.

It has been accepted for a long time that we should encourage cross-fertilisation between the European Parliament and national Parliaments. That is why Members of this House draw exactly the same salary as Members of the European Parliament and pay exactly the same contributions towards their pensions. We also draw exactly the same pension as Members of the European Parliament. However, there is one anomaly—it is referred to in paragraphs 30, 31 and 32—and there is no good reason for it. It should be a perfectly natural career pattern for Members of the European Parliament to seek election to this House and for Members here to seek election to the European Parliament. One hon. Member did that at the last European election but was unsuccesful. In Northern Ireland a former Member of the House took a European seat at that election.

Cross-fertilisation, with Members of this House standing for the European Parliament and vice versa, should be the norm. My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House should look again at paragraph 32 because it is a complete anomaly as the salary, pension and contributions are all the same. My right hon. and learned Friend is a reasonable man, and I am sure that he will come to the conclusion that, not for the first time, the TSRB has erred.

6.36 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I shall begin by outlining how we have got into such a position over the pension fund. It is important to explain to those who listen to the debate and who read about it that we are talking about money paid from the salaries of hon. Members. The Government Actuary made an assessment of the liability of the fund for the three years from the date on which the assessment was made, and that assessment was based on certain factors.

If the Actuary recommends a reduction in the Treasury contribution, the 1972 legislation requires that recommendation to be acted upon without the need to come to the House. We should amend the 1972 Act so that, when the Actuary makes his recommendation about the Treasury contribution, it cannot be implemented until the House has given its approval. If we do not amend the 1972 Act, there is no doubt that Members in future Parliaments will find themselves in the position that we are in now.

To be fair to the Treasury and to the Leader of the House, I should say that they had no option but to implement the recommendation of the Actuary to reduce the Treasury contribution to 4·41 per cent. The decision is a fait accompli, and that is unsatisfactory. We are dealing with the question of what to do with the surplus. I share the view of the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) that we should not reduce Members' contributions.

The Leader of the House said that, when there is a surplus in a pension fund, it is normal practice for the holiday to be enjoyed only by the employer. I shall give two contrasting examples of recent weeks from the Post Office and British Telecom. The public sector Post Office has a surplus in its fund, and its employees had their contributions reduced from 6·7 per cent. to 6 per cent. The private sector British Telecom has a massive surplus in its fund, but the employee's contribution has not been reduced and the British Telecom board has decided to take a holiday in relation to its contributions. We can all give similar examples to justify our arguments.

What should be done with the surplus? I am not in favour of reducing the contribution from 9 per cent., high though that may be. I am prepared to make such a contribution from my salary, as I suspect are right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House, provided that one eventually enjoys the benefits that such a contribution should provide. At present, that is not so. As there is a surplus, how should it be distributed?

At present, the pensions of Members of Parliament are made up of two accrual rates—one of 60 per cent. up to 1983 and another of 50 per cent. from 1983 to date. The Leader of the House should examine the feasibility of converting the sixtieths into fiftieths, or, more radically —though it would fall into line with Civil Service pension arrangements—of converting the whole lot to fortieths. If the pension fund is so much in surplus, then conversion to fortieths, or at least to fiftieths, should be possible.

Much has been said about the need to re-examine widows' pensions. I am strongly in favour of that being done, but any increase should be linked with an improvement in the pensions of right hon. and hon. Members. All that is before the House now is a proposal to increase widows' pensions from 50 per cent. to 66·66 per cent., which is unacceptable. It would be far better to improve both pensions together.

An examination of the ages of right hon. and hon. Members of the present Parliament reveals that this is the youngest House of Commons in the history of this country's parliamentary democracy. One way of keeping Parliament young is to provide adequate pensions to ensure that, when right hon. and hon. Members feel that the time to retire is right, they can do so. I am not the judge of when any other hon. Member should retire, only of when I should do so. Nevertheless, when right hon. and hon. Members wish to retire, they should be able to do so, free in the knowledge that they will be financially supported by an adequate parliamentary pension.

The Leader of the House mentioned the TSRB's recommendation that Ministers leaving office should be paid the equivalent of three months' salary. He said that that measure had been agreed by both sides of the House. I have certain reservations about such an arrangement, which strikes me as an earnings-related benefit. This House abolished such benefits for outsiders, and if it reintroduces them only for Ministers of whatever party is in power—and I am not trying to get at the present Government, because such benefits would be passed on to a Labour Government in 18 months or two years—there would be a serious risk of bringing this House into

disrepute. I have not made up my mind on that aspect, and I shall want to consider the proposals that the Leader of the House is to bring before us.

Mr. Orme: I was asked specifically by Lord Plowden whether I would agree to that proposal, along with others affecting the Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker. As a good trade unionist, and in an attempt to negotiate across the board in the interests of all right hon. and hon. Members, I conceded such payments because I believed then that there would be a general improvement. Unfortunately, the TSRB proposed instead the arrangements that are now before the House. I make no apology for my earlier concession, which seemed to be in the best interests of all right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Ewing: I knew the position to be as my right hon. Friend has described it and that he feels somewhat let down by the TSRB. Deals and quid pro quos are arrived at in many different circles, and my right hon. Friend thought that he was making a concession in exchange for an additional benefit. As that has not proved to be the case, we want to re-examine the whole scheme.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) that severance pay or the resettlement grant—call it what one may—should be dealt with tidily and cleanly. It would be simplest to accept the proposition of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton that one month's salary should be paid for each year of service, with a minimum of six months' salary. There is much to be said for the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), that the financial responsibility for meeting resettlement payments should be transferred from the contingency reserve fund to the pension fund, which would help to absorb some of the surplus.

I am grateful to the Leader of the House for listening to my suggestions, and I look forward to seeing them manifest themselves in the various recommendations that will come before the House at a later date.

6.46 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): Much of the debate has inevitably centred on the Government Actuary's recommendation that the employer's contribution should be reduced to 4·4 per cent. I would normally go along with the comment in the report of the Top Salaries Review Body that it is not common to pass on a funding rate reduction to the employees, which is the usual arrangement where there is a balance in the relationship between the contributions made by the employer and the employee—which could be of the order of an employee contribution of one third and an employer contribution of two thirds. At worse, both sides might contribute one half each.

The Government Actuary's recommendation of a reduction to 4·4 per cent. in the employer's contribution deals with only one moment in time. The scheme's trustees should ascertain whether they have the power to commission an independent consultant actuary to examine the totality of contributions to the scheme in the long term and try to arrive at a proper balance.

I agree with much of what has been said about other improvements and about the present 9 per cent. contribution made by right hon. and hon. Members. I should very much like to see an improvement in the size of widows' pensions, both pre-retirement and post-retirement. The current pension is only 50 per cent., but it is not uncommon for schemes covering comparable employees—if it is possible to find such a thing outside this House—to offer pre-retirement and post-retirement widows' pensions of as much as 66 per cent. Bearing in mind all that the job of a right hon. and hon. Member entails—with its unsociable hours, the schizophrenic existence that it imposes, and the uncertain future that it presents—we owe it to our dependants to ensure that the scheme incorporates decent widows' pensions.

There is a proposal to increase the value of the death benefit from one times salary to two times salary. I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposal to backdate that improvement to cover former Members of Parliament who are no longer with us. Nevertheless, death benefit outside can be as large as four times salary. Less emphasis should be placed on its being a single lump sum payment, because after all the bills have been paid—perhaps including a mortgage commitment, albeit that it makes sense to arrange alternative protection in that respect—the lump sum should be viewed as additional income replacement, to provide adequate support for retired widows.

The TSRB report makes provision for early retirement. I welcome the spirit of the recommendations, but I am worried that the proposal might create fresh anomalies. Taking the calculations and abatements used in the report, I noticed that for two Members, both aged 60, leaving on a retirement basis, one with 20 years' service would receive a pension of 20 fiftieths or 40 per cent., while his colleague, leaving after only 15 years' service would receive 15 fiftieths or 30 per cent. There would be a further abatement based on years of service. Instead of receiving 30 per cent., the latter would receive only 20·7 per cent. I cannot see why such a difference between two Members of the same age is justified.

When the question was referred to the TSRB, I think that it was asked specifically whether an early retirement pension could be provided from age 55. On the same examples of Members with 20 and 15 years' service respectively, one would get a pension of 27·6 per cent. and the other would get only 15 per cent. That is caused by the perpetuation of a double penalty which is not justified. I hope that the Leader of the House will consider further the use of years of service as a double abatement.

That might also be the answer to the question raised about Members of the European Assembly who are Members of this House. I have great sympathy for the point that has been made about them. If every Member got an early retirement pension, determined solely by the exact early retirement, the years of service, whether in this place or in the European Assembly, could be dealt with fairly and properly.

There is great scope for further progress on the parliamentary pension scheme. Other options deserve consideration. I hope that those options will be laid before all Members by the trustees, perhaps informally, before we have a longer and deeper debate.

Mr. Ray Powell *rose*——

6.52 pm

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I apologise to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) for intervening now, but there are only eight minutes left for a reply. I shall listen with interest to what the hon. Member may have to say to me privately afterwards.

I have listened closely to what has been said by colleagues during the debate. I will not make a debating reply, responding to each point as though they had to be knocked down like ninepins in the customary fashion. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) reproached me a little unjustly because I was not speaking in the capacity that he normally imputes to me. I appreciate very much the contributions from hon. Members on both sides.

I should also have expressed my appreciation for the work of Mr. Dobson, Mr. Lewis and Miss Moreen McColl, as well as the work of Treasury staff on these matters.

It was unfair of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) to talk about a Treasury rip-off. To a large extent I think that a number of the things about which we are complaining were a result of a self-imposed big dipper. We agreed, rightly or wrongly, to the 9 per cent. contribution. The latest valuation by the Government Actuary, bringing it down to 4·4 per cent., is also an automatic consequence of legislation passed as long ago as 1972. Of course, it is in the power of the House to make the necessary changes. That is a power which we have to exercise responsibly.

I was struck by the way in which my hon. Friends the Members for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) referred to the extent to which we are also in the power of the electorate, whether we be drones, bees or intermittent occupants of each role. I was struck particularly by the insight of my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey into how swiftly we might be removed altogether from this place. I remember vividly coming back on polling day in 1987 from a Nato summit in Reykjavik; I arrived in time for the count in my constituency. I remember saying to the officials who travelled in the plane with me, "At least you know what you will be doing tomorrow afternoon." That shows the hazardous nature of our occupation.

We have a special responsibility. Although a large part of the money is contributed by hon. Members, a significant part is contributed by the taxpayer, and we have to consider it in that way.

There are special factors, as my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham pointed out. None of us was covered by a scheme before 1964. We have, as I think we should, a rapid accrual scheme. That is why the rate of employees' contribution is so high. We are not the same as the fireman or the policeman where the hazard of the employment allows for early retirement; in most cases, we do not retire early but we arrive late. Even antiques like my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham, who has just celebrated his silver jubilee, have been here for only 25 years.

How am I to handle the matter from now on? I hope, after further proper consultations, to implement as expeditiously as possible the matters that have been under consideration by the TSRB, such as resettlement, early retirement, death in service and matters relating to ministerial severance pay and office holders, and also excess contributions, if we can get the right answer.

I note the support expressed by the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) in the case that I offered, which was supported also by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), in relation to Members of the European Parliament. With respect to the insight of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) from my native land, it is a Parliament and not an Assembly. As for the best way forward procedurally, I shall examine the suggestions made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I cannot buy his procedural proposals on the nod.

I think the right hon. Member for Swansea, West misunderstood me when I talked about trying to get as much as we could into the secondary legislation framework. It is not because I want to avoid the possibility of amendment; I want to avoid being stuck unnecessarily, waiting for the much more difficult achievement of primary legislation, if we happen to need that to deal with some matters, such as the effect of the Government Actuary's report. There might be a blockage in getting another Bill because of the legislative programme.

After further consideration, I shall seek to identify the matters which should be considered by the TSRB. Not necessarily all the matters that have been raised are appropriate for consideration by the TSRB, as has been pointed out. I should like that consideration to be undertaken as quickly as possible, as my hon. Friends the Members for Horsham and for East Lindsey suggested.

If I am to identify the principal matters for such consideration, I think that the most important is that which has been described as the balance of the fund, or the right relationship between employer and employee. I am struck by the widespread support for the retention of the figure of 9 per cent. I see the right hon. Member for Salford, East shaking his head. I do not say that that figure was endorsed universally, but it was supported widely. It gives resources for the improvement of benefits. Of course, it need not be as high, but it should be a generous figure.

On a contributions holiday, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North and by my hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark), it is right to point out that, although it can be dealt with either way, a document provided for the trustees, based on the National Association of Pension Funds' survey 1988, showed at that time that in three quarters of the cases the employee contributions were not altered but substantial reductions were made in the employers' contributions. That is not decisive. At any rate, balance is one question for consideration.

The second important matter, strongly supported on all sides of the House, is the benefit that should accrue to widows or widowers of hon. Members. I subscribe to everything that was said about the miserable existence that we impose upon our spouses, which justifies sympathetic consideration.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey also raised the rate of build-up of entitlement to full pension. While I mention these things, I am not prejudging them, but they are matters that have been widely supported.

Fourthly, the resettlement grant—however one describes it—again may or may not be a matter entirely for consideration by the TSRB.

As we handle the matter in that way, I shall try to keep the House, and certainly the trustees, informed about the progress of my consideration, so that we can deal with these matters as expeditiously as the House would wish.

I hope that I have made a reasonable response to the points raised today.

It being Seven o'clock the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [12 January].

Isle of Wight Bill *(By Order)*

Lords amendents considered.

7 pm

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, relating to the conduct of Government business and the business of the House. I hope that the Leader of the House will listen for a few seconds.

It may be unknown to most hon. Members that there has been a scandal surrounding the private life of a member of the Court of Session in Edinburgh, one of our most senior judges, which reflected upon his public persona to the point where he could not continue to sit on the judicial bench. That was followed by a resignation. I understand that today, senior figures in the legal and political establishment gave a briefing to newspaper editors of the Scottish press during which it emerged that allegations had been made about more than the individual who was required to resign on 1 January.

What is most worrying is that Scotland is rife with the rumour that tomorrow the Government will evade the issue by the device of a planted written question on the Order Paper to which the Secretary of State can reply without Scottish Members having the opportunity to debate the matter or to question the Secretary of State —who, in the absence of the Lord Advocate, is the responsible Minister in the House.

I should like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on our behalf, to seek an assurance from the Leader of the House that there will be no such device as a planted written question on the Order Paper tomorrow but that, instead, there will be an oral statement to the elected Members of Parliament from Scotland of the same character and frankness that apparently was the case at the briefing of national newspaper editors today. This is a matter that concerns the highest judicial body in Scotland, and it must be dealt with in this House tomorrow afternoon through a statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot deal with that matter during private business. However, the Leader of the House is on the Treasury Bench, and I am sure that he will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 9 agreed to.

HYTHE MARINA VILLAGE (SOUTHAMPTON) WAVESCREEN BILL *(By Order)*

Lords amendments considered.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 8 agreed to.

Clause 14

FOR PROTECTION OF A.B. PORTS

Lords amendment: No. 9, in page 5, line 5, at end insert—

For the protection of A.B. Ports the following provisions shall, unless otherwise agreed in writing between the Company and A.B. Ports, apply and have effect:—

(1) In this section—

"construction" includes execution and placing, extension, enlargement, alteration, replacement or relaying, and removal, and "constructed" shall be construed accordingly;

"plans" includes description, drawings and specifications:

(2)(a) Before commencing the construction of a tidal work the Company shall furnish to A.B.

Ports for its approval, which it shall not unreasonably withhold, plans of the work showing the general mode of construction and such work shall not be constructed otherwise than in accordance with such plans as may be approved by A.B. Ports or as may be determined by the Secretary of State as hereinafter provided and all such works shall be executed to the reasonable satisfaction of A.B. Ports:

(b) When submitting plans to the Secretary of State pursuant to section 6 (Tidal works not to be executed without approval of Secretary of State) of this Act, the Company shall send a copy thereof to A.B. Ports and the Company shall, on receipt of approval of plans or of any conditions or restrictions imposed under that section, send a copy to A.B. Ports:

(c) In the event of A.B. Ports failing to express its disapproval of any plans within 56 days after they shall have been delivered to A.B. Ports under this paragraph, A.B. Ports shall be deemed to have approved them:

(d) If it appears to the Company that A.B. Ports has unreasonably withheld its approval to any plans under this paragraph, the Company may appeal to the Secretary of State whose decision shall be final:

(e) The Company shall at all reasonable times afford to the duly authorised representative of A.B. Ports all reasonable facilities for inspecting any tidal work in the course of construction:

(3) The Company shall give to A.B. Ports not less than 14 days' written notice of its intention to commence the construction of a tidal work and, not more than 14 days after completion of such construction, shall give to A.B. Ports written notice of such completion:

(4) After the purpose of any temporary structure has been accomplished the Company shall with all reasonable dispatch, or after a reasonable period of notice in writing from A.B. Ports requiring them so to do, remove any such temporary structure or any materials relating thereto which may have been placed below the level of high water by or on behalf of the Company and, on its failing so to do within a reasonable period after receiving such notice, A.B. Ports may remove the same and charge the Company with the reasonable expense of so doing, which expense the Company shall repay to A.B. Ports:

(5) The Company shall not exercise the powers conferred on it by section 5 (Dredging) of this Act except with the written consent of A.B. Ports (which it shall not unreasonably withhold) and in accordance with such conditions and restrictions as may be reasonably prescribed by A.B. Ports:

(6) The provisions of section 8 (Abatement of works abandoned or decayed), section 9 (Survey of tidal works), and section 11 (Lights on tidal works during construction) of this Act shall extend for the protection of A.B. Ports and, for that purpose, shall have effect as if for any reference therein to the Secretary of State, there were substituted a reference to A.B. Ports:

(7)(a) Without prejudice to the other provisions of this section, the Company shall be responsible for, and make good to A.B. Ports, all losses, costs, charges, damages and expenses however caused (including a proper proportion of the overhead charges of A.B. Ports) which may reasonably be incurred by or occasioned to A.B. Ports—

(i) arising from the perusal of plans and the inspection of any tidal work by A.B. Ports or its duly authorised representative;

(ii) by reason of the construction of any of the works or the exercise by the Company of the powers conferred on it by section 5 (Dredging) of this Act, the failure of any of the works or the undertaking by A.B. Ports of works or measures for the prevention of danger to navigation arising from such failure;

(iii) by reason of any act or omission of the Company or its servants or agents whilst engaged in the construction of any of the works or the exercise of the powers conferred by the said section 5;

and the Company shall indemnify A.B. Ports from and against all claims and demands arising out of, or in connection with, such construction, exercise, failure or act or omission as aforesaid;

(b) A.B. Ports shall give to the Company notice of any claim or demand made against it which is a claim or demand for which the Company may be liable under this paragraph and no settlement or compromise of any such claim or demand shall be made without the consent in writing of the Company:

(8) Nothing in this Act shall be construed as imposing upon A.B. Ports, either directly or indirectly, any form of duty or liability to which A.B. Ports would not otherwise be subject which is enforceable by proceedings before any Court:

(9) Nothing in this Act shall affect prejudicially any statutory or other rights, powers or privileges vested in, or enjoyed by, A.B. Ports at the commencement of this Act or any title of A.B. Ports in, to or over any lands or foreshore held or acquired by it."

Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment, in subsection (8), leave out "Nothing" and insert

"With the exception of any duty owed by A.B. Ports to the Company expressly provided for in the foregoing provisions of this section, nothing"—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Question, That the amendment be made, *put and agreed to.*

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BILL
[Lords] (By Order)

As amended, considered.

Ordered,

That Standing Order 205 (Notice of Third Reading) be suspended and that the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

7.7 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that you will allow me to put on the record the fact that Opposition Members who want to reform the private business procedure have not delayed the House tonight by forcing a series of votes, which could have been of considerable number, on the amendments. It is a token of our good will. We hope that the private Bill procedure will be speedily reformed and there will not be any further necessity to delay private business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I suspect that rarely does the Chair take a point of order that is so welcome. I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman for his comments.

Orders of the Day

Pensions (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

Considered in Committee.

Clause 1

QUALIFYING CONDITIONS

7.8 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 17, leave out from 'men)' to the end of line 18 and insert

'the words "is a woman who" are hereby repealed.'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): With this we shall discuss amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 28, leave out subsection (4).

Mr. Flynn: The main reason for clause 1 is that the public service pension schemes presently discriminate between the sexes in a way that, from January 1993, will no longer be permissible under the European directive on equal treatment in occupational schemes. The discrimination is found in a rule that provides for pension increases to women under 55 with dependent children. Men in the same position do not qualify for pension increases unless they have retired because of ill health or, having retired on other grounds, are disabled by physical or mental infirmity.

The discrimination operates only up to the age of 55. A man whose pension starts before that age will not get increases, except on health grounds, unless he is 55. When he reaches that age, his pension is increased to the level that it would have reached if the discrimination did not exist. The loss of pension to a policeman who, for example, retires—as many do—in his 40s can be considerable. At the age of 54, he could be drawing a pension worth half or less its original value.

On Second Reading, the Minister said that if the discrimination was removed, by bringing men up to the level of entitlement that women now enjoy, about 7,000 police pensions would have to be increased and that if analogous arrangements were made for the armed forces, another 50,000 would be affected. That would be expensive, but public service pensions are not public charity: they are paid for in exactly the same way as all other occupational pensions, either by direct contributions by employees and employers or by an adjustment of salary in the case of a non-contributory scheme, such as the Civil Service scheme. Neither the employers nor the Government have a moral right to make unilateral decisions of that sort without consulting the members of the scheme and discussing the alternatives and how any additional costs might be met. No such consultations appear to have taken place.

The Minister argued that equalising in favour of men would mean increasing the pensions paid to those who retire at comparatively young ages and who can then enjoy second careers. That is an extremely worrying argument for those who are affected, such as the police, who have good historical reasons for retiring at an early age. If it is acceptable to pay a retired policemen a pension that falls in value every year because he can make up for the loss by taking another job, the implication must be that he does not need the pension at all.

How long will it be before the Government decide, in the interests of efficient targeting, that no public servant should receive a pension below the age of 55? That is the logical conclusion of the Government's decision to which clause 1 inexorably leads us. Our amendment would tackle the problem of discrimination from the other end—equalising in favour of men, rather than removing the rights enjoyed by a small number of women. The Opposition do not propose to divide the Committee at this stage, but we hope to hear a statement about the Government's views on the issue, since no such statement was forthcoming on Second Reading.

The National Union of Teachers and the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association—practically the only bodies that seem to be aware of the Bill—say that they oppose the Government's proposals. The NUT believes that there should be legislation with the opposite effect—that equality of provision should be achieved by levelling up rather than levelling down, as proposed.

The Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association is opposed to the clause as drafted and regrets the removal of an entitlement to pensions increased to female pensioners under 55 with dependants. That organisation writes:

"The removal of this benefit is wholly unnecessary as regards the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme as the scheme's fund is well able to bear the financial cost of treating men on equal terms."

While comparisons can be made with the police—a profession from which traditionally people retire at an early age—few male teachers would be caught in the net. We are told that the cost to the teachers superannuation scheme would be small.

It is worrying not to have heard a statement about the Government's thinking on the equalisation of pensions, especially as equalisation is just over the horizon, or will happen within a few years. Seven of our 12 EEC partners have already equalised their basic pensions, most of them at the age of 65, with France equalising at 60.

Perhaps more significant is what has happened recently in occupational pension schemes in Britain. With a view to equalising pensions in that sector, many have taken action and, from May to August 1988 of those occupational funds that equalised their pensions between the sexes, only 21 per cent. had equalised at age 60, while 55 per cent., by far the majority, had equalised at 65.

May we be told what plans the Government have? As I said, the amendment attempts to solve the problem of discrimination by ensuring that we level up rather than down. Although, as I said, we shall not divide the Committee on the issue, it is clear that much consultation with members of the schemes affected is necessary. We hope that that will take place.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Richard Ryder): I thank the Opposition, and in particular the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), for enabling us to take the Committee stage on the Floor of the House.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we discussed the important issue of levelling up and down on Second Reading, when he signposted the fact that he would be taking a further interest in the subject. He has deployed the same arguments at this stage, and the answer that I shall give the Committee is along the lines that I adduced on Second Reading.

[Mr. Richard Ryder]

Clause 1(2)(b) and subsection (4) provide for the phasing out of the payment of pensions increase paid to women below the age of 55 if they have dependent children, a point stressed by the hon. Member for Newport, West. The existing law—that is, section 3(2)(c) of the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971—discriminates against men and must be changed to comply with the United Kingdom's obligations under European Community equal treatment law, which is EC directive 86/3/78.

7.15 pm

As I explained on Second Reading, the existing provisions benefit very few women; to our knowledge, only eight women fall into this category. But extending it to men would be costly. Equal treatment can, therefore, be secured only by removing that provision. The clause does that by phasing out the provision in a way which fully protects the accrued rights of female scheme members and pensioners.

Acceptance of the amendment would mean that pensions increase would be payable from 1 January 1993 on pensions paid to men below the age of 55, provided they had dependent children, even on the parts of those pensions earned by service before that date. That, as the hon. Member for Newport, West pointed out, would be very costly indeed, and retrospective improvement to the superannuation provisions would benefit almost exclusively the younger retired members of the police, fire service and armed forces schemes at an age at which many of them can and do enjoy second careers.

I advise the Committee to reject the amendment because, as I said on Second Reading, the total cost of it would be substantial. It would be about £80 million a year at today's pension levels, rising to over £100 million a year at today's pension levels after about 20 years.

Those who have retired on ill health grounds or who are physically or mentally disabled already receive pensions increase when below the age of 55, and when other pensioners in the schemes reach 55—that is, still five years younger than the normal retirement age for most public service schemes and 10 years below the state pension age—their pensions are increased and the increase built up since they retired is paid up to then.

The Committee will agree that we could not give priority to targeting extra support on a group of public service pensioners who already enjoy some of the best pension provisions of any groups of public sector employees.

The hon. Member for Newport, West raised the issue of the equalisation of pension ages. The Government recognise the arguments for equalisation of pension age, but a great many complex issues must be considered, including demographic factors and the long-term economic and financial implications of any change for individuals, employers and the state.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of what was happening in Europe and was right to suggest that some European countries have a common pension age. The common pension age in Denmark is 67, and in Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain it is 65. I do not imagine that women nearing pensionable age would be delighted were the British Government to raise the pension age to 65.

Five countries have different pension ages. They are Belgium, where men retire at 65 and women at 60; Greece, where men retire at 65 and women at 60; Italy, men at 60 and women at 55—the only country with a 55 pension age for women; Portugal, men at 65 and women at 62; and the United Kingdom, men at 65 and women at 60.

I hope that, having heard my reasons why we cannot accept the amendment, plus the additional background information on the equalisation of pension ages, the hon. Member for Newport, West will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I support the thrust of the case that has already been made by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). However, I am puzzled by the size of the sum of money involved. I agree that if I was in the Minister's shoes I would not wish to spend £180 million in such a way, because there are other claims on the money that also come under the social security heading.

If I understand the situation correctly, we are talking about extending pensions, after 1 January 1993, to men under 55 with dependants, and the amendment aims to give them a larger increase than that provided for in the Bill.

Presumably we are talking about the cost over a period and not expenditure of £180 million in the year commencing 1 January 1993. Either there are more people within the category that would get the increase if the amendment were passed than I imagined, or the sums of money to be paid to them are larger than I imagined.

What I am trying to say, in a cack-handed fashion, is that either the increases are large or a huge number of people will benefit from them.

I know that this is a technical question and the Minister may not have the information immediately available to answer, but I think that the Committee would like to know why such substantial sums of money would be involved if the amendment were passed. Will a few men under the age of 55 get a substantial increase in the short term, or will thousands of new pensioners benefit from the amendment? That is an important question. Why do the Government estimate that the costs will be greater if this amendment is made?

Mr. Ryder: I shall do my best to answer the understandable and legitimate question of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

I shall again paint some of the backcloth. As I said earlier, only eight women in the schemes for which data are available—the Civil Service, the National Health Service in Great Britain and teachers in England and Wales—currently benefit from the provisions. The cost of the pensions increase to be paid to them is approximately £3,000. Home Office estimates for the police scheme in England and Wales show that no more than 50 or 60 retired policewomen could benefit from the provision, and the actual number is thought to be somewhat less. There are no retired female firefighters or armed forces personnel who would benefit from the provision. Paying a pension increase to men under 55 with dependent children would be very costly, as some 7,000 retired policemen and firefighters would benefit—mainly policemen, as proportionately more firemen retire early on grounds of ill health and they already qualify for an increase on those grounds.

The annual cost of such a provision would be about £6 million in 1989 to 1990, at 1989 to 1990 pension levels, rising to £14 million, at 1989 to 1990 pension levels, after 25 years.

The cost of a pensions increase for some male pensioners under 55 could be met by an additional contribution of approximately one half of 1 per cent. of the payroll. The costs of increases on pensions payments in the future, in respect of the past service of current and retired employees, could not be met in that way for the police scheme, which is the main scheme to be affected, because the costs would have a capital value of approximately £120 million at 1989 pension levels.

When I first saw the figures, I was as surprised as the hon. Gentleman, but they have been worked on in detail by the Treasury and by other interested parties and, to the best of my knowledge, the figures are accurate.

The amendment moved by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) does not propose to phase in the provisions. If it did, the cost in 1993 would be small.

I hope that I have answered the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. If I have missed any technical matters, I shall try to answer them later.

Armed forces personnel can draw a pension from the age of 38 and the police, I think, from the age of 48.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman —and I am not trouble-making, honestly. Perhaps it is because I am not a specialist in this subject, but I do not understand the £120 million capitalisation figure that the Minister mentioned. I think that it means that the Treasury, however indirectly, would have to put that sum into the schemes to meet the increments over a period of some years. If that is the case, I shall go away a relatively contented man. As a lay person, it seems to me that it is possible to phase in the cost of meeting the increase if males under 55 are to benefit from the scheme.

I remain surprised that the scheme will cost so much money. Is the simple answer that £120 million will have to come out of the Treasury's pocket to be paid into pension funds? I am still somewhat puzzled about the cost of the scheme, bearing in mind the small number of people likely to benefit from it.

Mr Ryder: As the hon. Gentleman has conceded, we are dealing with sizeable amounts of public money. Some of that money could be better spent by looking after people who are less fortunate than many of the people who subscribe to, or gain from, the schemes that we are debating.

To elaborate on the hon. Gentleman's last point, the schemes are not funded. Therefore, we are talking about the amount that we would have to put in if the payment were applied to pensions derived from service before the change was made.

Mr. Flynn: I share the unhappiness of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) with the Minister's replies.

I should like to draw hon. Members' attention to the unusual nature of the work of the police and the armed services, and the fact that it is universally accepted that people in those services need to retire early.

I mentioned the teachers. Two teachers' unions have said that they would be happy to see the costs provided for in the amendment funded out of their superannuation fund. They believe that the cost would be tiny, protozoan or minute, and they would be prepared to pay that for the principle that is at stake. It is an important principle: equal treatment of the sexes represents a great international reform. We should compare that reform with others in the world. At the time of the emancipation of slaves, we did not create equality by making all working people slaves; we did not spread the misery. The Government, however, seem in this instance to wish to spread not the advantages enjoyed by either sex—sometimes men, sometimes women —but the disadvantages.

7.30 pm

On Second Reading, the Minister used the words "the ultimate cost". Ultimate" refers to a long period, and I share the cynicism that has been expressed about the arrival of the year in question. It is with some regret that we note the resistance from this regressive, backward-looking Government to the ideal being pushed by the far-sighted, progressive Europeans. Much of the contribution involved should be a matter for negotiation, as the funds are provided not by a public charity but by working people, in the same way as with other occupational pensions. Surely this is a matter for those people to decide rather than a matter for Government edict.

Mr. Ryder: May I repeat what I said in my opening remarks and on Second Reading? If we were to accept the amendment on the levelling-up or levelling-down principle, considerable public expenditure would be involved. Therefore, we cannot accept it.

The hon. Gentleman alluded to the equalisation of pension ages. As I said in my earlier speech, equalisation of pensions in Europe is not always equalisation downwards. The majority of countries that apply such equalisations equalise up to the age of 65, while Denmark equalises up to 67. Such an arrangement in this country would make women less happy than they are with the present arrangements, which specify an age of 60.

I am advised that one problem of the amendment is that, perversely—I am sure that this was not the intention —it could discriminate against women. The children involved must be dependent children and, other things being equal, male pensioners are more likely to be regarded as heads of household than female pensioners, especially if the husbands of the female pensioners are still working.

Mr. Flynn: In these days of equality and the spread of "house husbands", I do not think that that would pose a serious danger. In view of what the Minister has said, however, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

PERIODS OF FURTHER SERVICE

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Kirkwood: May I ask again a question that I asked on Second Reading about the legal propriety of legislation to amend Acts that have been repealed? As I said then, it strikes me as absurd in the extreme and, indeed, incompetent for clause 2(5) to be included in the Bill without some discussion and some explanation of why the Treasury solicitors consider it necessary to amend the

[Mr. Kirkwood]

repealed Pensions (Increase) Act 1965. If it is competent to do so, I should like an explanation of why it is necessary. The Minister addressed the matter briefly on Second Reading and, as far as I can remember, said that he thought that it was necessary so that people could understand what was supposed to have been the position between 1965 and 1971. Following the coming into effect of the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971, the appropriate increases were implemented.

If the Treasury solicitors are going to make the amendment of repealed Acts a habit in the future, we shall all be led a merry dance. I could suggest a number of candidates for amendment among repealed Acts, but I think that those outside the House will not understand, and will think that we have nothing better to do with our time. I was not satisfied with the explanation that I was given on Second Reading, and I should be obliged if the Minister would have another stab at it tonight.

Mr. Ryder: I will have a shot at it.

Clause 2 amends the law on two small, technical aspects of pensions increase to align it with the actual practice followed by public service schemes. There are two separate issues. First, subsections (1), (2), (3) and (5) amend the Pensions (Increase) Acts 1965 and 1971 to make the law relating to the increase of pensions of certain re-employed scheme members what it was always thought to have been. The Acts include provisions to ensure that re-employed scheme members—that is, those who have left, and rejoined with a break in service—do not have a lower pension because of the way in which the Acts would otherwise apply on their cases.

However, special provision then had to be made for the teachers' schemes because of provisions in those schemes that allowed teachers to qualify for a pension in certain types of employment or other absence from teaching which did not count towards their eventual pension. The relevant words have always been interpreted by the Departments concerned in a particular way which they believed that the Acts prescribed. The clause validates that interpretation and the practice that those schemes have followed since 1965. I should emphasise that the practice of scheme managements will not be changed, and in that sense no pensioners will be affected. No doubt you, Sir Paul, followed those remarks with particular attention in view of your previous responsibility for pension matters some years ago.

Clause 2(4) corrects an unintended anomaly in the application of the same provisions to the dependants of re-employed scheme members. As it is now worded, section 4(3) of the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971 would apply only to dependants' pensions calculated as a proportion of the scheme member's pension. It would not appply to a dependant's pension calculated directly by reference to the scheme member's salary and years of service. The practice of scheme managements has always been to apply section 4(3) where appropriate to dependants' pensions, however calculated.

The 1965 Act was repealed by the 1971 Act, but without prejudice to the operation of the repealed provisions in respect of the period ending 31 August 1971. The aim of the clause is to ensure that the provision has the effect that it should have had since 1965.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked why clause 2 was necessary. I think that I have explained the reason in general terms, but let me explain more specifically: if we left it out, there would be an obligation to trace all past pensioners, and to compensate any who had not benefited but should have. That would probably be impossible and certainly very costly. It would be unfair and possibly illegal not to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

NO INCREASE FOR ADDITIONAL LUMP SUMS ARISING FROM RECALCULATION

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Flynn: Clause 3 removes the right to inflation proofing when a lump sum retirement benefit is reassessed to take account of a retrospective pay increase. That is a frequent occurrence in certain professions, particularly the teaching profession, as the normal retirement date is the end of August and not spread throughout the year as it is in other professions. I understand that each year about 16,000 applications for retirement are received to come into effect at the end of August. When that happens the lump sum payments are calculated before the annual pay settlement is concluded. In due course those pensioners receive an additional lump sum based on the increase in salary. That addition is increased, where appropriate, under the Pensions (Increase) Act. Under clause 3 that will no longer apply.

There seems to be only one argument in favour of clause 3 and that is that interest is not paid on salary arrears resulting from a pay rise and therefore pensioners should not be treated more favourably than employees. That argument has a familiar ring because of our discussions on clause 1, under which women are to lose their entitlement to a pension increase because men do not have the same entitlement. In clause 3 pensioners are to lose entitlement to inflation proofing of arrears because employees do not have the same entitlement. In short, the Government are saying that equality is a many-splendoured thing. They have suddenly become fanatical about being egalitarian, but only when the results of equality achieve a saving in public funds. That is a questionable devotion to the principle of equality.

Perhaps the Minister can tell us how many people would have received those increases in recent years and whether they would have been affected by clause 3. Perhaps he could give us some idea of what the average loss would have been and the total savings to be made. What consultations have taken place with the unions and other representatives of the members of the scheme? Again, clause 3 represents a small change, but a mean, penny-pinching and unnecessary one.

Mr. Ryder: Clause 3 ends a provision that gives rise to extremely small one-off payments to pensioners but with a disproportionate administrative burden for the scheme managements concerned.

The problem we seek to solve is this. The Pensions (Increase) Act protects the real value of preserved lump sums awarded to "early leavers" from public service

schemes. That is entirely appropriate, but, of course, it was never intended that the provisions should operate once the lump sum had been paid.

Unfortunately, they apply to lump sums that are recalculated when a retrospective pay award is made. If a scheme member retires after a retrospective pay award comes into force but before that award has been announced, his final salary for pension purposes will be increased and his pension and lump sum recalculated. An additional amount of lump sum is paid, and the Pensions (Increase) Act also requires pensions increase to be paid on that additional lump sum. However, the amount of that increase cannot be calculated and paid until the next pensions increase order is made. So the scheme management may have to make no fewer than three payments of lump sum when a scheme member retires: on the date he retires; when a retrospective pay award is announced; and when the next pensions increase order come into force.

The last payment will normally be very small, no more than a few pounds and perhaps even a few pence. Clause 3 relieves schemes of the requirement to make this third payment and of the associate administrative burden. I must stress that the entitlement under scheme rules to an additional lump sum and the recalculation of pension if a retrospective pay award is made is completely unaffected by the clause. The clause simplifies the administration of pensions increase at an insignificant cost to pensioners.

7.45 pm

It is important to establish clearly that the minor administrative simplification is made at a negligible or insignificant cost to some pensioners. It does not undermine the principle that all pension benefits are protected against inflation. Pensions increase legislation has always taken account of practical considerations and the need to avoid excessive administrative costs.

The effect on pensioners is very small. In many cases, the amount is less than £1. A hypothetical calculation based on a civil servant retiring on a salary of £25,000 after a full 40-year career might have benefited from an award six months delayed of only £11·25, or 0·03 per cent. of the total lump sum involved.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) was right to ask one particular question. The salary arrears do not attract interest. Another anomaly is that if the scheme makes a mistake no pensions increase is paid on the extra lump sum. I hope that that goes some way towards answering the hon. Gentleman's points.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

EMPLOYERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS COST OF PENSIONS INCREASE FOR TEACHERS AND PERSONS ENGAGED IN THE HEALTH SERVICES ETC

Mr. Flynn: I beg to move amendment No. 3 in page 4, line 1, leave out subsection (1).

The amendment seeks to delete subsection (1) which gives powers to make regulations placing the cost of teachers' pension increases on their employers or

"such other persons or classes of persons (apart from teachers) as the Secretary of State may consider appropriate".

Perhaps the Economic Secretary can explain who those other persons or classes of persons are.

By pressing for the removal of subsection (1), the amendment does not imply that we approve of subsection (2) which applies similar powers to Health Service staff. We want to concentrate on subsection (1) for two reasons, although we have many misgivings about the Health Service. I understand that a couple of telephone calls to health authorities revealed a sublime ignorance about the existence of the Bill.

We seek to remove subsection (1) because the teachers' unions are concerned that the Government are pre-empting the results of negotiations that have been taking place on the funding and other aspects of the teachers' superannuation scheme. Given the present state of local government finance, any threat to impose additional charges on local authorities must be a matter of deep concern. Firm assurances are needed that, if the powers are to be used, an appropriate transfer of resources will take place at the same time.

The calculation of the teachers' superannuation fund is weird and wonderful. It works in rather a similar manner to the pools panel that used to meet when we had severe winters, when experts would get together and guess the results of football matches that had not been played. Apparently a committee of experts decides what investments which would have been made, but had not been made, by the teachers' superannuation fund would have yielded. Unfortunately, the possible investments that they consider are only Government funds. No occupational pension scheme would have a portfolio which consisted only of Government funds.

There is much concern that for many years teachers' superannuation payments have been seriously understated, but I understand that the teachers' unions and the appropriate body are negotiating on that.

Clause 4 has wider implications. The principle of inflation-proofing public service pensions may be threatened if it became a matter for negotiation between occupational groups and employers rather than a nationally recognised obligation. We debated that at length on Second Reading. Clause 4 could be the first stage in the dismantling of the Pensions (Increase) Act, of which the Prime Minister strongly disapproves.

If such fundamental changes are to be made to the financing of public service pensions, it should not be done by an enabling provision such as clause 4, followed by regulations that cannot be amended. If and when the Government decide what they want to do, they should incorporate their detailed proposals in a Bill that can be properly debated and amended.

The financial memorandum to the Bill says:

"Regulations made under the amendments to the Superannuation Act 1972 made by this Bill may in future have some financial effect."

What does that mean? The Minister may say that he cannot predict what will happen in the future, but the worry is the effect that the Bill is likely to have on health authorities and, in particular, local government. We are aware of the financial problems experienced by both those bodies, but it is a particular threat to local government, because the gearing effect of the poll tax means that for every extra penny of expense shouldered by local authorities they must charge many times as much to local poll tax payers. We should like the Minister at least to tell the House what would be the maximum increased burden

[Mr. Flynn]

on employers if the total cost of pension increases were placed on local authorities and local bodies which clearly is what the Government have in mind.

Labour Members recognise that there is merit in that proposal and that those sums should be paid by those bodies rather than by the Treasury, but the Minister must assure us that it will be fully and appropriately funded. Will he explain how employers will find the money to pay what will be required?

The Department of Education and Science has sent a letter to the National Union of Teachers. Last year, the NUT held a meeting on the root-and-branch reform of the teachers superannuation fund. It intends to reconvene that meeting, but it fears that legislation may pre-empt negotiations. The reply from the Department states that the Bill will not pre-empt future negotiations. We should like the Minister to confirm that that is not the purpose of the Bill.

Mr. Ryder: The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) mentioned the pools panel. I must reveal that I have always wanted to sit on the pools panel on a Saturday morning when matches are snowed off and to deliberate over the fortunes of Newport County, Norwich City or Ipswich Town. Alas, the pools panel has had a pretty thin time over recent seasons. I hope for its own sake that it is not paid according to the number of times that it meets.

I must reject amendment No. 3. The purpose of clause 4 is to allow the Secretaries of State responsible for the National Health Service and teachers' superannuation schemes in England, Wales and Scotland to make regulations, which would be subject to negative resolution, to permit the cost of pensions increase to be taken into account in determining employers' contributions to the schemes. At the moment, those costs are met by the Departments that administer the schemes, rather than by employing authorities.

The teachers' and National Health Service schemes are unfunded. The Government Actuary advises the Secretaries of State on the appropriate levels of employers' contributions on the basis of quinquennial valuations of the schemes' assets and liabilities. For that purpose, he makes various actuarial assumptions and works on the basis that the schemes are funded.

Union interests, particularly in teaching, have in the past argued strongly that some of the assumptions that the Government Actuary uses are unrealistic. They believe, for example, that different assumptions about investment returns would lead to a surplus on the notional funds, which might then permit lower contribution rates or improvements in benefits. I understand that employees' and employers' representatives in the teachers superannuation working party have just agreed on a report endorsing that. It will be impossible to take this further without clause 4.

The Amendment No. 3 would restrict the change made in clause 4 to the National Health Service superannuation schemes and would deny a worthwhile opportunity to take similar powers for the teachers' schemes.

Without wishing to anticipate unduly the outcome of discussions following the teachers superannuation working party report, the Government would feel able to agree to changes in such matters as the investment assumptions, which might be seen as giving greater realism in building up the assets of the schemes, only if there were a corresponding realism in treating pensions increase as a liability of the schemes. I understand that employees' and employers' representatives in the teachers' superannuation working party recognise and accept that. Clause 4 provides the necessary power.

I cannot say when regulations will be made under clause 4. There would need to be much careful consultation with all the interests concerned before a change could be made. Indeed, sections 9(5) and 10(4) of the Superannuation Act 1972 would require that, and the statutory instruments containing the regulations would be subject to negative resolution. The Government would also want to be sure, so far as possible, that the net effect of any changes was not likely to add unacceptably to the costs of employing authorities.

I hope that the recognition that I have given to the need to contain the additional costs for employing authorities and the need for full consultation before any changes are made will allay any misgivings that Labour Members, or interests with which they have been in touch, may have had.

The hon. Member for Newport, West asked whether the Government plan to compensate health and education authorities for the higher contributions that they will have to make to finance pension increase. They will not necessarily have to pay increased contributions; the clause confers a power on Ministers only to make at an appropriate time regulations under which employers' contributions can be set to cover the costs of pensions increase. The effect on health and education authorities' finances will be considered if the need arises.

Mr. Flynn: The Minister trod on private grief when he mentioned Newport County and the pools panel. The only game that Newport County could win was when the pools panel sat, but tragically the football team no longer exists.

We take little comfort from what the Minister said. I noticed how carefully he chose his words when talking about not adding unnecessarily to the costs of local authorities.

In the past, Opposition Members have been cynical about Government legislation, and we remain a little apprehensive. I note the Minister's points. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clauses 4 to 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

8 pm

Mr. Ryder: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am grateful to hon. Members, particularly the hon. Members for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), for their prompt consideration of this modest, technical and useful Bill. Public service superannuation will never be the most exciting subject that hon. Members debate, but we owe an obligation to the electorate and to approximately 4 million members of public service pension schemes to give a fair hearing to Bills of this kind.

I recognise the strength of feeling on the subject of levelling up against levelling down, which we debated in Committee. I assure the House that the Government looked carefully at the issues and the merits and demerits

of levelling up and levelling down before concluding that it was right to phase out a benefit which, in practice, has benefited and always will benefit a small number of women pensioners. We must do what is right for public service pensioners, what meets our European Community obligations and what is fair to the taxpayer. I am confident that the Bill strikes the proper balance.

In Committee, hon. Members noted that other measures in the Bill made small and, again, technical changes to the existing law. Opportunities to legislate on public service superannuation will always be rare events, but I am pleased that we have been able to produce a Bill to secure equal treatment in pensions increase to make such changes. I commend the Bill to the House.

8.2 pm

Mr. Flynn: Opposition Members do not wish unnecessarily to delay legislation, but the Bill is proceeding at breakneck pace. It was introduced at an unusual time —a few days before the Christmas recess. The Second Reading debate was shortly before Christmas, and we are now concluding the remaining stages. Further submissions from representatives of many people affected by the Bill may be made when the Bill is in another place and when it returns to the House.

A great pensions minefield is ahead for the Government. There are many qualms about the Bill, some of which have been expressed tonight, particularly the implications for the Health Service and local government, and for equality of the sexes legislation. There will be repercussions throughout other Government pensions legislation and policies.

The fascinating history over the centuries of providing the elderly with comfort and security in retirement is continuing. It reached a high point of hope in the 1970s. The years since then have shown the growth of complexity of pension provision, without a growth in pension quality, and a certain guarantee of much future confusion. There is great indecision about the problem of equalising pension provision for men and women in the future. I am certainly not suggesting that pensions should be equalised down, but the implications are that the Government have little hope of equalising them other than by disadvantaging women. We will also see a continued undermining of the precious 10-year-old principle that pensioners should share in the country's growing prosperity.

The Bill is a product of yesterday's false, extinct ideas and, sadly, is not a product of the new hope for universal access to prosperous and fulfilling vintage years of retirement for everybody.

8.5 pm

Mr. Kirkwood: The Bill is a useful addition to the body of statute law governing pensions. I almost stand accused of being boring about the need——

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Not just on pensions.

Mr. Kirkwood: That may be true, but it is for others to judge.

I am concerned about the increasing complexity of the language used in pensions legislation. Earlier debates have suffered because of it, but the Minister coped commendably well. He should use his power to make the parliamentary draftsmen to do their best. I understand that it is a complex subject, but we are getting into the realms of the absurd in the language that is used in some statutes. That comment applies to this Bill in particular.

The Government were right on whether to level up or level down. I give the Minister clear notice that the Government must take no precedent from their judgment on the Bill. If they bring forward sex equality measures or any other legislation, they must not use this Bill as a basis on which to level down future provision. The facts and circumstances of each case must be carefully considered. On balance, the Minister was right, but he must not assume that he will have such a easy ride in the future.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Easy Ryder.

Mr. Kirkwood: Yes.

The Government must introduce legislation that takes advantage of the opportunity presented by legislation from Europe to level up social provision across the broad spectrum of social policy. He will be widely opposed if he seeks to use the Bill as a precedent for arguments in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Civil Aviation Authority (Borrowing Powers) Bill *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—
Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Civil Aviation (Borrowing Powers) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase in the sums payable out of or into the National Loans Fund or charged on and issued out of or payable into the Consolidated Fund under the Civil Aviation Act 1982 which is attributable to provisions of the new Act—

(a) increasing the Authority's borowing limit to £500 million with power to make further increases up to £750 million by order;

(b) enabling the Authority to borrow sums in units of account defined by reference to more than one currency.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

8.8 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): As hon. Members know, I like to exercise some scrutiny of money resolutions, and I am delighted that several hon. Members are intent to do the same. The Bill was dealt with by a Second Reading Committee which sat for just under an hour. No doubt the Minister will be pleased to confirm that the borrowing powers in the resolution are for only £500 million, which is a great deal of money, but that any further sums up to a total of £750 million will be subject to an affirmative order of the House—that is not a great safeguard, but it is something—and that, by virtue of this money resolution, we are not handing the Minister unfettered powers.

The borrowing powers that are authorised by the money resolution are for money that is to be used for improving air traffic control capacity. On 20 December last year the Minister stated:

"Perhaps I could give two examples of major projects in the investment programme, which hon. Members may find of particular interest. One project is the central control function; it has been called the tunnels in the sky concept. It involves a major restructuring of the airspace over south-east England and will increase capacity in the terminal manoeuvring area over the south-east by at least 30 per cent. when it is fully in place in 1995. The project will cost about £30 million."—[*Official Report, Second Reading Committee*, 20 December 1989, c. 3.]

Perhaps the Minister will confirm that the borrowings for that project will not confine the benefits to the south-east and that regional airports, such as the Leeds-Bradford airport which is operated by the Leeds-Bradford airport committee, will obtain the benefits by virtue of the fact that the delays around Heathrow and Gatwick will, I hope, be curtailed.

As the Government are currently considering the application to extend flying hours beyond 10 pm, perhaps the Minister will bear in mind the fact that the investment which is to be authorised by the money resolution might increase the existing capacity of aircraft to enter and leave air space. Therefore, the extended flying hours at Leeds-Bradford, for which some people are pressing—but not, I hasten to add, those people who live close to the flight paths—might not be necessary.

If the money is to be used for such a project, there will be great advantages. However, there is then the question of the other priorities. As was made clear in the debate to which I have referred, there are several other more pressing priorities. I refer, for example, to Bradford and, although this is not the Minister's responsibility, I should like to place it on the record that it would be helpful if more money could be allocated for the construction of permanent extensions to schools there, because several schools in my constituency need many millions of pounds spent on them.

We are talking about borrowing powers. Air traffic is a growth area, and since the money that will be lent to the Civil Aviation Authority will be recouped in charges to the air traffic users, we must ask the Minister how long the borrowing period is and how soon the Government will recoup that money so that it is available for other priorities. I am not opposed to improvements in air traffic control and, of course, in safety standards. We all agree with the need and determination to maintain and improve our air safety standards. However, if the money is to be recouped, some of the other pressing priorities for expenditure can also be considered. I should like the Minister to comment on that.

The Civil Aviation (Air Navigation Charges) Act 1989 allowed charges for landing to be made in European currency units. As a consequence, paragraph (b) of the money resolution refers to

"enabling the Authority to borrow sums in units of account defined by reference to more than one currency."

I take it that that wording has been chosen to embrace ecus, as they are known, which very few people on the face of our planet have ever seen or used.

I served on the Second Reading Committee of the Civil Aviation (Air Navigation Charges) Act which, as I have said, allowed charges to be rendered in ecu. As the Minister explained in the Second Reading Committee, the extension of the use of other currencies is purely to embrace ecu. However, he could not satisfactorily explain at that stage why that would be of great advantage to the Civil Aviation Authority, except from the point of view of flexibility.

As was pointed out to the Minister, the exchange rate in ecu, like that of any other currency, fluctuates and varies extensively. European currency units are no different. The significant difference is that the European currency unit is a medium by which the federalists inside the Common Market are devoting their attention to producing a standard European currency. The extension into ecu goes directly against the Prime Minister's vaunted wish to oppose federalism and instead merely to retain the European Economic Community as a trading organisation. Paragraph (b) of the money resolution is therefore a sign of the acceptance of and a step towards federalism, not against it.

I hope that the Minister will be able to cite something more than "flexibility" to justify paragraph (b) because he did not provide an adequate explanation when the Bill was considered in Committee. As I have said, I hope that he can give an explanation about the money resolution because a large sum of money is involved. The total is £750 million. The borrowing limit seems to be being provided for a good and useful purpose, but the examples that the Minister gave in Committee totalled only £30 million. Perhaps he could give us a brief outline of what the other £720 million——

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I believe that in Committee I also gave the example of the en route centre, which will cost considerably more than £30 million. In fact, it will cost about £200 million. That £30 million covered just a few examples.

Mr. Cryer: I am sure that the Minister would like to fill us in with some further details and to give us a sketch of the £750 million that is likely to be involved. In fact, the money resolution covers only £500 million because any increase in the borrowing limit above £500 million will be made by order. Presumably, therefore, that part of the borrowing requirement is not yet needed. Perhaps the Minister could tell us why there is a contingency figure of £250 million, because he will have to do that when he presents the order. I look forward with eager anticipation to the Minister's detailed response.

8.16 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Before commenting on the money resolution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to ask for clarification. As I understand it, the length of any speech made by any hon. Member is recorded. I am concerned to ensure that any speech that I make tonight will not lead to my being placed on a blacklist. When I asked Mr. Speaker a little earlier about my speeches, I learned that there were two stars against my name, which showed that I had spoken for 20 minutes or longer in the past. However, neither of those speeches was a Second Reading speech. Both were made on Report or at the request of my hon. Friends who had asked me to keep the business going. I want to make quite sure that, in future, I shall not be picked out and discriminated against because of my speech tonight. I should be most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Chair could give a ruling.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): These matters are clouded in mystery. However, I can advise the hon. Gentleman and the whole House that in the interests of trying to get a fair balance among those whoe are called to speak in our debates, Mr. Speaker keeps a careful note of those hcn. Members who speak, of the subject on which they speak and for how long they speak.

Mr. Steen: As that may put a somewhat different complexion on the fact that this debate can last until 10.45 pm, I hope that the length of an hon. Member's speech will not be held against him or her. Because we now have two and a half hours before the next business needs to be called, I am deliberately making the statement that, if I choose to go on until 10.45 pm or thereabouts—although I have no plans to do so at the moment—I believe that, in view of the position in the House at the moment, no hon. Member, including myself, should be compromised for choosing to speak on a money resolution which is important but which may not be the most significant matter that has come before the House.

I declare an interest at the outset. First, I have been involved with aviation for the best part of 20 years. Before I became a Member of the House, when I practised at the Bar, I was involved in aviation law, and I have been involved in the aviation industry ever since I have been a Member of the House. I deliberately declare that interest because it has been said from the Chair that constituency interests take precedence over consultancy interests. I and many other hon. Members have both constituency and consultancy interests.

I have a constituency interest in Plymouth airport, which is surrounded by South Hams. I also have consultancy interests in Airlines of Great Britain, of which British Midland Airways is part, and British Island Airways. As I am interested in aviation I have worked, not necessarily in a paid capacity, for several other airlines, such as Brymon Airways, which is my local airline, Britannia and other airlines.

The House is becoming confused about interests. Simply because one is paid to do work connected with a particular interest, one should not be discouraged by one's colleagues or by organisations outside the House from speaking on the subject. It has been said that, if an hon. Member speaks on a subject as a paid consultant, the content of the speech is dismissed.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Does my hon. Friend agree that that criticism usually comes from those who would prefer to speak on most subjects from ignorance? Provided that my hon. Friend or any other hon. Member declares that interest, and its extent, the additional knowledge that arises from it is of the greatest importance to industry and to the House.

Mr. Steen: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's timely intervention. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was not called in a recent debate on airport security. I could have given the House inside knowledge from five airlines about the serious problems faced by the industry. As I was deprived of the opportunity to do so, the House was deprived of information direct from operators at Heathrow, Gatwick and Plymouth about the problems of airport security and safety. One reason for not calling me was that I had interests in the aviation industry. I should have thought—this is the point that my hon. Friend made—that because I had interests in aviation I could have been useful to the House and given it the benefit of my 10 years' experience in the industry.

I declare my interests because I believe that they are good, not bad, points. My hon. Friends would prefer to hear from an hon. Member who knows about his subject rather than from one who does not. Many of my hon. Friends believe that, provided that the hon. Member gives good value for his consultancy interests, it adds another facet to debates in the House.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): There are two and a quarter hours to go.

Mr. Steen: As my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) says, I have two and a quarter hours to go. I assure the House that I do not propose to speak for that long. It is important to get on with the money resolutions.

The money resolution will give the Civil Aviation Authority a sizeable sum of money. Probably few hon. Members can comprehend the enormous sum of £750 million. The sum of £500 million went through on the nod, but the extra £250 million will have to be brought back to the House for another debate. It is strange that, the more money that we ask the Government for, the fewer hon. Members attend the debate in the House. For smaller sums, the House is packed. The large sum of money may be going for the best possible purposes. I should like the Minister to comment on the regulation and control of that money, which will go to a public body. It would be most helpful to the House to know what control there will be on the £500 million that will be spent.

Urban development corporations were debated in the House several times and vast sums of money were spent on them. Those sums went through on the nod. When the Labour party was in government between 1974 and 1979, we constantly passed vast sums of money for the

[Mr. Steen]

nationalised industries. Now that so many of them stand on their own feet in the private sector, there is less opportunity to pass vast sums to the public sector. I am afraid to say that the civil aviation authority is still one of those bodies.

The House will be interested to know that 90 per cent. of the Civil Aviation Authority consists of an organisation known as the National Air Traffic Scheme. The NATS service is responsible for all that happens in our skies and 90 per cent. of the staff of the CAA are in NATS. Does the Minister believe that public money could be saved if the CAA were separated from the navigational arm, which forms the majority of it, and was either made into a public utility or privatised?

NATS controls slots at airports. The service that it performs is marketable and could be privatised. Airlines could be charged for its services. Could some of the large sums to be voted for CAA borrowing be saved if NATS became a public utility or was privatised?

In 1983, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry referred the running of the CAA to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and it conducted an inquiry. It is strange that, six years later, the Department of Trade and Industry has again referred the CAA to the MMC. Is that because the 1983 report was no good or are the Government running out of public bodies which the MMC can investigate? As we go through the cycle of privatisation, the CAA will probably be referred to the MMC every few months as the MMC runs out of public bodies to examine.

We have a problem about the amount of money that is being asked for and about how NATS is run. If it were run in a slightly different way, it might not cost so much. I do not know whether my hon. Friends know that NATS is run by an air marshal for three years and by civilians for the next three years. It is rather like a biblical story, in which seven years are lean and the next seven years are fat. With NATS, the air marshal takes over the running of the air navigational system every three years and civilians do it every other three years. It is like rotation of crops. Is that the best way to run air traffic control? There is a constant change of seats. It is like musical chairs. After the third year, the air marshal has his chair removed and a civilian moves in. That does not lead to continuity and cannot be the most effective use of money.

Conservative and Opposition Members would like more money, provided that it produces more slots in the air. Is the Minister aware that the antiquated system under which NATS is run means not only that more slots will not be produced, but that the amount of money spent will not necessarily result in better working practices?

I wonder whether my hon. Friends are aware that at Heathrow every day at 3 o'clock the runways are changed, rather like the changing of the guard. That results in about a half-hour gap in operations as the CAA changes the runway pattern. No other airport halts all aircraft wanting to take off or land so as to change the runways, and Heathrow is one of the few airports that does not have a mixed-mode runway. Perhaps a few bob from the £500 million could be saved if Heathrow's runway configuration were not changed at the same time each day.

Money could also be saved if NATS had better working practices. I know that the Minister will tell me that various London boroughs asked for the runways to be changed round because of noise. That request was made many years ago, but since then planes have become much quieter. It should not necessarily be advantageous to spend money on an organisation that has antiquated practices.

The money to be loaned to the CAA will not mean that it gets NATS off its back, nor will it give NATS the opportunity to make its operations lean and more efficient. That money will compound what is going on. I accept the good work that NATS does, but I fear that the money will consolidate outdated and ineffectual working practices. When the Minister replies I hope that he will consider whether money could be saved or better value for money given were my suggestions followed.

We are all for safety and security and we all want facilities for more capacity in terminal areas. The only snag about the money to be given to the CAA for NATS is that it may produce many more slots in the air space, but the £500 million may only keep the planes in the sky. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), whose interest in travel is well known, will be pleased to know that. I am sure that he will share my concern, however, that although more planes will be flying around the air, it will not follow that more planes will be taking off or landing. The money will provide slots in the sky, but it will not provide more capacity in the terminal areas.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem lies not with the number of slots in the sky, but with the experts who decide how many seats will be used in a plane? The problem is not the ever-growing number of people who use air travel, but the number and type of plane. A few years ago, the so-called experts advised that smaller aircraft should be used. Those aircraft have resulted in a greater number of air movements, but there has been no commensurate increase in the ability of those aircraft to carry more passengers. Exactly the same number of passengers are carried now as in the past.

Mr. Steen: Although my hon. Friend's point does not truly relate to the borrowing powers that we are discussing, it would be discourteous if I did not respond to him briefly. The problem with the larger aircraft is that one presumes that all passengers want to travel to the same destination at precisely the same time.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): They cannot get off halfway.

Mr. Steen: No, indeed.

Nowadays, the travelling public want planes that will take them, on a regular basis, to smaller airfields nearer to their eventual destinations rather than larger and larger planes that go to one place. In the 1970s there was a growth in the demand for large planes, but that trend is reversing and smaller planes are being used, which has resulted in more air movements.

More air movements do not present a problem. The trouble is that those planes must land and take off. Extra slots in the sky do not present a problem; the problem is providing adequate and sufficient controls at each airport to allow planes to take off or land. When my hon. Friend replies, I hope that he will say something about better working practices at airports such as Heathrow which will result in more movements.

At the terminal 4 inquiry, the inspector said that the maximum number of movements that could be allowed

out of Heathrow was 275,000 a year. Hon. Members are probably unaware that there are now 340,000 movements in and out of Heathrow, discounting night movements. New technology has enabled more planes to land and take off and the provision of more slots in the sky. As a result of the money to be given to the CAA and of planes becoming quieter, does the Minister intend 400,000 air movements at Heathrow? Is it his intention to increase the number of slots out of Gatwick? Unless my hon. Friend makes a statement about how the money will be used, he will find that the British Airports Authority will resist growth at Heathrow and Gatwick and will favour moving planes to Stansted, in which it has invested £300 million.

I hope that my hon. Friend's reply will be robust and I hope that he will tell the House that Heathrow's efficiency will not be reduced because of a conflict between the CAA which, through new technology, will be able to produce more slots and more take-offs and landings, and the BAA, which wants to switch traffic to Stansted. The House is entitled to know whether the CAA will use its enormous loan clout to redirect air traffic in the London area.

Although the sky is the limit for investment in airlines, there is little point in making provision for more air space if sufficient money is not used to provide the necessary infrastructure to deal with arrivals and departures. I touched on that when I mentioned the mixed-mode runway.

Although I could speak for a long time, it would not be right to do so, as I know that other hon. Members want to participate. We should remember, however, that airports such as Heathrow can be competitive only if there are sufficient slots in the air space and opportunities for true competition. The House should be concerned about the new competitive blocks that are emerging at Heathrow —British Airways, Sabena and KLM and Air France and Lufthansa. Between them they could take up 60 per cent. of the slots at Heathrow and allow virtually no room for competition.

It is important for the Minister to ensure that the major airline blocks do not take all the additional slots to be made available as a result of the additional money for the CAA. Those slots must be used for the smaller independent airlines so that they can compete on all fours with the big battalions. I hope that the Minister will tell us the Government's policy on this—*[Interruption.]* I do not know why the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) is getting so excited. I cannot believe that it is because of my speech.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I have never heard a money resolution being allowed to be debated as widely as this. The hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) has not once been brought to order or brought back to the resolution. If the Government's intention is to try to waste time tonight, we could have saved them the effort because we could have been voting from 7 o'clock on every amendment on the private Bill. We shall consider doing that the next time the Government wheel in Back-Bench Tories to waste time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): We are discussing a money resolution, which happens to be wide. The hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) obviously has expertise in the matter before us and it is therefore more important for him than for other hon. Members, to speak directly to the resolution.

Mr. Steen: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the way in which you put that. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) for explaining his discomfort. I do not wish to detain the House because I have made many points which have been well received by Conservative Members.

I do not wish to abuse the good will of the House. I have mentioned the points about which I am concerned. We are talking about £500 million and I want to ensure that the money will not create just more space in the sky but with no room to land. I do not want the CAA to use the words "safety and security" to obtain millions of extra pounds.

I hope that the Minister will be circumspect in ensuring that the money is put to the best possible use in line with Government policy. The Government's policy is to encourage competition. If the Civil Aviation Authority uses the money to provide more opportunities for competition, that will fulfil the Government's commitment. I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us tonight that the money will be used for the direct purpose of opening up the skies to real competition rather than giving the block cartels more opportunities, which in turn will prevent airlines from competing equally and which are against consumers' interests.

8.42 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I wish to speak on a subject on which I have given notice to the Minister and on which I checked that I would be in order. I shall refer to the letters from Mr. Karel Van Miert to Mr. Roland Dumas—page 3 on the first letter on infrastructure facilities and page 7 of the second letter on the legal framework. I should like, I hope concisely, to raise one particular issue.

During the Consolidated Fund debate which started at 5.52 am just before Christmas, I was fortunate enough to raise the general issue of rain forest trade in animals. The debate could have been referred to any one of 10 Government Departments because the subject straddles Whitehall Departments. During the debate I raised the matter of the International Air Transport Association and it is that on which I wish to concentrate tonight.

I brought the debate recorded in *Hansard*, column 564 on 20 December, to the attention of the Department of Transport. My contribution should not be interpreted as any criticism of the Department because we are dealing with difficult matters which, to my knowledge, have not been solved by any country. Of the millions of pounds that we are discussing tonight, my plea is that more money should be given to guarantee facilities at our big airports, particularly Heathrow. That is relevant to the resolution.

At 6 am on 20 December I said that I was

"indebted to Tony Juniper and Christoph Imboden of the International Council for Bird Preservation, which is primarily concerned with the conservation of species."

If my information seems to come from specialist sources, I think that the Minister would agree that there is widespread concern in this country about the conditions of the import of birds, fish, animals and reptiles.

On 20 December I continued:

"It is therefore of great concern that they have learnt that the number of birds dying in each consignment entering Britain continually averages between 13 and 20 per cent. In answer, I think that the Minister gave a figure of 13·7 per cent. The recent consignment of birds from Tanzania en route through Heathrow to Miami is a good example of the scale of the problem."

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

We are concerned not only with the importation but with the transit facilities which may be at the root of the problem. On 20 December, I said that one recent consignment

"totalled over 8,700 birds, but over 1,200 individuals died. That is within the percentage loss that appears to be generally accepted by the authorities and importers not only in Britain but world-wide. In the United States, the figures for deaths range from 14 to 24 per cent."

Current public feeling is considerable.

"If it were dogs, cats or horses in trade, such figures would be totally unacceptable. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food figures"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. As usual, the hon. Gentleman has been most courteous in giving notice to the Minister of the points which he wishes to raise. The money resolution concerns not IATA but the Civil Aviation Authority and it would be helpful to the Chair if the hon. Gentleman would show how the CAA makes the rules in this case, how they are used and how finance comes into it. I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make, but it would be enormously helpful if he would speak more directly to the money resolution.

Mr. Dalyell: I think that the Minister would agree that the Civil Aviation Authority has the closest relations with IATA. Is not the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority, Christopher Tugendhat, a member of the IATA governing body—so there is the closest relationship between the two?

I shall be concise. On 20 December I said:

"While detailed figures are available on this trade in other countries, there are no comparable figures available in this country. For example, in the United States in 1985 over 18,000 grey parrots were imported and almost 2,700 died . . .

Obviously a total ban on the trade in animals for commercial trade is ideal, but the present climate would never accept such a measure. However, limiting the trade to those individuals which are captive bred will certainly reduce the trade and the mortality figures. Interim measures which could be easily implemented include a stronger resolve by Governments to get to grips with this problem and to implement the CITES checklist scheme.

The problem experienced by the International Air Transport Association is very important. It is vital that the dialogue between the CITES secretariat, through the standing committee, and the live animals board of the International Air Transport Association, the Animal Air Transport Association and the International Office of Epizootics be continued; that applicants for export permits or re-export certificates should be notified that, as a condition of issuance, they are required to prepare and ship live specimens in accordance with IATA live animals regulations for the transport of live specimens by air and the CITES guidelines for transport of live specimens for marine or terrestrial shipments; that to assist enforcement officers, CITES export permits or re-export certificates should be accompanied by a crating checklist to be signed immediately prior to shipment by a person designated by a CITES management authority, the person so designated being familiar with the live animals regulations;"—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. 564-65.]

This will all cost money and require facilities. That is why I am particularly grateful that the Minister said that he would do his best to comment on this contribution.

I admit that being a party to the convention and providing animal holding facilities can be extremely expensive. Facilities should be open to inspection, with the concurrence of the transport company—in this case the airlines—by CITES-designated enforcement personnel or designated observers; and any documented information should be made available to the appropriate authorities and to the transport companies.

This is a complex matter to which there is no easy answer; it requires money and an understanding that other countries are involved in the trade, and that it is no good exporting or re-exporting animals from this country and finding that a significant percentage of them die on the way to their final destination.

One of the advantages of the Consolidated Fund debate is that one can quietly put a case to the House. That is what I should like to do on this, similar, occasion, in the expectation that the Department of Transport is doing its best and will tell us what it is doing about an appalling problem. It is, of course, true that humans are more important than animals, but the civilised world can do a great deal about the problem.

8.52 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I have the honour to have been selected to serve on the Standing Committee scrutinising this Bill and I am extremely worried about much of the way in which the money is to be spent.

The key to the Bill and this resolution is the overcrowded skies of the south-east, a problem which has arisen time and again. Experts have been consistently wrong, and I should like to be reassured that the money will be spent in ways that will reduce the burden on air traffic controllers. As far as I can tell, that is not what will happen.

Some of the money will be spent on buying a new green field site of about 30 acres in Fareham to move the air traffic centre from West Drayton. I cannot say that I am enthusiastic about that. I understand also that some of the extra borrowed money will go to a national radar network. Anyone who has studied the radar system—especially the defence system—of this country will know that it has been a shambles since the late 1940s. I hope that some of the money will be spent integrating the military and civil systems.

Similarly, a great deal could be achieved by spending the money sensibly to remove the pressure on the south-east. When this issue reached crisis proportions last year, serious consideration was given to opening up two major international airports, not in the south-east but serving the major catchment area of the west midlands and the south-west.

We have two huge airports that are hardly used. One is Greenham Common which was, but is no longer, a cruise missile site. It is conveniently close to the M4. Brize Norton is a major international airport used only by the military. No civilian personnel pass through it, but Customs and immigration officials are there. For my constituents in the south-west it would be extremely useful not to have to trek the whole way to the M25 and around it to Gatwick to make their connections. It would greatly help them if they could go up the M5, on to the M4 and pop into Brize Norton or Greenham Common, both of which are greatly underused. If these two sites were developed there would be no necessity to move from West Drayton and despoil a green field site in Fareham, and that is the core of my proposition.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) described the resolution as concentrating on safety and security; I cannot say that I share his view. Safety is

extremely important, but I understand from the Civil Aviation Authority that much of the money will be spent on training an additional number of air traffic controllers, which is to be welcomed if they are really needed. The irony is that study of the figures shows that the trainees are being streamlined—Civil Service jargon for saving money and reducing the time spent on training. The time from the moment someone is recruited to the time he is popped into the control centre will be 18 months. I am a little concerned about that and about the time that will be spent in on-site training in a control tower——

Mr. Steen: I want to correct a misapprehension on the part of my hon. Friend. I said that the amount of money that could be spent on security or safety was limitless. Merely mentioning them necessitates an open cheque, so using any of the £500 million for security or safety does not necessarily mean that procedures would be any more secure or safe.

Mr. Allason: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct as usual. His knowledge of the subject is considerable, and it is a great disappointment that he was not called in the debate on airport security. It is astonishing that the most modern airport in Europe, terminal 4 at Gatwick, is probably illegal, in the sense that it is the only airport with no segregation of incoming and outgoing passengers. That should be against the law; it is likely to be against European law in the not-too-distant future.

This most modern of terminals was obviously built and designed by people who had never had to walk through an airport building. When the Queen went to open terminal 4 she was horrified by what she saw and remarked that she could not understand——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that he should not bring in the monarch to assist debate.

Mr. Allason: I beg your forgiveness, Madam Deputy Speaker, for my brief lapse. All I can say is that a personage who opened terminal 4 asked how her subjects would be able to push their trolleys from the point of luggage collection at the carousel to the railway station, a journey which would necessitate no fewer than four on-and-offloadings of the trolleys, because the geniuses who invented the little shuttle train that moves between the terminal buildings designed it not to be able to carry luggage carts.

Mr. Batiste: That annoys many of the passengers who go through most of our larger airports.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are departing from the resolution. Airport buildings are not necessarily the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. Allason: While I agree that the railways inspector is directly responsible for banning the luggage carts on the Gatwick shuttle, the CAA has overall responsibility to police such matters. The CAA plans for expenditure clearly show that little is to be spent to improve security. It is curious that in Canada, the security and intelligence service spends the majority of its vetting time dealing with applicants and candidates from airports. Every airside member of staff has to be positively vetted in Canada. In this country the Security Service is regarded as far too secret to have to dirty its hands protecting the public.

I am not convinced that this increase in the borrowing powers of the CAA from £200 million to £500 million in ecu, dollars or pounds will be sensibly spent. I look forward to the Minister giving us a detailed analysis of exactly what will be spent, and I hope that he will assure us that the site in Fareham will not be a complete white elephant.

9 pm

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The Bill is essentially simple, although the debate may have raised it above that level. It is an important measure to increase the borrowing limit of the CAA. It also makes clear the existing power of the CAA to borrow in foreign currencies and also to borrow in units of account such as ecu. I shall try to cover as many as possible of the points that were raised in debate. I hope that the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) will accept that I shall try to cover concisely matters raised not only by my hon. Friends but by Opposition Members.

I can tell the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that any extension over the £500 million would require an affirmative order and would be subject to the possibility of another debate. The hon. Gentleman slightly confused me when he talked about the need for regional airports. I was not sure whether he meant that they ought to develop or whether he wanted to see some restriction on the opening hours at Leeds-Bradford airport.

Mr. Cryer: I suggested that the Minister's explanation in Committee was an illustration of increasing air traffic capacity through investment of the money that would be subject to the money resolution. If that is the case, it would obviously increase the capacity of airports such as Leeds-Bradford which are not congested in the same way as Heathrow. That might lead to the conclusion that it would not be necessary to extend the opening hours at Leeds-Bradford airport, and that would satisfy many people who live under the flight path.

Mr. McLoughlin: I follow the hon. Gentleman's argument. One of the great dilemmas when talking about the necessity to increase airport capacity is balancing environmental questions against the convenience of people in the Leeds-Bradford area travelling from their own airport and not having to travel long distances to other airports. The Government place great emphasis on the role of regional airports in serving their localities. It seems nonsense that people have to travel from Leeds, Bradford or Derbyshire to London to get the flight that they require. The Government would like to see regional airports take up as many opportunities as possible. There are many flourishing regional airports such as Birmingham, Manchester, East Midlands and to some extent Leeds-Bradford, which I have not yet visited but hope to visit in the near future.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South asked why the CAA should be allowed to borrow in units of account such as ecu. The CAA already has power to borrow in foreign currencies with the approval of the Secretary of State. The legislation merely extends that power, including the consent provision. The Secretary of State and the Treasury have to be satisfied that each tranche is required. As units of account are not currencies in every sense of the word,

[Mr. McLoughlin]

the Bill merely explains that the term "currency other than Sterling", in section 10 of the 1982 Act, includes units of account defined by reference to more than one currency.

It is wise to allow the CAA to borrow in units of account, because charges collected from airlines by Eurocontrol for air navigation services provided by the CAA from 1 January this year will be paid to the CAA in European currency units and not United States dollars. That provision has been introduced to provide greater flexibility. The money is required for not only the £30 million tunnel in the sky concept that I mentioned earlier but the new en route system, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) referred, and to which I shall return.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who has a great knowledge of aviation, made a number of serious points. I was sorry that he was unable to catch the eye of Mr. Speaker during our debates on the Aviation and Maritime Security Bill. On Monday he made an important point concerning slot allocations and the necessity—although this may go wider than the issue of the CAA's borrowing powers—to ensure that fair competition is allowed, the consumer has a right of choice, and smaller airlines are not stifled and put out of business.

My hon. Friend asked about the possibility of splitting national air traffic control services. That interesting idea was also contained in a recommendation of the Select Committee on Transport, which we are currently considering. We shall respond in due course, and I trust that my hon. Friend will not expect me to comment further now.

My hon. Friend asked also about a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. That is not the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport but for the Director-General of Fair Trading. Any public body must be open to detailed scrutiny of the kind that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission can undertake, and I hope that the CAA comes out of its investigation very well. However, I cannot comment on the likely outcome of the MMC's report.

My hon. Friend gave me some of the answers to his own questions concerning mixed mode operations at Heathrow. That aspect is new to me, but it is also a question of getting the balance right between noise and maximising the capabilities of our airports, which is of fundamental importance.

Mr. Steen: Objections to noise are too often made without being counteracted by the argument that there is virtually no unemployment in the vicinity of airports. The people who work at airports want to live near them, so complaints about noise are often a red herring.

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is welcome to make that point, but it is not one which right hon. and hon. Members representing areas close to airports would promote. I have to take very seriously the views of local residents. I repeat that it is a matter of achieving a balance between providing the required service and the environmental impact in a particular area. That balance is not easy to achieve, but we must aim at striking it as often as we can.

I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for his usual courtesy in notifying my office that he would be raising certain points. I understand that his remarks were in order because the CAA is responsible for safety matters. Most of the responsibility for regulating the carriage of livestock is primarily with Departments other than my own. Shortly before tonight's debate, the hon. Member informed me that his contribution to the Consolidated Fund Bill just before the Christmas Recess could have brought responses from 10 different Departments.

Responsibility for livestock lies mainly with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment. For carriage by air, the air operators themselves have drawn up, through the International Air Transport Association, regulations with which all United Kingdom operators should comply. In licensing a United Kingdom operator wishing to carry cargo, including livestock, the Civil Aviation Authority will satisfy itself that an operator is competent to comply with the association's rules. The policing of such carriage lies principally with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and with local authorities in which the point of entry or departure is located. However, the CAA flight operations inspectors also run checks on air operators to ensure that they comply with the association's regulations in the holding and transit of livestock.

The hon. Gentleman drew attention to serious incidents. I assure him that I shall draw attention to the chairman of the CAA. If I can go further, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman later. Indeed, we gave him an undertaking when he managed to get in at the end of the debate on the Aviation and Maritime Security Bill.

Mr. Dalyell: The Department of Transport can make sure that the checks are carried out systematically. The difficulty is that MAFF says that it is the responsibility of the Department of Transport. It is not as simple as buck-passing all the way round. The difficulty in the British system is that anything that straddles more than two Government Departments, let alone 10, becomes the responsibility of someone else if it is awkward. That is why I suggested in the Adjournment debate that there should be an overall committee representing all Departments to consider an issue that concerns a great many people who are horrified, particularly at the pictures of gross cruelty to animals and often gross and needless incompetence.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have had a warning. If there is one thing for which the hon. Gentleman is known, it is his persistence. If the problem is not sorted out, we can expect to hear more from him on it. I undertake that we shall try to produce clear guidelines to cover some of the important points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay wondered whether the money was necessary. There is no doubt that some of the new equipment that the CAA needs is very expensive. We do not want to hold the CAA back. The argument is sometimes put that there has been under-investment. We want to make sure that adequate investment is available to the CAA. It is not a matter of trying to create more slots. Some would argue that Heathrow and Gatwick are almost at capacity. We are awaiting advice from the CAA on that. It should be published nearer the summer.

The Bill is important and deserves the approval of the House; I hope that it will get that approval.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Civil Aviation (Borrowing Powers) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase in the sums payable out of or into the National Loans Fund or charged on and issued out of or payable into the Consolidated Fund under the Civil Aviation Act 1982 which is attributable to provisions of the new Act—

(a) increasing the Authority's borrowing limit to £500 million with power to make further increases up to £750 million by order;

(b) enabling the Authority to borrow sums in units of account defined by reference to more than one currency.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(5) (Standing Committees on European Community documents).

AIR TRANSPORT

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8520/89 relating to the application of the competition rules to air transport, and 8521/89 relating to the development of civil aviation in the Community; and endorses the Government's objectives in the first case of improving procedural certainty in aviation operations, and in the second of providing the fullest degree of liberalisation within the Community subject to suitable safeguards against anti-competitive behaviour.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Question agreed to.

Telephone Premium Services

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn,—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

9.13 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I did not think that I would be called, because of all the shenanigans on the Conservative side. However, I am on my feet and I am grateful for the opportunity to raise again the issue of telephone premium services. I fear that I am in danger of being politically typecast, so I shall have to be careful.

Telephone premium services were introduced in January 1986. They caused immediate controversy. There were large bills and children were being corrupted. In one case, three young children in the London area were abducted through a liaison made with an older person who was keying in to the telephone services and having conversations with young people.

Those embarrassing events led the industry to respond in what I regard to be a timid way. In August 1986, it created an organisation called the independent committee for the supervision of standards of telephone information services—ICSTIS. It was funded—and still is—by British Telecom, the main recipient of the profits from those services. Various trade organisations were set up and various codes of practice were published. Throughout 1986 and 1987, the embarrassing and controversial cases still appeared in the newspapers and on television. There was a great response, throughout the country to the interest that I took in the matter.

The Director General of Oftel, whose remit from the House under the Telecommunications Act 1984 is to represent the consumer interest, was very much involved. I shall later discuss the various cases in greater detail.

The Director General of Oftel, under considerable pressure and clearly within the remit given by the House, finally made a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in July 1988, and its report was published in January 1989. There then followed considerable consultations with interested parties, but the interests of the consumer and those who have fallen victim to the services during the preceding three and a half years were not sufficiently taken into account. I gave evidence to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, had several meetings with the Director General of Oftel and had considerable correspondence, but not one of my recommendations was adopted. I do not take that as a personal insult.

I am sure that the Minister will agree that all the matters that we discussed recently in a television debate were conceived by the industry. The cornerstone of the new licence amendment is a code of practice that will be supervised by the ICSTIS. It is a new code but, in effect, it is only the old code in a new wrapping. The first code has gone by the board. There have been three codes in three years and we are told that this one will solve all the problems. It seeks to provide monitoring of the multiline chatlines, when up to a dozen people engage in what is mostly banal conversation, but which can be dangerous. It envisages age control, where young people below a certain age will be barred from using the service. It also envisages compensation for high bills.

I shall first deal with monitoring. In 1987 there was a chatline called Talkabout, which was owned by British Telecom. It was taken out of service after a great deal of

[Mr. Terry Lewis]

controversy and after much heartache for many families. When the controversy was at its height, the Liverpool city council trading standards office made a fetish of monitoring—almost 24 hours a day.

British Telecom was persuaded to carry out an almost one-to-one monitoring exercise. It is nonsense to suggest that monitoring can solve the problems about which I am speaking. I shall show how many people have become involved in monitoring. It will then become clear that it is nonsense to suggest that monitoring can solve the problem.

It is suggested that age control will help. How in goodness can a telephone monitor judge that a girl is younger than 14, 15, 16 or 17? Publicans cannot do it. Sophisticated as some youngsters are, it will be virtually impossible to do it on the telephone. In other words, age control is another nonsense which has been dreamt up by the industry to protect its profits.

The most ludicrous proposal is the so-called compensation scheme. That idea came from the industry when families were driven into debt with telephone bills of £4,000, £5,000 and a record £7,000 because youngsters had used the telephone without consent. If a compensation scheme could overcome that, I would be the first to say that it should be given a try.

If a product or service, before being delivered into the market place, needs a compensation scheme to underpin it or to make it legitimate, the service or goods in question cannot be worth a candle. Again, the industry creating protection for itself dreamed that idea up and it was taken on board by the Director General of Oftel.

The market about which I am speaking is so defective that it must be addressed not by the Director General of Oftel but by Parliament. It is defective to the extent that the market can survive only if people steal calls on the telephone at home or at their workplace.

My next remarks will interest the Minister because I have with me a cutting from a newspaper which this morning said that a business in the Minister's constituency had been landed with a telephone bill for £19,000 because of an employee's obsession with chatlines.

About two years ago I began to appreciate, as households were being driven into debt, how small businesses could find themselves faced with huge charges as young employees, ill-supervised—particularly where it was not possible for small firms to provide call-barring equipment—ran up huge telephone bills.

I have done a great deal of research into the whole issue. I would not care to think how much it has cost me in telephone calls to funny and seedy chatlines in recent years. Indeed, economy has had to be introduced into my parliamentary office and we have had to do less telephoning.

So concerned was I about the possible plight of small businesses that I wrote to about 600 chambers of commerce, one of which was in the Minister's constituency, where the company to which I referred has been saddled with a telephone bill for £19,000, a reasonable irony for tonight's debate.

Why am I so bitterly opposed to telephone message services, and why have I put so much time into the argument, and run the risk of being typecast? It is because of the experiences that I have outlined tonight, and the research that I have carried out.

Multiline chatlines are one of the specific problems that I have come across. I know of a case where three children aged 13, 14 and 15, tried to commit suicide when huge bills of between £3,000 and £5,000 dropped on to the doormat. I know from correspondence from people throughout Britain that families are still struggling with the debts that have been run up in such a way.

I anticipated the possibility of fraud, and I alerted the Director General of Oftel a long time ago to the fact that unscrupulous chatline companies, once they get a line from British Telecom, are divorced from scrutiny and supervision. I thought that people might be encouraged to break into other people's homes and businesses, use the chatline, leave the phone hanging there for hours on end, and the chatline proprietor would split the difference with the perpetrator of the crime.

I am sad to say that that has happened on a number of occasions. Several cases are now going through the courts, and two court cases have been concluded in the past three weeks. We should not clutter up the courts with a new crime—telephone chatline stealing.

The other game that I detest and find despicable is the so-called interactive game in which the caller can be kept on the line for a long time, sent from one part of the game to another. The games are designed to keep the caller on the line and the caller is usually not the person who has to pay the bill.

Tape messages are another problem. One usually sees offensive adverts for them. Out of respect for you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and because it would probably be an affront to the House, I shall not read out the offensive adverts that appear in *The Sport* today—they need to be seen to be believed, they are so bad.

The worst problem is with one-to-one calls—usually a girl talking to a man. One finds them in the poorest parts of city centres throughout Britain, but Manchester seems to be the capital. A young woman is employed to speak, typically to a male caller, at all hours of the day or night and the conversation has to be about sex.

I have brought to the attention of the House on a number of occasions the different problems associated with such lines. They are corruptive of women and, in my view, there is a correlation between the institution of those lines during the past four years and the number of crimes that are perpetrated against women on the streets. Some people think that they are useful and they argue that they are a safety valve. They say that sexual inadequates use the lines to blow off steam and that they are no problem to anyone else.

Interviews that I have conducted in my office with young women who have worked on chatlines suggest that the opposite is the case: those women feel corrupted and dirty, and a number have said that they felt like "verbal prostitutes". No doubt someone will now say, "They do not have to do it."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): They do not have to do it.

Mr. Lewis: The Minister is not strapped economically; like most hon. Members, he is all right, thank you very much. Outside the House, however, are one-parent

families—women who work at night when the kids have been put to bed. There are people out there who have not a hope in hell of getting a reasonable job. People in economic difficulties will do many things to earn a crust; women have been known to walk the streets because they have been dragged into economic difficulties.

I hope that the Minister will take that aspect rather more seriously. Women are being corrupted. Let me appeal to the Minister in his capacity as a family man who, I believe, has two daughters of his own, rather than as a desiccated Minister who is far above these matters.

During the campaign led by newspapers and television producers, we have from time to time been able to infiltrate some of the one-to-one chatline companies with women journalists. On the most recent occasion, a woman who engaged in such work for two and a half days told me —10 days after the experience—that she felt damaged by it. She could not talk about it to anyone for a long time. She confirmed what others have told me many times when I have spoken to them in my office or in their own homes. What they have to listen to, and the memories that they go away with, have no place in a civilised society.

As has been said before in the House, typically the man who telephones must hear a female voice, and while he is talking to that voice—often in a public phone box—he is usually masturbating. Such men describe how they are going to go away and abuse their own children, and even their domestic pets. All this stems from the legalisation and legitimisation of the involvement of a great British corporation—indeed, an international corporation—in improper activities. The House of Commons should do something about it, and it is the Government's responsibility to help us to do something.

Where do I stand? If he is consistent, the Minister will probably say that I am denying people choice, but, on the contrary, I am arguing for choice. I am saying that the subscriber should be able to choose whether his or her telephone is used for these awful services. That would kill them stone dead overnight. Consumers, most of whom have a good deal of sense, do not want to spend their money on the tripe and garbage that we are discussing.

I want the introduction of a contracting-in system. I want subscribers to be able to sign a piece of paper telling British Telecom, Mercury or Racal that they actually want their telephone receivers to bring them such services. That would solve the problem. There should be free itemised billing. The quarterly bill should include a list of the calls that have been made so that they can be challenged and so that any calls that have not been authorised by the subscriber are immediately apparent.

There should be a total ban on the one-to-ones and the multilines. I have heard on the multilines drug dealing, racialist comments that made my hair stand on end, and young girls making liaisons with older men. Those services have no right to survive.

There should also be a ban on the lurid advertisements. The advertisements in certain newspapers cause deep offence to many people and need to be cleaned up. A statutory body should be set up, independent of the industry, created by Parliament and funded by Government to supervise what remains of those services.

I take some comfort from the fact that one or two unexpected allies have rallied to my cause. Not least is the chairman of British Telecom, Iain Vallance, who described the services as a blight on the industry. I hope that the Minister will take that on board. As the chairman of British Telecom has said that it is a blight on the industry, we should jolly well do something to assist him in removing it.

Another ally is the Director General of Oftel. I understand that many of the complaints that he has received since 8 December resulted in his staff replying in writing and sometimes by telephone. In at least two of those telephone calls, members of the public have been told to contact their Members of Parliament as there is a need for a change in the legislation.

But that is where I came in. I said four years ago that there needs to be a change in the legislation. I have said it in the House, outside and in every television studio in the land. It is a simple matter to look at the problems that I have outlined and the case that I have proved and that other people have proved and change the legislation.

I said earlier that it was imposible for ICSTIS as presently constituted to monitor the volume of calls. We are talking about millions of calls per year. The supervisory committee consists of the princely number of eight staff—one secretary and seven administrative workers. It does not envisage employing more people until the end of the year when they will increase to 10. What chance has such a minuscule organisation of policing the matters that I have been talking about tonight and for a considerable time?

I hope that the Minister has changed his mind since 6 o'clock this evening and has been convinced that something needs to be done not by the industry or by the Director General of Oftel but by the House of Commons. I am supported in that by organisations such as the Conservative Family Concern organisation and many others. Many individual members of the Conservative party have written to me.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's policy of allowing the marketplace to dominate and providing only a weak and ineffective code of practice has been found to be completely ineffective? This evil traffic will be controlled only by legislation. The Minister should recognise that my hon. Friend has yet again brought to the fore one of the unacceptable faces of the enterprise culture.

Mr. Lewis: I am convinced of that, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

Over the past four years, I have been extremely careful to argue on moral and practical grounds that the case is unanswerable. Any reasonable person, whether it be a Minister or member of any political party, must see the wisdom of the argument that these services are a facet of the free market and that the problem should be strenuously tackled. Ministers must begin to tackle the problem. There is no chance of its going away, because there is no chance of the present controls working. The industry knows that they will not work, and the greedy people who benefit from these awful services, which are harming innocent people, will flourish as long as Ministers ignore the problems that I have highlighted. I hope to hear something more positive from the Minister.

9.41 pm

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on raising the subject of telephone message services.

[Sir Michael McNair-Wilson]

I endorse everything that the hon. Gentleman said. He was right to warn the House about the danger of such services. I wonder why Oftel and the independent committee for the supervision of standards allow British Telecom to make telephone numbers available to companies that pour out sexually suggestive, if not sexually arousing, tapes which anyone of any age can telephone.

As the hon. Member for Worsley said, advertisements for those services are not restricted to pornographic magazines but regularly appear in some Sunday and daily newspapers and, as a constituent of mine recently pointed out, even in that all-purpose publication *Exchange and Mart*. I have some of those advertisements here if the Minister would care to see them.

The telephone advertisements always feature some form of sexual pursuit in their titles that appeal across the range of human desires. Some call themselves "teledates" and others call themselves "contact lines." An advertisement in the *Exchange and Mart* says:

"Men 4 Men. Ring and listen to other gay men looking for someone special".

The advertisement next to that says "Data-Mate." One can ring either for a woman or a man on "Gay Lines" or on a "Lesbian Line." In other words, they pander to the lowest of human desires.

As I said, those advertisements in *Exchange and Mart* were brought to my attention by a constituent who had bought that magazine, as tens of thousands of people do, for advertisements for household goods, cars, motor bikes, houses and a range of the essentials of life. To his great surprise, he found page after page of those advertisements under the title "Adult interests."

As a result of my constituent's letter, I wrote to Sir Bryan Carsberg, who is Director General of Oftel, asking why Oftel allowed such advertisements to appear. I should like to quote his reply:

"I do not have any formal powers that would enable me to exercise direct control over these advertisements. However, when I first became aware of the general problems associated with this kind of service, I encouraged British Telecom to take steps to establish a system of voluntary regulations. As a result of that, British Telecom appointed an independent committee, chaired by Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper and chosen to be broadly representative of public opinion, to draw up a code of practice relating to these services. British Telecom made compliance with the code of practice a condition of its contracts and the committee considered complaints.

The code deals with both the content of messages and advertising. Some services have already been suspended as a result of breaches of the code. However, the committee has not so far taken a strong line on advertising, preferring the view that this was primarily a matter for the Advertising Standards Authority.

Some complaints about the advertisements for these services were considered by the Authority but it declined to criticise them. As a result of recent escalation of concern with recorded message services, the committee is now determined to take a stronger line and I believe that it sees advertising, as you do, as a significant part of the problem. It proposes to issue a revised and strengthened code later this month"—

he wrote in March 1989—

"and it expects this to provide a basis for action in relation to advertising.

I think that the best way forward is to try to make the committee's procedures effective and I believe that there is a good chance these procedures will now work well."

He then advised me to write to Mr. David Wiseman, the Secretary of ICSTIS, which is what I did. In his somewhat anodyne reply, Mr. Wiseman enclosed two copies of ICSTIS leaflets. One is headed "Premium Rate Telephone Information and Entertainment Services", and states:

"What is ICSTIS?

The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services .... is an independent watchdog which supervises premium rate telephone information and entertainment services.

Premium rate services cost more than an ordinary telephone call.

Currently, calls cost 25p per minute cheap rate and 38p per minute at all other times of the day. Of course, these rates will be higher for calls made from telephone boxes, hotels, etc.

These services provide both information and entertainment (such as weather forecasts, financial information, sports results, games, and stories) over the telephone. Most of these services consist of recorded messages provided by private companies called Service Providers, each of whom is responsible for the content of the message or service as well as any associated promotional material.

The independent committee, ICSTIS, has produced a Code of Practice that sets the standards which the Service Providers must observe. If they break the Code, their service can be removed from the telephone network."

From that leaflet and from Sir Bryan Carsberg's letter, one would have thought that, 10 months later, I would not be supporting the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), who has powerfully made out the case against these message services. He will probably agree that there has been no appreciable change and that, if anything, such services have proliferated.

If one chooses to buy soft porn magazines one can see literally hundreds of these advertisements in a single column. That shows that these services are profitable both to the providers of the tapes and, sadly, to British Telecom. I must declare an interest, for I have a small shareholding in British Telecom. It gives me no pleasure to be a shareholder in a company that is making money out of such a grubby business.

One must ask what can be done. Some advertisements at least trade on what can only be described as obscene titles, but, as is often the case with that sort of material, they end up as a rip-off in every sense. The actual message will probably be fairly innocuous and, I suspect, carefully produced to be just within whatever the lawyers who advise the companies believe allow them to claim that they are not obscene. If the titles are obscene, the companies will no doubt claim that the content of the tapes is not obscene. It must be on those grounds and on those alone —what other reason could there be?—that ICSTIS does not seem able to put into effect the code of practice, the details of which I have already given to the House.

However, whether these "services" are rip-offs or not, and whether or not they are verbal prostitution—or, as I would prefer to put it, a verbal form of striptease—the fact is that they pander to the lowest tastes in human beings. They do nothing for the reputation of British Telecom and they make me wonder why neither Oftel nor ICSTIS has yet been able to produce the necessary procedures to prevent the trade from continuing.

I recognise that when a company initially asks British Telecom for a telephone number with which to provide a service, British Telecom cannot know exactly what is involved. However, I no longer believe that British Telecom, Oftel or ICSTIS can have avoided noticing the advertisements that appear not only in pornographic magazines but, as both myself and the hon. Member for Worsley have already said, in daily and Sunday newspapers and in other publications as widely read as

Exchange and Mart. It is no good those organisations putting their heads in the sand and saying, "We had no idea that this was going on," because it is their telephone lines that are being used. They are profiting from the services. It is high time that they took their duties more responsibly.

The advertisements and the services that they present to the public can do nothing for the reputation of British Telecom or persuade any of us that privatising British Telecom has enhanced the reputation of our national telephone service. By the same token, while the advertisements continue unabated, there must be a question mark over the effectiveness of Oftel and its Director General. Why has he not been given the formal powers, which in his letter to me he said that he did not have?

Is my hon. Friend the Minister satisfied that we can continue without bringing forward such formal powers for the Director General and without asking ICSTIS to look again at its code of practice with a view, not to offering slaps on the wrist, but to giving the sort of teeth that will banish these advertisements from our daily and Sunday newspapers and from publications that lie about the house and can be seen by people of all ages and both sexes? That should not happen. I believe that we have it in our power to prevent it from happening.

9.52 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): It is a sad sign of the times that we must have this debate, but it is also sad that we are seeing the true face of the Minister and his party, with a few honourable exceptions. There is no doubt in my mind that Alexander Graham Bell would turn in his grave at the knowledge that his wonderful invention was being used widely for such a perverted purpose. It is a sad sign of the times that so many people are using such services for misguided or perverted reasons, and it is also sad that once-responsible businesses are choosing to boost their profits by providing these revolting services.

It is not that the services pander to healthy appetites —whatever that may mean—because today's newspapers carry a selection of advertisements from one company, Leeds Communications, which offers no fewer than 19 lines, including "Rubber Lust", "Wet 'n' Wild", "Ready and Willing", and "Out of Control". Another company encourages men to fantasise about girls at school with its "Gymslip" line. Another offers girl lovers.

The Minister is well known for his support for private enterprise, but I should have thought that even he would draw the line at some of those advertisements. Apparently not. The Minister supports the independent committee for the supervision of standards of telephone information services, the regulatory body charged with vetting obscene calls on chatlines and associated premium rate lines. Each year, an estimated 45 million calls are made on sex lines. The watchdog body has one person permanently monitoring the lines with back-up from eight people who can be called in from other duties. Those were the figures that it gave to me today. There is one person to monitor every 5 million potentially obscene calls. If someone is caught making an obscene call, the penalty under section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 is £400.

The profits from porn lines are enormous. Over a dozen chat lines and phone line firms have revenues in excess of £1 million. The penalties are puny. Not one prosecution has been brought against a company in four years. The chatline industry is laughing all the way to the bank. One paper today even flaunts that fact in an advert. It is called "Dial if you Dare". It dares people not only to take the risk of being caught, but to risk being prosecuted. Another advert calls its British Telecom number "Banned Lines".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) said, the effect on women can be devastating. Parents cannot stop their child or a young teenager from ringing the phone lines. Firms cannot stop unscrupulous or irresponsible people from running up massive bills.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) concluded by putting a list of questions to the Minister. I, too, have a list of questions. Why has it taken him four years to produce a code of conduct that will control sex lines? The third code is claimed to be effective, but we know that it will not be. Why does the Minister rule out legislation when the code of practice is patently ineffective? Why does he not provide tough laws to control chatlines when the watchdog body appears to be toothless? Why does he refuse even to meet the Director General of Oftel to discuss the need to protect the public?

Why is the Minister taking no action to prevent British Telecom from giving detailed technical advice on how to set up filth lines? Why are the people who run chatlines not vetted to screen out the paedophiles and perverts? Is he satisfied that nine staff can monitor 45 million sex line calls? Does he believe that a £400 fine for chatline obscenities deters firms which make millions of pounds?

British Telecom claims that sex lines are a blight on the industry. The advice of the Director General of Oftel to my constituents and others is to contact their Member of Parliament to lobby on this matter.

The Minister must know that British Telecom will not tackle the problems. The business generates multi-million pound profits for it. The Minister has a choice. He can endorse market sleaze or accept the four-point plan proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley. It is time for the Minister to stand up and protect consumers throughout Britain from this obscenity.

9.58 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on obtaining it. The interest which the subject arouses is amply demonstrated by the number of hon. Members present for this Adjournment debate.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) should have attempted to introduce party politics. It degraded what has been an entirely serious debate. If he wishes to conduct the debate on that level, however, I must say that I see little mileage in a party that opposed clause 28 of the Local Government Bill in 1988 and opposed the prevention of the promotion of perversion in schools lecturing us on morality. I would rather get back to the major substance of the debate.

The hon. Member for Worsley said that chatlines were driving many people into debt, but they also drive people into crime. In my constituency, one young man has become so addicted to the obscene lines and the obscene services that he breaks into shops to use telephone points.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Miss Widdecombe: I agree that the obscene services thus provided can be described as prostitution. The consequence must be that those who make profits from such services are living upon immoral earnings. I was under the impression that that was a crime. I would like the Home Office to be involved with this matter as well as the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs.

I, too, welcome profits, but the profits that are made from the innocence and irresponsibility of children are immoral. It is totally unrealistic to expect a young person, particularly a child, to understand that a telephone is not a free instrument and to understand that calls cost a great deal of money, which mounts up. In every home, agitated parents say to teenagers in the normal course of events that they spend too much time on the telephone.

In the abnormal course of events, of which we have heard tonight, problems often occur in families in economically straitened circumstances. In those cases, the mother of the family is often economically constrained to go out to work. She is not at home to exercise control over the use of the telephone and is unaware of what is going on. She is simply unable to exercise parental responsibility, and by the time she realises what has happened it is much too late. In my constituency, telephone bills of four figures have been reported fairly regularly, so much so that a local priest, the Rev. Tony Faulkner, has taken up this issue. He has tried to inject local responsibility into this matter so that parents are more aware of what is going on.

I second what the hon. Member for Worsley said about the effect of such services on women. All of us who have received obscene calls and who have managed to put the telephone down in 10 seconds flat, still know that one can feel extremely shaken up after the event, no matter how tough or self-reliant one may be. Therefore, the effect on women can be extremely damaging.

I appreciate that the Minister will say that it is up to women to decide whether they participate in such calls. That is not true of young girls who ring up such lines for a bit of a giggle and who suddenly realise exactly what is on offer. Obviously, there is also the danger of liaisons being formed and young girls being lured to meet men —there is evidence that that has happened.

I am all for wholly responsible profit-making and initiative in the sort of chatlines that are produced. I see nothing to suggest that the problem is restricted to private enterprise. British Telecom was privatised fairly recently, but the lines that we are discussing have been going for some time.

I am all for responsible commercial enterprise, but we are talking about completely irresponsible commercial enterprise. That enterprise represents immorality and prostitution and those behind it are living off immoral earnings. Even when no obscenity is involved, such enterprises live off the irresponsible exploitation of the young. A little bit of will would stop it. We have heard various suggestions as to how it could be stopped. The hon. Member for Worsley suggested the opting-out method whereby it could be indicated that certain telephone lines were not to be used for such services. We should tackle what will become a growing social evil. It involves the worry of parents who cannot meet their bills, the steady corruption of children, the degradation of women and the promotion of an ugly face of private enterprise which I do not like any more than the hon. Member for Worsley does.

10.4 pm

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I shall not keep the House long, but I should like to join in the congratulations of hon. Members from both sides of the House to my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), not just for winning tonight's Adjournment debate and choosing such an admirable subject, but for the campaign that he has conducted for some time.

I feel strongly about the subject, largely due to an experience I had which sums up some of the issues involved. I held a surgery just before Christmas and a mother came to see me who was quite upset and distraught. She had discovered that her son was addicted to the disgraceful and pornographic telephone lines provided by British Telecom. Sadly, she actually believed for some time that British Telecom had confused her account with somebody else's because she was receiving such astronomical bills. She thought that they had lined her into a local company. She discovered quite by accident, through the recording mechanism on the telephone, which records the previous number called, that her adolescent son was using these services.

I said that I would take up the case. I was not then familiar with the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley with British Telecom and Oftel. Quite frankly, I could not believe that we had no power, and the firms had no power, to do anything about this disgraceful and expanding practice.

Sadly, I have to disagree with the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), although I accept that many of her colleagues have supported my hon. Friend's campaign and disagreed with their Front-Bench spokesmen on the matter. I am afraid that this is a party-political problem. The solution is simple and anybody with a modicum of common sense can see what it is: with just minor legislative changes we could prevent this disgraceful activity.

I am obliged to ask why we are not taking such steps and why the Government are not taking action. It may be a lesson to some Conservative Members to know that it is because the Government have gone so far that they do not know where to draw the line and stop. They adopt such doctrinaire attitudes towards privatisation, free markets and enterprise that they cannot see the damage that is being done. That is why I shall listen with great interest to the Minister's response.

10.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on having secured the debate and pay tribute to him for the dedication with which he has pursued the cause over a long period. That has been mentioned during the debate and I want to pay tribute to him for having pursued the matter with great sincerity and dedication. This Adjournment debate is an important occasion in the course of his pursuit. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) referred to the amount of

support in the House this evening, it is worth recording that although there is an unusually large number of Members here for the Adjournment debate, it is not exactly an overwhelming presence.

Many hon. Members have contributed to the debate —my hon. Friends the Members for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson), for Maidstone and for Pendle (Mr. Lee) and the hon. Members for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). Also present are my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) and for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) and the hon. Members for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) and for Hemsworth (Mr. Buckley). My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) is also here. It is worth recording the names of the hon. Members who have taken the trouble to be here at this relatively late hour to participate in the debate.

I am glad that I shall have a little longer than usual to reply to the many important points that have been made during the debate. I want to reply to them reasonably fully.

First, I want to set in their proper context the difficulties to which all hon. Members have referred. Consumers generally, and particularly consumers of telephone services, benefit enormously from the widely available and openly accessible public telecommunications systems that are provided principally, but not exclusively, by British Telecom.

The availability and accessibility of these systems are at the heart of any public system of telecommunications and these rights are recognised in the duties placed on the Secretary of State and on the Director General of Oftel by section 3 of the Telecommunications Act 1984

"to secure that there are provided throughout the United Kingdom, save in so far as the provision thereof is impracticable or not reasonably practicable, such telecommunications services as satisfy all reasonable demands for them".

It may be that the burden of this debate will revolve round the interpretation of the word "reasonable". That may be the word on which we agree to differ, but in any case this is the basis of the provision of telecommunications services, and these duties are reflected in the licences granted to British Telecom and other national network operators—Mercury Communications, Racal-Vodafone and Cellnet.

However, just as consumers have a right to telephone services, so too do premium-rate service providers. If we qualify such a right we must be sure that we do not undermine that main objective or access to the system.

I also stress that under the terms of the Telecommunications Act 1984 and the licences issued under it the regulation of premium-rate services is the responsibility—rightly—of the Director General of Oftel, Sir Bryan Carsberg, whom hon. Members have mentioned several times in the debate. I make it absolutely clear that Sir Bryan has my fullest support, and that of the Secretary of State, in his work. We believe that he discharges his duties with great responsibility.

The hon. Member for Worsley knows that I am obliged —I take the obligation seriously—to maintain a close interest in the issues raised tonight and I shall ensure that Sir Bryan receives a report of our debate.

It is worth recalling that the services to which the hon. Member for Worsley refers have a common feature, in that they are all charged at premium rate directly to the subscriber's bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury referred to that, but it is worth emphasising that these sorts of services fall into three categories: recorded message services on which the caller listens to a tape recording which could, for example, be a weather forecast or many other sorts of service; multiline or chatline services, which have caused some anxiety and on which the caller has the opportunity of talking to a group of between two and 11 other callers; and one-to-one services, those which perhaps cause the most concern, on which the caller has a conversation with an operator on a subject of his choice, or on one of the subjects in the advertisements to which hon. Members have referred.

It is worth recalling briefly the history that has led to the present controls. In response to public concern—like that expressed by the hon. Member for Worsley—over many years about these premium-rate services and about their cost, advertising methods and contents, Sir Bryan decided that regulatory action was necessary. He first tried to persuade British Telecom to agree voluntarily to new measures that gave control over access to these services to the person paying the bill. When this failed, he referred the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Its report was published last year.

The MMC concluded that the services operate or may be expected to operate against the public interest. It specified the effects that were adverse to the public interest by saying:

"Due to the ease of access to the services, and the terms of contract between BT and its customers, the customer has inadequate control over the types of service which can be accessed and over the costs or charges that may be incurred for use of the services, which significantly impairs the value and quality of the telephone service to the customer".

The MMC advised that until the modernisation of the network provided technology to remedy the main adverse effects of these services, they could be remedied or prevented by licence amendments and the MMC specified licence amendments which it believed to be appropriate. The MMC also stated that it did

"not believe that the adverse effects of chatline services are sufficient to justify the virtual cessation of the services".

That is an important statement because the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is independent of Government, as is Oftel. That statement is the backdrop to what I am about to say. It is clear that the MMC did not share in any full sense the points made by the hon. Member for Worsley.

Mr. Lewis: Does the Minister agree that following the taking of evidence by the MMC, worse cases of chatline girls and of chatline services such as those we have been discussing appeared in the media? Because of that, Sir Bryan Carsberg took a stronger line than he would otherwise have taken.

Does the Minister further agree that the Director General of Oftel could make licence amendments without strict reference to the MMC recommendations? He may take them into account, but in the light of new evidence he could have acted differently, and I do not think that he has done so. As I said in my speech, one of the great difficulties is that the Director General of Oftel seems to have taken more account of the industry's views than he has taken of consumers' views.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to put that interpretation on Sir Bryan's conclusions, but I repeat—it is important to remember—that I and Sir Bryan have to

[Mr. Forth]

pay due regard to what the legislation specifies and what an independent body such as the MMC says. The Government also have to pay due regard to what Sir Bryan and Oftel say. That is the way that the thing works. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that in many ways it is preferable for such matters to be dealt with by bodies that are independent of Government rather than to have a political overlay. I regard that as a virtue, not a shortcoming. In many other cases the hon. Gentleman might agree with me, and if he reflects on the matter I think that he will agree in this case, too.

It is incorrect to suggest that to legislate in this matter would be relatively simple and straightforward. The hon. Gentleman has not faced the difficulties that Ministers have to face when legislating. First, there is the difficulty of getting a priority place in the legislative programme and secondly, there is the extent of commitment to legislative change. There are no wands to be waved in such matters even if the wish were there. I do not regard legislation as appropriate in this case and I shall explain why.

Following the MMC report and having closed its own chatline service, British Telecom withdrew services from chatline operators. That decision is still the subject of legal action and I cannot comment further upon it.

That brings me to the present measures. In the light of the MMC report and following the appropriate consultation, Sir Bryan has introduced new controls which give strong protection to the consumer by making amendments to the network operators' licences. They may now provide the facilities needed by premium chatline and one-to-one services only if the director general has approved a code of practice which regulates the provision of the services and, most important, sets up a fund to compensate customers with excessive bills arising from unauthorised access to the services.

As recently as 7 December, Oftel approved two such codes of practice—one for multiline chatline services and another for one-to-one services. Both are administered by the independent committee for the supervision of standards of telephone information services. I stress the word "independent". I make it clear that a body that is chaired by as eminent an individual as Louis Blom-Cooper can hardly be regarded as in the pocket of either British Telecom or the service providers. I am sure that anyone who casts an eye over the committee's other members will be satisfied of their probity, integrity and independence. I resent the suggestion that they are in any way in the pocket of British Telecom or of the service providers. They are sturdily independent people of great reputation and probity. The House should know and understand that, and acknowledge it.

Mr. Lewis: Public perception outside this House is as important as the Minister's regard for the members of the committee. I have no criticism of them as individuals, but the committee is funded by British Telecom and the other network providers, who appointed its members in the first place. That body includes an individual who is himself a chatline provider, albeit at the respectable end of the business. However, no consumer interest is represented on the committee. If it was broadly based and totally independent of the networkers, it would be more acceptable.

Nor is the committee wide-ranging in social or geographical terms. Its members all come from a narrow social background and work or live in London. There are other parts of this great country of ours than London.

Mr. Forth: I do not dissent strongly from some of the hon. Gentleman's points, which will be considered when reviewing the future membership of the committee. However, given that its members include a consultant physician, a head teacher, and someone who calls himself a consumer policy adviser, I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's main criticism. I do not want to get unnecessarily bogged down in the composition of the committee, and hope that I have said enough to convince the House that its members are highly qualified and independent.

If an operator fails to comply with one of the codes of practice approved by Oftel, ICSTIS can make a recommendation to Oftel, which can in turn authorise British Telecom to disconnect the service. As right hon. and hon. Members must be aware, one such disconnection has already taken place and another service has been withdrawn voluntarily. Evidence of failure to comply with the codes can come either from monitoring of the services by ICSTIS or from a complaint. I hope that any right hon. or hon. Member who has grounds for complaint will use the machinery available under ICSTIS to initiate the complaints procedure.

The codes of practice, copies of which have been in the Library for some time, provide strong consumer protection. They require service providers to contribute to a fund sufficient to compensate any subscribers who face large bills as a result of unauthorised access to their services. One of the terms of the compensation fund—claims to which will be considered by an adjudicator, Sir John Bailey—is that where the adjudicator is unable to identify any firm evidence to support either acceptance or rejection of a claim, the benefit of the doubt shall normally be given to the customer, which is an important protection.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): The Minister said that he does not believe that new legislation is necessary. I am not a great believer in censorship, but a whole village in my constituency is served by a telephone exchange having the STD prefix 08993. I am having problems because people using digital telephones just have to add another "9" and my constituents find themselves being asked for cricket scores or weather forecasts, which is not too bad, but for other services such as "Kinky dreams", "Naughty nymphette", "Rubber bust", Waiting for it" and "Wet 'n' wild".

My constituents are harassed by these calls. People have to be protected. I am talking about a rural area with a substantially elderly community. I am pressed by people who are getting obscene calls. We are the legislators and we must do something about it. That is where democracy is. We have to protect people from harassment and perversion. I hope that the Minister will explain clearly why he will not introduce legislation to save people from harassment.

Mr. Forth: In the five minutes that are left I shall attempt to give a clear explanation. I hope that I shall be allowed to press on. I accept absolutely the validity of the hon. Gentleman's point. If he has not done so, I hope that

he will approach British Telecom to discuss the problem. If he has any difficulty about that, I hope that he will come to me.

Mr. Hood: I have raised the point with British Telecom, and we had a heated exchange. British Telecom more or less said, "Sorry, it is not our problem. It would cost us too much to change STD numbers." I was more or less told to go forth and multiply.

Mr. Forth: I hope that the heated exchanges will be limited to the House and will not spread to British Telecom, where they could be disastrous. I hope to answer the points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Under the terms of the code of practice, ICSTIS has the right to visit the premises of operators without notice, to require that reasonable information and co-operation be provided, including written records in the case of one-to-one services and tape recordings in the case of chatlines, which must be retained for a period of six months.

Service providers are required to do everything practicable to prevent access to the services by those under 18 years of age. In saying that, I recognise the difficulties with that provision. Even now there is an argument about the sale of cigarettes to under-16s by tobacconists. There is a continuing argument about the sale of alcohol in pubs to under-18s. I emphasise the general point that the new provisions have been in place just over a month. We have not yet had time to see how effective the codes of practice, the compensation fund, and the other provisions that ICSTIS has in its power will be.

I hope that all hon. Members and the public will take the fullest opportunity to use the mechanisms that are available to find out whether they are adequate to cover the requirements raised in the debate. I believe that they should be. Equally, I can see that they may not be. If so, we will have to consider the matter again. Oftel will, as will others. The reason why I resist further legislation is that I believe that the mechanisms that we have provided, which are much more flexible than anything provided under legislation, should be adequate. If they are not, it is to them that we should look.

I must hurry in the two minutes remaining to me to say a word about the content and advertising of the services —another matter raised in the debate. I understand the concern of hon. Members. I looked at some of the advertisements earlier this evening to check on their nature.

The codes of practice incorporate the British code of advertising practice and the British code of sales promotion practice, as well as other provisions requiring disclosure of the cost of the services, and details of the service provider and restrictions on aiming the services at young people. ICSTIS has written to the National Press Association and the Association of Free Newspapers informing them of the existence of the new codes of practice.

It has begun an investigation into the advertising and promotion of adult services, examining ways to improve the standards of advertising and restrict the placement of advertisements, particularly in publications readily accessible to children. The investigation will involve service providers, network operators, the Advertising Standards Authority and relevant newspaper publishers associations and European and international authorities. ICSTIS is also taking action to make the general public more aware of its role, to look into European experience with premium rate services and to see what more can be done.

I ask hon. Members to give the measures that we have put in place the fullest opportunity to work and to use the complaints services and the existing mechanisms. We will reconsider the matter when they have had a chance to operate to see whether they have had the effect that I expect and hope they will. If not, I will expect Oftel and the MMC to return to the matter, and I shall do so as well. I hope that over the next few weeks and months we will see a dramatic change and the improvements that all hon. Members have urged upon us. I expect that to be the case, but we will watch the position closely.

The motion having been made Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 25 January.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 25 January.

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 25 January at Seven o'clock.

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 25 January.

MEDWAY TUNNEL BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 25 January at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inflation

1. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of inflation.

The Economic Secretary of State to the Treasury (Mr. Richard Ryder): The underlying rate of inflation excluding mortgage interest payments is 6·1 per cent.

Mr. MacKay: Does my hon. Friend recall that before Christmas shop stewards at Ford sensibly told their members that excessive wage claims would lead to job losses and loss of business for the company? Therefore, is he, like me, disappointed at the wage offer that has been made by the Ford management and so irresponsibly rejected by the trade unions in the past week?

Mr. Ryder: I am disappointed that the unions at Ford have not accepted the offer that has been made to them. Excessive pay awards ultimately cause unemployment unless they are matched by increases in productivity.

Mr. Livingstone: Does the Minister agree that the biggest impact on reducing inflation would be achieved by tackling the deficit on the long-term capital flow out of Britain, which is the basic reason why the Government need to keep short-term interest rates so high to attract short-term capital into the country to balance that deficit? Does the Minister really think that his constituents—or anybody in Britain—values the freedom to carry on paying vast mortgage rates simply to allow British finance capital to flow abroad at the rate of a £30 billion deficit this year?

Mr. Ryder: Industry has far more to fear from inflation and high pay awards than from interest rates.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will my hon. Friend ignore those who are now arguing that it is necessary to increase taxation to combat inflation? Will he confirm that, as the Red Book stated last year, the Government's long-term objective remains achieving a balanced Budget?

Mr. Ryder: My hon. Friend's question bears a close resemblance to a Budget submission. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will have heard it.

Mr. John Smith: Is it not astonishing that the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself does not answer a direct question on the rate of inflation? Do the Government stand by the Chancellor's prediction that inflation will have an annual rate of 5·75 per cent. by the fourth quarter of this year? Does he not understand that if the Government deliberately increase the cost of living by forcing up mortgage rates, and electricity, water and transport prices and by introducing the poll tax, they are guilty of what the Confederation of British Industry has described as causing inflationary own goals? When will the Government admit that they are responsible for the underlying rate of inflation?

Mr. Ryder: I take no lectures from the right hon. and learned Gentleman on inflation because when he was a member of the Callaghan Government, inflation averaged 15½ per cent., whereas, under this Government at the moment the underlying rate of inflation is 6·1 per cent. The answer to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's first question is yes, and the answer to his second question is that industry has far more to fear from inflation and high pay awards than from high interest rates.

Share Ownership

2. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the number of shareholders in the United Kingdom has increased during the 1980s.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): The latest Treasury and stock exchange survey in February 1989 showed that approximately 9 million

people—that is 20 per cent. of the adult population—owned shares directly. This represents a threefold increase in the number of shareholders since 1979.

Mr. King: Does my hon. Friend welcome the dramatic addition to that list of shareholders represented by those who invested in Abbey National and in water, the flotation of which took place so successfully a few weeks ago? Does he agree that as eastern Europe seeks to adopt methods of privatisation and to encourage individual responsibility and investment by its people, the only political party that wants to take Britain back to a mark I type Polish economy is the Labour party?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. The figures that I gave do not include those who bought shares in Abbey National and in the successful water flotation. He is also right that the former Socialist countries in eastern Europe are appointing Ministers responsible for privatisation. In Poland my opposite number has the splendid title of the plenipotentiary in charge of ownership changes. In Hungary a commissioner responsible for privatisation has been appointed. The Labour party will not stand a chance of being elected until it appoints a shadow Minister in charge of privatisation.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that shareholders are still a minority of the adult population? Is it not outrageous that the Government have sold off assets which belong to all the people to a tiny minority of the population and boast about it? In any decent society would not the Cabinet be prosecuted for theft?

Mr. Lilley: Shareholders are certainly not a minority of the population. There are now more direct owners of shares than members of the trade union movement.

Sir William Clark: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the advantages of privatising industries is that, in most cases they are now profitable and the Exchequer receives corporation tax from them whereas before privatisation, many of them made losses and cost the taxpayers money in subsidies?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. British Telecom now pays more in corporation tax than it used to pay in dividends to the Government when we owned the shares.

Mr. Boateng: Will the Financial Secretary take this early opportunity to clarify the Treasury's attitude to the banking sector? We are told that the Prime Minister is fizzing with anger and demanding retribution of an unspecified nature against it. Has the Chancellor of the Exchequer received his instructions? When the Prime Minister fizzes, does the Chancellor boil or gently bubble?

Mr. Lilley: I am happy to say that the banking system in this country is 100 per cent. privately owned. We intend to keep it that way. The subject under discussion is privatisation and share ownership. Within that context, I am happy to say that it will remain a successful, privately owned industry.

Taxation

3. Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it remains his policy to achieve lower rates of direct taxation.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. John Major): We have set an objective of 20 per cent. basic rate of income tax, without a time limit.

Mr. Porter: I am sure that all my hon. Friends are delighted with that response. In drawing up his Budget statement will my right hon. Friend also consider that it would be helpful to give some fiscal encouragement to savings and investment rather than to consumer spending?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend makes an important point about savings. I shall make a careful note of it. The real difficulty with the savings ratio is not so much a fall in the stock of savings, but an increase in the amount of borrowing. Our interest rate policy is intended to deal with that.

Mr. Beith: Will the Chancellor take a more positive and enthusiastic attitude to incentives for saving, particularly in a year when the necessary and welcome move towards independent taxation and the national insurance changes will make for a looser fiscal stance?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is an old parliamentary hand. When was any Chancellor enthusiastic before a Budget?

Mr. Yeo: Bearing in mind the obvious advantages for everyone of lower taxation, can my right hon. Friend advise my constituents in Suffolk whether he knows of any politician who is currently recommending higher taxation?

Mr. Major: Whether the person concerned is a politician is a matter for judgment, but I believe that it is the official policy of Her Majesty's Opposition to raise taxation substantially both in terms of direct taxes and national insurance contributions.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Just among ourselves, would not the Chancellor like to take this opportunity to admit that 2 per cent. off the mortgage rate is worth substantially more to most home owners than 2p off the basic rate of income tax? Would not the Chancellor also like to take this opportunity to repudiate the top rate tax-cutting, interest rate-rising policies of the previous Chancellor, or would he prefer to wait until the Budget? In the meantime, will he confirm that, as the former Minister for Housing and Planning told us not so long ago, the Conservative party's official response to those who are struggling to pay their mortgages is that they should take in lodgers?

Mr. Major: Even among ourselves, in the privacy of this exchange, I am reluctant to concede too much to the hon. Gentleman. I note his implicit acknowledgement that the Labour party would reverse the Government's policy of cutting top taxes and would increase taxation quite substantially. Mortgage interest rates will fall when interest rates fall, which will be when we begin to see some progress in reducing the rate of inflation, and not before.

Gross Domestic Product

4. Mr. Stevens: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the growth in gross domestic product during the 1980s *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in other European Community countries.

6. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the growth in gross domestic product during the 1980s *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in other European Community countries.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): Since 1980, growth has averaged 2·7 per cent. a year in the United Kingdom, compared with 1·9 per cent. in other European Community countries.

Mr. Stevens: My right hon. Friend's reply not only shows the relative improvement in the Government's success compared with other EC countries, but also gives the lie to the Opposition's continual talking down of our economic progress. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there remains potential for substantial growth in the United Kingdom economy and that, in order to realise that potential, it is vital that we should continue to improve our productivity and hold down unit prices to improve further our international competitiveness?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right to stress that the growth in productivity has paved the way for the dramatic change in Britain's growth trend. During the 1980s, our economy has grown faster than any other major EC economy and that has been based precisely on the facts that my hon. Friend mentions.

Mr. Fishburn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, despite the trade figures that have been announced today, it will still be at least 20 years before the average Briton enjoys the same wealth per head as the average Frenchman or German, so that we are only at the start of a wealth creation process with the hardest part yet to come?

Mr. Lamont: The gap in living standards between ourselves and the French has narrowed, but my hon. Friend is right to say that there is a gap. However, that will continue to narrow if we can maintain the sort of rate of growth differential that we have had in the past decade.

Mr. Shore: Would not the result be significantly different if the Minister were to take the base year 1979 rather than 1980? Taking account of the relatively poor performance of the European countries during the past decade, how far would he attribute full membership of the ERM/EMS as a factor in producing that rather poor outward result?

Mr. Lamont: If one took 1979 as the base year, the British economy would still have grown faster than the EC average and faster than the French and the Germans', something that has not happened in Britain for many years. In the 1970s we were bottom of the league; in the 1980s we have been top of it. The relevance of the ERM is much more to do with inflation, although inflation might ultimately also have consequences for growth.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Is it not the case that, since 1979, our growth rate has been scarcely better than that of any other EC country, despite the enormous advantage of North Sea oil? If we look ahead over the next year, is not the Treasury's forecast is for less than 1 per cent. growth and that what the Government's economic policies have introduced is a self-inflicted hard landing?

Mr. Lamont: I answered the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question when I replied to his right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). Even if we take the base date as 1979, with the recessionary environment which existed then because of the high inflation that we inherited from the Labour party, our growth rate has been above that of France, Germany and the EEC average. Of course, we are having a pause this year. That is not surprising after the excellent record that we have had. However, the trend of our exports and productivity means that the long-term outlook for this country is far better than it was then when the Labour party was in power.

Industrial Investment

5. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the prospects for industrial investment over the next 12 months.

Mr. Major: The Industry Act 1971 forecast published with the Autumn Statement projected total business investment to grow by 9¼ per cent. in 1989 and 4½ per cent. in 1990. This follows growth of 30 per cent. in real terms between 1986 and 1988.

Mr. Greenway: Has my right hon. Friend noted the results of a survey of leading industrialists published this week which described the fear of a recession as a myth based on a misconception? It rejected the gloomier predictions of the effect of high interest rates on industry. In his forthcoming Budget, will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor give priority to measures that will keep up the momentum of increased investment seen under the Government? Will he target the small independent business sector as one deserving of particular help through investment-related taxation reform?

Mr. Major: I have noted the survey to which my hon. Friend refers and he characterises it accurately. He will know that I cannot anticipate the Budget. However, I can draw to his attention the fact that the small business sector is still growing substantially, with a rate of VAT registrations of more than 1,300 a week during the past year.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: But manufacturing industry will clearly be damaged by the high level of interest rates, even if they remain as they are and do not increase. Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that something must be done for manufacturing industry? One problem that it faces is that the capital allowances militate against investment—a rate of 25 per cent. capital allowances in the first year is not realistic. Manufacturing industries cannot retrieve 75 per cent. of the cost of that investment at the end of the first year and, therefore, the allowances are an investment disincentive. Will the Chancellor replace them with a proper investment incentive, as existed pre-1979?

Mr. Major: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the reforms in corporate taxation introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) in 1984. They made significant changes, not least a dramatic reduction in the prime rate of corporation tax. The vast majority of capital investment in manufacturing in recent years has come out of retained profits, at present taxed at a much lower rate. There will be a slowdown in capital investment in manufacturing, but there will be continued growth. There has been a considerable record growth in recent years.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one factor in the continued good news about business investment is that Britain has managed to increase labour productivity and keep down unit costs of labour? If the position were to change—given the irresponsibility of certain unions backed by the Labour party—the climate for business investment might decline. In the internal market of the European Community businesses could switch their investment criteria elsewhere which would largely be the result of the unions' failure to appreciate the position.

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Productivity is vital, not only to maintain competitiveness and present profitability, but to open up the opportunity of future investment to create future jobs and prosperity.

Mr. John Garrett: What are the figures for manufacturing disinvestment? Bankruptcies rose by 40 per cent. last year. In the city that I represent, 400 jobs were lost in a liquidation which the management attributed directly to the Government's level of interest rates. How many more victims will there be of the Government's use of interest rates as the sole means of controlling the economy?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman picks a strange day to make that charge. He does so on the very day unemployment and employment figures show that more people in this country are in work than ever before.

Mr. Sumberg: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the north-west of England is present enjoying an economic boom, with increased investment and reduced unemployment? Does he agree that the Government have laid to rest for ever the idea of a north-south divide?

Mr. Major: I agree with my hon. Friend. Between 1980 and 1988, investment growth in the whole economy grew at the rate of 4½ per cent. per year. Between 1970 and 1980, the rate of growth was not 4½ per cent. annually but 0·4 per cent.

Manufacturing Investment

7. **Mr. Leighton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of business investment was represented by manufacturing investment in *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* 1988.

10. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of business investment was represented by manufacturing investment in *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* 1988.

Mr. Ryder: Twenty nine per cent. and 22 per cent.

Mr. Leighton: Does not that show that the Government have presided over a collapse in manufacturing investment? How does the Minister intend to close the yawning trade gap caused by our deficit in exports of manufactures, which is now about £17 billion per annum —equivalent to £32,000 per minute—unless investment is increased? Does the Minister have any policies for dealing with that situation?

Mr. Ryder: At the tail end of the last Labour Government, manufacturing output was at a low. Since then it has increased by 12¾ per cent. Also, the United Kingdom enjoyed a higher average growth rate in the 1980s than West Germany, France and Italy. In the 1970s, our growth rate was lower than all three of those countries.

Mr. Forman: Has my hon. Friend studied the recent Peat Marwick survey showing that manufacturing industry is even now intending to increase by about 68 per cent. its investment in new products and services, and by about 46 per cent. its investment in further training? Is not that completely convincing evidence that this country has not lost the investing habit?

Mr. Ryder: My hon. Friend is correct. Business investment in 1989 is likely to have reached a record level as a percentage of gross domestic product. In 1987 and 1988, we saw the fastest growth in investment over a two-year period since the war.

Mrs. Beckett: Despite the Minister's optimism, he is surely aware of the Confederation of British Industry's recent survey of investment intention, which implies that the country may be about to hit serious problems in that regard. At least the figures he gave earlier answered the original question of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), which is more than can be said for his answer to my hon. Friend's supplementary question. Do not the figures signify a substantial shift away from investment in real wealth creation during the period of the present Government? Does not that create anxiety in respect of Britain's long-term economic future?

Mr. Ryder: The CBI forecast still predicts that investment will continue. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has already made clear, the 1980s saw record levels of growth and investment. After two or three particularly strong years at the end of the 1980s, growth is likely to slow a little over the next 12 months.

Mr. Hind: Does my hon. Friend agree that in order to sustain the growth in manufacturing industry that has been achieved over the past few years, it must be encouraged to invest? When he and his colleagues prepare for the next Budget, will they consider the view of the north-west CBI that tax allowances on machinery for purely manufacturing purposes would be of great assistance and help to sustain the investment that is necessary?

Mr. Ryder: I shall ensure that that suggestion is borne in mind when we come to prepare the next Budget. I remind my hon. Friend that profitability levels are now the highest for 20 years.

Money Supply

8. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest target for MO.

Mr. Ryder: One to 5 per cent.

Mr. Kirkwood: Instead of the Treasury ministerial team hiding in their pre-Budget bunker, which must be the most archaic and arcane way imaginable of developing any democratic country's economy, will the hon. Gentleman explain why the Government are paying no attention to the credibility of their anti-inflationary policies—given that MO, which is the cornerstone of that policy, is so

sadly and stubbornly off target? Why do not the Government make an effort to restore credibility in their anti-inflationary policies with an early announcement of Britain's entry into the exchange rate mechanism?

Mr. Ryder: MO has been declining for the past year. At this time last year it was 7·4 per cent. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the last party but two of which he was a member, was prepared to support a Labour Government in the late 1970s, when MO was 13·1 per cent., a far higher figure than today. MO is one indicator that the Government take into account when formulating base rate policy.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's latter question on the European monetary system, we have made it clear that we shall enter that system when the conditions set out at the Madrid summit have been met.

Mr. Gow: Does my hon. Friend agree that the present level of inflation has been caused by excessive monetary growth between 18 months and two years ago? Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to reaffirm his belief that inflation is a disease of money, and that he will persevere with his policy of high interest rates?

Mr. Ryder: Yes, Sir. Inflation is caused by demand exceeding supply, and my hon. Friend reminds the House of the problems that arose as a result of a monetary policy that was looser than it should have been after the Wall street crash.

Mr. Cohen: Are the Government planning a tight monetary policy with perhaps higher interest rates to force up unemployment, as an unofficial incomes policy?

Mr. Ryder: There is no question of there being an incomes policy. We never hear whether the Opposition want lower or higher interest rates. Opposition Front Bench spokesmen have no monetary policy.

Mr. John Townend: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, to achieve the conditions under which interest rates can be brought down, it is necessary to reduce the increase in MO and the increase in broad money?

Mr. Ryder: My hon. Friend is correct that broad money —M4—is another indicator that must be taken into account when formulating monetary policy.

EC Banking

9. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what work he envisages being undertaken by the joint committee and associated secretariat of central banks of the member nations of the European Community now being established.

Mr. Peter Lilley: As I explained in the explanatory memoranda that I submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, the committee of European central bankers will consider the co-ordination of monetary policy, but will have no powers to impose its views.

Mr. Fatchett: As it is becoming clear that the German Bundesbank is keen to establish itself as a central bank for western Europe, what is the policy of the Government and the Bank of England? Is it not fair to say that the Governor of the Bank of England wants more independence from the Treasury, and would like the Bank of England to operate in a similar way to the German Bundesbank?

Mr. Lilley: It is not fair to say that the Bundesbank has the ambition that the hon. Gentleman has ascribed to it. The governor of the Bundesbank has expressed considerable sympathy with the ideas that we have put forward for the evolution of monetary union, as have the governors of the central bank of Switzerland, the board of academic advisers to the German Finance Ministry, and the leading French economist and Nobel laureate, Professor Allais. There is a great deal of support for our views on European monetary union.

Mr. Butcher: While considering the role of the central banks, will my hon. Friend reconsider the position of the Bank of England? Does he agree that if the Bank of England had had the same powers and role as the Bundesbank, inflation would not be as high as it is today?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend knows that we considered that idea some 18 months ago, and we concluded that it is difficult to have a constitutionally independent central bank, such as exists in the United States and West Germany, within our Westminster constitution because the House, on behalf of the British people, expects the Government to be accountable and responsible for monetary and economic policy.

Mr. Chris Smith: Treasury Ministers have reiterated several times today their intention to take sterling into the exchange rate mechanism when the conditions are right. Every time the Prime Minister opens her mouth, however, she adds to the list of those conditions, and it is clear that the Government have no intention of taking sterling into the ERM at an early stage. Does that not leave us very much on the sidelines in the developing discussions about our European monetary future, and should we not be playing a much more constructive part?

Mr. Lilley: We have made our position very clear: we shall join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system during stage 1. What is unclear, and what the shadow Chancellor was unable to tell us during a debate on the subject, is what the Labour party's conditions are. Are they the four that he enunciated, the three enunciated by the Leader of the Opposition or all seven?

Corporation Tax

11. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the corporation tax rate in the United Kingdom and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Mr. Lilley: The United Kingdom corporation tax rate is one of the lowest rates in the major industrial countries. With permission, I shall circulate the figures in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the present happy level of inward investment owes much to our low level of corporation tax? Does he also agree that the growth of the small business sector is largely due to that? Does he accept that small businesses need special support, and that we should continue that support—in contrast to the policies of the Opposition, who seem to

attack small businesses constantly, particularly in relation to the social charter? What, in my hon. Friend's view, would be the effect of their policies on such investment?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The fact that this country has the lowest rate of corporation tax makes it an attractive country in which to do business, as countless foreign investors have discovered. The fact that our corporation tax rate for small businesses is now only 25p—far the lowest of any of the rates of which I am aware—is one factor behind the healthy growth of such businesses, at a rate of more than 1,300 new businesses every week during the past year.

Mr. Mullin: In that case, are we to assume that the Chancellor has no objection to the record profits being shared with the work force?

Mr. Lilley: Profits, by definition, are measured after the benefits to the work force—both pay and profit-sharing. We have introduced schemes to encourage profit-sharing, and to give a tax incentive to companies that take part in it. I am happy to say that that has given a stimulus to the spread of profit-sharing arrangements in British industry.

Mr. Oppenheim: Would not one of the best tax-related ways of helping British industry be a reduction in tax on savings, which would make a larger pool of investment income available to industry? Is my hon. Friend aware that this country taxes savers twice—first, when they earn and then on the yield of their investments?

Mr. Lilley: I note my hon. Friend's point, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done so, too. My hon. Friend will appreciate, however, that I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Mr. Ron Brown: Is not the Minister really saying that Britain has become a tax haven for dodgy money, and does that not sum up the political values of his Government?

Mr. Lilley: I did not catch the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I imagine that he was probably welcoming the low rate of corporation tax and the great boost that it has given to small businesses.

Following is the information:

	Main national rate (per cent.)	*Total national + local tax*
Australia	39	—
Austria	30	40·1
Belgium	[1]43	—
Canada	28	43·5 (Ontario)
Denmark	[2]50	—
Finland	33	47·0-52·5
France	42	—
Germany	50	60·03 (average)
Greece	46	—
Iceland	51	—
Ireland	43	—
Italy	36	46·4
Japan	40	56·0 (approx average)
Luxembourg	34	41·3
Netherlands	35	—
New Zealand	33	—
Norway	50·8	—
Portugal	36·5	—
Spain	35	35·7
Sweden	52	—
Switzerland	9·8	29·2 (Zurich)
Turkey	46	47·84
United Kingdom	35	—
USA	34	40·13

[1] Will be 41 per cent. from 1 January 1990 if Finance Bill is enacted.

[2] Will be 35 per cent. from 1 January 1990 if Government proposals are enacted.

Notes:

(1) The rates of company tax shown are those at present in force.

(2) There are lower rates for smaller companies in Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, United Kingdom and USA.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

12. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he or his officials have had with United States counterparts about the banking operations of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Mr. Major: There has been close liaison between United Kingdom and United States customs officials in connection with Operation C-Chase, a drugs money-laundering investigation directed at the Medellin cartel, involving bank accounts held with the BCC group.

Mr. Rathbone: The Chancellor will be aware of newspaper reports of the handling of huge amounts of drug-trafficking money by the bank, which transferred £15 million from this country to Luxembourg last year and has held the major part of $60 million in deposits for Mr. Rodriguez Gacha and the Medellin drug cartel this year. Is he satisfied that there is sufficient national and international supervision of the bank's operations? In the light of his investigations, what initiatives will he present for inclusion in the report by the international financial action task force, which is due in April?

Mr. Major: I am aware of the reports to which my hon. Friend refers and I am satisfied with the supervision responsibilities and powers available to the Bank of England. As my hon. Friend will know, under the Banking Act 1987 the operations of BCCI in the United Kingdom are supervised by the Bank of England. Internationally, overall supervision of the group is carried out by a college of supervisors with representatives from a number of countries in which the bank has its operations. I have no doubt that those supervisors will give careful consideration to the outcome of the case, and it would be inappropriate of me to comment on that now.

Mr. Skinner: If the Chancellor of the Exchequer really wanted to get hold of the money that has been salted away by the drug barons, he need only use the system that was adopted by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer during the miners' strike. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that when the miners' money was in banks in Switzerland and elsewhere on the continent, the British Government found ways and means of sequestrating that money that belonged to the National Union of Mineworkers? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that if he adopted a similar system, he could get at the drug barons' money? If he wanted to adopt an even stronger method, he could tell all the banks that the Government intend to stop the tax relief that they give them every year.

Mr. Major: I am fascinated by those post hoc revelations. On money-laundering, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 strengthened considerably the powers of enforcement agencies and introduced a provision for financial institutions to report suspicious transactions to the police. The United Kingdom is participating fully in the financial action task force that has been established, with representatives from a number of countries, specifically to deal with this problem.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that although the Florida allegations are serious and must be pursued rigorously, it would be unfair—particularly as he has confirmed that supervision of the BCCI is correct so far as he can tell—to criticise on a worldwide basis this successful international bank, which apparently has helped millions of people in the Third world?

Mr. Major: As my hon. Friend will know, senior representatives of that bank are facing trial in the United States. It would be unwise of me to comment.

Dr. Marek: The Chancellor will accept that this is a most serious affair in that it could besmirch the good name of the City and the whole financial industry in this country. Will he assess the amount of man and woman power that should be available to Customs and other officers in the Bank of England to assure the public that there is no cause for alarm, that this is an isolated incident and that it will not recur in the City or anywhere else in this country?

Mr. Major: I share the hon. Gentleman's view that this is a serious matter, and I hope and believe that it is an isolated incident. The Bank of England has sufficient staff working on the proposition. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the successful year that Customs and Excise has had in combating and grabbing hold of illegal drug imports.

European Monetary Union

13. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the Delors plan for a three-stage advance towards the full integration of European Community economic and monetary policies.

Mr. Major: I have revceived a number of representations.

Mr. Day: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the current arguments surrounding the Delors plan, particularly in the area of economic sovereignty, do not, as is often thought, offer us a choice between the Prime Minister's vision of a free market in Europe and a federal Europe, but rather offer the prospect of a single unitary European state about which both federalists and free marketeers should be equally alarmed?

Mr. Major: I share that view and believe that that danger exists with the full stages, 1 to 3, of the Delors proposals. I recollect that the House was almost united in rejecting those proposals some time ago.

Budget

14. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what submissions he has received in respect of his 1990 Budget.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from a variey of individuals and organisations.

Mr. Grant: Has the Minister received representations about the growing gap between rich and poor, and the now poorer underclass in inner cities—those who have to live in cardbord boxes and scrounge in rubbish bins for something to eat? Will he guarantee to the House that he will not reduce personal income tax but will increase public expenditure to ensure that those people have a reasonable chance of survival?

Mr. Lilley: I certainly cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement on tax matters. Had the tax rates and allowances in real terms that we inherited from the Labour Government been retained, people would be worse off at every level of income. Under this Government, the rise in real living standards, even of a married couple on half average earnings with two children, has been 25 per cent., whereas under the Labour Government it was only 4 per cent.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Dr. Reid: Following her speech last night when she outlined plans to ensure maintenance payments by absent fathers, may I welcome the move but inform the Prime Minister that the question being asked this morning by many people is: who will benefit financially, the Chancellor or the children? Will the Prime Minister clear up the matter by giving a pledge today that every pound saved by the Exchequer from the enforcement of the new regulations will be committed to child welfare?

The Prime Minister: Both the mothers and the children will benefit. A scheme is being worked out and my right hon. Friends will come forward with it in due course.

Sir Peter Tapsell: If the governor of the Bundesbank was being serious and was not merely seeking to tease his own Minister of Finance when earlier this week he called for the establishment of a European central bank, totally free from all political control, will my right hon. Friend reiterate that that would be overwhelmingly rejected by people of all political persuasions in this country and, one would hope, by everyone throughout Europe who subscribes to the concept of parliamentary democracy?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. I am grateful to my hon. Friend and agree entirely with what he said. I believe that this hon. House does, too, judging from the debate. It was clear that all parts of the House totally and utterly rejected stages 2 and 3 of the Delors report, which would mean a central bank that took powers out of the hands of the House, not only on monetary policy but on budgetary policy, too.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to confirm that the poll tax bills that people will receive will be much bigger than the bills which the Government promised? Does not the gap between promise and reality show that the Government are guilty of incompetence and deception?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. The Government set the level of reasonable spending for the coming year at 11 per cent. above the reasonable spending for this year. If local authorities spend above that, the community charge will go up. If there are very high community charges, it would be as well to look for the fault to Labour local authorities.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister is trying to deceive yet again—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will rephrase that.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister just cannot stop herself trying to misrepresent the position. Does she not yet understand that local authorities, Conservative as well as Labour, are telling her repeatedly, as are some of her hon. Friends, that the poll tax system is absurd and dishonest?

The Prime Minister: The poll tax system will reveal to the electorate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] The adult community charge—the new system for contributing to local authority expenditure—will be very much fairer, will make local councils accountable to their electorate and will demonstrate which are the extravagant authorities and which are the careful spenders. It is because Labour authorities are extravagant that Labour Members oppose the community charge.

Mr. Kinnock: If that is even partly true, will the Prime Minister tell us why she thinks that so many of her hon. Friends will have such difficulty supporting her tonight?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps they should reserve their firepower for extravagant Labour local authorities.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that since time immemorial young couples have always had a job rearing and educating their children? Can it be right, just and fair for those couples to pay, through their taxes, for other people's children because fathers walk away from their financial responsibilities? May I say—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) has been away for some time. We all want to hear him.

Mr. Dickens: May I say to the Prime Minister that Conservative Members and most of the general public who care about children very much welcome the statement that she made last night and give her our support?

The Prime Minister: May I thank my hon. Friend, and welcome him back in his customary vigorous form? He will know that we believe that people who have a responsibility for the maintenance of children should not be allowed to escape that responsibility. We propose to make the arrangements for collecting maintenance more effective than they are now.

Q2. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kennedy: May I congratulate the Prime Minister —*[Interruption.]* May I warmly congratulate the Prime Minister on at last getting the title of the poll tax correct? Does she share the distinct sense of irony felt by Opposition Members who represent Scottish constituencies in that, although we are to witness yet another Conservative Back-Bench revolt on the issue, only three Conservative Members who are likely to withhold their support or vote against her in the Lobby tonight bothered to vote against precisely the same legislation on Scotland when it was pushed through this place? Does not that reality and the fact that Scottish Office Ministers have been warning their colleagues on the Back Benches of the "dire consequences" in Scotland for them of the poll tax highlight not only the fraudulent nature of the tax but the failure of so-called Governments in Scotland under her rump of a party?

The Prime Minister: The community charge is by far the fairest way of paying for a very small proportion of local authority expenditure. The taxpayer pays by far the greater part, the business taxpayer pays the next greatest part and all the rebates and transitional reliefs are paid for by the taxpayer. I wonder why Opposition Members who criticise the community charge have no alternative to put in its place.

Q3. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Janman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since the abolition of the dock labour scheme the port of Tilbury has attracted 14 new shipping services, has refurbished its cruise line terminal and is expecting that business to increase next year and is recruiting youngsters from the area for the first time in many years? The productivity record of the container division has recently been broken, with 230 containers being loaded off one ship in one eight-hour shift. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the chief executive, his management team and all the men and women who work in the port on their success, and does she agree that the facts that I have given the House prove that the Government were absolutely right to abolish the dock labour scheme?

The Prime Minister: I gladly accept my hon. Friend's invitation and congratulate those in the port of Tilbury. When we abolished the restrictive practices under the dock labour scheme, it was evident that ports would begin to flourish and that the surrounding areas and companies would benefit. That is now happening. The Opposition accepted and supported the dock labour scheme and opposed its abolition, but it is because we abolished it that there is now extra prosperity.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Prime Minister aware that in Scotland an estimated 1 million people are in serious arrears with poll tax payments, of whom 500,000 have made no payment at all? As even today's *Financial Times* describes the poll tax as a fiscal monstrosity, and as 40 or more English Tories are set to rebel in the poll tax vote tonight, will the Prime Minister do the decent thing and

abolish that iniquitous tax, which is unjust, unworkable and unwanted by the vast majority of people in this country?

The Prime Minister: The community charge is much fairer than domestic rating revaluation. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, in Scotland domestic rating revaluation after seven years caused immense problems. The hon. Gentleman should remember that the revaluation for England has taken place after 17 years. The community charge is much fairer than the proposed alternative, which would involve two taxes, including a local income tax. Once the community charge is working properly, people will know that it is a much better and fairer tax than the one which it replaces.

Q4. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shaw: At a time when eastern Europe is moving away from Socialism, centralisation and unelected government, does my right hon. Friend consider that her Government should do all in their power to oppose yesterday's proposals by Mr. Jacques Delors for more centralised bureaucratic power in the European Commission, which would do nothing to further the free enterprise system that should become the Europe of the 1990s?

The Prime Minister: I note my hon. Friend's views. I have read Mr. Delors' speech. I made the same point as my hon. Friend in my speech in Bruges some time ago. We do not want more bureaucratic control, especially as eastern Europe is trying to get away from it. We want more free trade and the dismantling of barriers. The House made clear its view that it would not accept stages 2 and 3 of the Delors report. It is a great pity that the Commission is trying to take more powers unto itself, and away from democratically elected Parliaments.

Q5. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Maxton: Is the Prime Minister aware that Lothian health board is seeking sponsorship from private companies to carry out open-heart surgery in its hospitals and that it has said that if it does not find the sponsorship, the operations will not take place? If she considers that proposal to be as obscene as I do, will she today ensure that the Scottish health boards are properly financed so that no Scottish person's life depends upon the whims of a private company? Is not that sponsorship proposal just one more move towards a Health Service that fulfills her Victorian ideals, whereby the rich pay for their health but the poor rely on charity?

The Prime Minister: There are far more open-heart operations now than there were 10 years ago. The amount spent on the Health Service in Scotland is more than 30 per cent. higher, after inflation, than it was 10 years ago. If people wish to raise more money—and there will always be room for more expenditure because of the swift progress of medical research—the hon. Gentleman should welcome that as it would assist the work of the Health Service.

Q6. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Waller: Is my right hon. Friend aware that most industrial companies that provide employment in the north and midlands greatly welcome the revalued uniform business rate? It will not only protect them from high-spending Labour authorities but provide a much more equitable basis for payment. Is my right hon. Friend aware that their only complaint is that the phasing-in period will prevent them from gaining the full benefits for a considerable time?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The business rate should be welcomed by all who believe in helping the north to get more jobs, keep their business costs down and ensure that they are not the prey of extravagant local authorities. Over five years, the north and midlands will benefit to the extent of £900 million. It is right that the south should have a transition period in which to pay that amount.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I ask the Leader of the House to tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 22 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Social Security Bill.

TUESDAY 23 JANUARY—There will be a debate on a motion to approve the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement.

Motion on the code of practice for trade union ballots for industrial action.

WEDNESDAY 24 JANUARY—Opposition Day (3rd Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Failure of the Government's Schools Policies". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "The Problems and Needs of Disabled People". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Motions on Welsh revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 25 JANUARY—Motions on Scottish housing support grant orders and revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motions to take note of EC document on shipping and dangerous goods and on merchant shipping regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

FRIDAY 26 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 29 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Employment Bill.

[Relevant documents:

Wednesday 24 January 1990:

Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1990-91 (HC 53)

Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (HC 54)

Welsh Non-Domestic Rating (County Share and District Share) Report (HC 55)

Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (HC 56)

Thursday 25 January 1990

(1) Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order
Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order Opposition Prayer (EDM 241)
Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1989
Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1990

(2) Relevant European Community Document 7074/89 Shipping (Dangerous Cargoes)

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee HC 15-xxix (1988-89), para 1

Negative Instruments

Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collision Regulations) Opposition Prayer (EDM 276)

Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation Regulations) Opposition Prayer (EDM 277)]

Dr. Cunningham: I thank the Leader of the House for arranging for us to have the opportunity to discuss the important Scottish housing support grant measures at a reasonable time next Thursday afternoon. I ask him to ensure that that good work is not undone by making it clear that the Government will not make any statements next Thursday, thus pushing that business into Thursday evening.

Is it yet possible for the Leader of the House to tell us when the Chancellor of the Exchequer intends to introduce his Budget? It would be greatly for the convenience of all hon. Members if we could have an early decision on that date. I am sure that the fixing of the date will not be unconnected with the pending by-election in Mid-Staffordshire.

When will we have an opportunity to debate the Government's public expenditure White Paper? Given the complete inadequacy of the important finance provisions in that White Paper, the House should have the opportunity soon to debate them.

I am sure that hon. Members of all parties welcome the Prime Minister's belated recognition that, after a decade of her Administrations, lone parent families face serious financial difficulties. The Opposition will also welcome and support measures to ensure that absent fathers make proper, responsible contributions, as they should, to the maintenance of their children. However, is not the plight of lone-parent families, especially women with children, made much worse by the persistent policies of the Government of freezing child benefit, undermining the availability of housing benefit and forcing up mortgage rates to impossible levels, which affects especially women who are unable to go out to work?

Given all those important problems which are faced by lone parents—the overwhelming number of whom are women—will the Leader of the House find an early opportunity, in Government time, to debate those important matters?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On the latter matter, the hon. Gentleman should recall that the Government's policies have been designed to raise the total economic prosperity of the country and to ensure that the resources that are generated by prosperity go increasingly to those whose needs are greatest, including those to whom the hon. Gentleman refers. If the matter is as serious as he makes it appear, I am surprised that he has not chosen the topic for debate on the Opposition day next week.

I shall do my best to ensure that next Thursday, when we debate the Scottish orders, we avoid making a statement that is likely to curtail that time. The fact that it happens to be Burns night allows me, I hope, to add that

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley."

I have taken the precaution of ensuring that the Welsh orders are debated on the preceding day.

I shall bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the request for information about the date of the Budget. I have it in mind to arrange a debate on the public expenditure White Paper in the relatively near future. The matter can be discussed through the usual channels.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we have an important debate today. Even if I had the authority to

limit speeches to five minutes, I regret that many hon. Members would not be called. I ask hon. Members, especially those seeking to participate in the debate, to hold their business questions for another time.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): My right hon. and learned Friend has doubtless noticed, as I did only this morning, a most deplorable practice which has become associated with the current industrial dispute. I am referring to the practice of using public property—that is, ambulances—for the propaganda purposes of one side in the dispute. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure us that we shall have an early opportunity to debate the question and that, preferably, we shall have a statement from our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend realises, we had a debate on the general topic only last Thursday. That is all the more reason why I should bring that particular point to the notice of my right hon. and learned Friend, which I shall do.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am sure that the Leader of the House has had an opportunity to consider the speeches yesterday by the President of the European Commission and by the Chancellor of the Federal German Republic. Will he give the House an opportunity to debate those speeches, which were visionary about the future development of western Europe and which stretched out a positive hand towards the developing democracies in eastern Europe?

The Leader of the House quoted from Burns poem "To a Mouse". Will he go to the other end of the animal kingdom and consider the plight of the endangered African elephant and the Government's decision to open up the market for ivory trades in Hong Kong? As that is believed to put into further jeopardy that already endangered species, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman arrange for the Prime Minister to come to the House, as it seems that she made that ill-considered decision?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot tackle at business questions all the foreign policy questions raised by the hon. Gentleman. One is always looking for an opportunity for a general foreign affairs debate. The hon. Gentleman asked about Hong Kong ivory. He must understand that Hong Kong has already imposed a total ban on imports of ivory. It has an existing 600-tonne stock of legally acquired ivory. It is in respect of that that the reservation has been entered, and it will be withdrawn after six months.

Mr. Speaker: May I draw the attention of the House to the statement that I made before Christmas to the effect that hon. Members should ask one business question rather than a series?

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Labour party has become a receiver of stolen or leaked documents? Will he arrange for an early debate so that we may discuss whether the Opposition should be allowed to use the facilities of the House to utilise the contents of those stolen or leaked documents?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall need to investigate my hon. Friend's allegation before I can decide how quickly we can have a debate on that.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Has the Leader of the House seen reports to the effect that Manchester's Wythenshawe hospital, unable to afford their running costs, now has to rent its facilities for open-heart surgery to health authorities in other parts of the country? Patients from elsewhere are treated in Wythenshawe hospital while local patients suffering severe heart attacks and other cardiac emergencies have to wait. Is not that a scandal, and can we have a statement next week from the responsible Minister? Who can now say that accountants are not more important than consultants in today's Health Service?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman will understand that that kind of difficulty is characterised by the description "the efficiency trap". That is one of the matters that the National Health Service reforms are calculated to remedy.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Has my right hon. and learned Friend had an opportunity to consider the terms of early-day motion 312 concerning the proposed closure of the Armitage Shanks Tubal works in Barrhead?

[That this House notes that a delegation from Renfrew District Council, union officials and shop stewards from the Armitage Shanks Tubal Works, Barrhead, met the Scottish Industry Minister, the honourable Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, on 14th December 1989 to discuss the proposed closure of the Tubal Works and the associated redundancies; fully supports the Minister of State's subsequent request to Blue Circle Industries plc., the owners of Armitage Shanks, that the redundancies be deferred to allow a wide ranging feasibility study of constructive alternatives; endorses the terms of reference of the study as proposed by Renfrew District Council; deplores the negative response given so far to these proposals by Blue Circle Industries; and urges Blue Circle Industries plc now to take a constructive and truthful approach to the future of employment at Barrhead.]

Is it not deplorable that the owner of the factory, Blue Circle Industries, has been so negative about the universally supported suggestion, endorsed by the Government, that the redundancies should be deferred to allow a wide-ranging feasibility study of constructive alternatives? Does my right hon. and learned Friend hold out any hope of a debate in prime time in the near future in which the wide-ranging questions that arise from the proposals can be discussed in the House?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot offer the immediate prospect of a debate, but I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government are concerned about the case. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office has written to the company asking for the planned redundancies to be delayed pending the results of the new feasibility study. It is for Armitage Shanks to decide on a proper course of action. It is encouraging that the company has committed the sum of £1·7 million to immediate investment in the ceramics side of the Barrhead investment, and I hope that in time that will lead to fresh employment opportunities.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Will the Leader of the House assure us that a statement will be made next week concerning the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Lord Dervaird from the Bench at the Court of Session? Is he aware that the matter gives rise to important points of principle concerning civil liberties and

[Mr. Jim Sillars]

the legal process in Scotland? The civil liberties issue—as the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware—is whether a person who is a practising homosexual within the law should be protected in his office of employment. If that was not the case with Lord Dervaird, we are entitled to a statement on the reason for his resignation.

Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman further aware that the advice given by the Lord Advocate to Lord President Hope, it appears that he has dragged Lord President Hope from a judgmental position to an inquisitorial position that should have been adopted by the Lord Advocate, the Crown Office and the procurator fiscal. Important questions of principle will have to be raised and answered, and it would be far better for the Government to come clean now than for people to believe that there has been a cover-up.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Hon. Members on both sides of the House will have nothing but contempt for the way in which the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter. The conduct of Scottish judges is entirely and properly a matter for the Lord President of the Court of Session and not for any member of the Government. The House knows that Lord Dervaird resigned last month for personal reasons. The reasons for his resignation are entirely a matter for him.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House will enjoy his Burns supper in the Cafeteria, but will he bear in mind that the majority of Scots Members would rather be enjoying that and St. Andrew's night with their constituents, so will he try to keep those two nights of the year clear of Scottish business?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I admire and respect my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for the proper celebration of matters Scottish, but if the House proceeds to consider the matters expeditiously, there should be time enough for celebrations as well.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): May I raise a subject that I know is very unpopular with some hon. Members? Is the Leader of the House aware that, notwithstanding the splendid work of hospitals and hospices, the right to die of people in chronic and incurable pain is now increasingly discussed in public and it should be discussed in the House of Commons? May we debate this issue as soon as possible, preferably next week, so that hon. Members with views on both sides of this highly controversial subject can express their views in Parliament?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is not a matter on which the Government have any plans for debate in the House. The right hon. Gentleman is experienced enough in the business of the House to know that there are many other opportunities that he may take to bring this matter before the House.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that even those of us who hold the Federal Republic of Germany in affection and respect have been disconcerted to read the reported remarks of Chancellor Kohl recently in which he said that German territorial ambitions on Poland still exist? Is that not the most foolhardy thing to say, even if it was for domestic consumption, at a time when events in central Europe are so fluid and flexible? May we have a debate on central and eastern Europe as the other place had recently?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On the matter that it for me to answer—the possibility of a debate on that topic—we had an extensive debate on eastern Europe not many weeks ago. It is a matter of continuing importance, and I shall bear in mind the possibility of another opportunity.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): May we expect a statement next week on whether the Government have sought clarification from the Government of the Irish Republic about all the circumstances surrounding the shooting of a citizen of the United Kingdom by the Irish police during a bank robbery in county Kildare last Friday? Given that it now appears that the police opened fire first and that all the persons wounded were hit by police bullets, will the Government raise this matter through the Anglo-Irish Conference? Will the Government demand a full investigation by the Irish police, followed by a judicial inquiry, to establish whether unnecessary force was used and will a further statement be made to the House once the investigations are completed and the report is to hand?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot promise the prospect of a statement on that matter, but I can promise that I shall bring the point raised by the hon. Gentleman to the specific attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Can my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment use his Question Time next Wednesday—a question has been tabled to him—to announce that he is appointing an inquiry to look into all the aspects of the pollution of Rutland water last summer, which led to the deaths of significant numbers of dogs and sheep and about which there is still grave public concern because it is far from clear that a wide-ranging inquiry into all the circumstances, if necessary apportioning blame, is now taking place?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend will have observed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment appeared to be taking an alert and proper interest in his question. I shall remind him of it at the end of a triumphant day's debate.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I bring the Leader of the House back to the matter of the deplorable decision by the British Government to allow Hong Kong to dispose of 600 tonnes of elephant ivory in the Crown colony? Is he aware that possibly up to 90 per cent. of that ivory, which he previously described as "legal", was illegally obtained in the first instance, coming from the poaching of African elephants?

Will the Leader of the House please consider this matter carefully? He said last week that we could have the opportunity of a debate, so will he let us have that debate so that we can explain to the Foreign Secretary that he got it completely wrong and that he should not have allowed political considerations to overwhelm the expert information that he has received from the various animal conservation groups and, indeed, from the Department of the Environment itself?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am aware of the seriousness with which the hon. Member addresses himself to that topic. He could perhaps contrive to have a debate on it, perhaps on the Adjournment. On the substance of the matter, both Hong Kong and the United Kingdom are committed to the conservation of the African elephant and to the CITES agreement. The ivory stock has already been imported. There is a total ban on further imports into Hong Kong.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): As my hon. and learned Friend knows, nationalised industries are responsible to the House through the appropriate Secretary of State. British Rail is engaged in acquiring large numbers of houses. Not only the people who sell or hope to sell to British Rail but those who live next door to houses that have already been acquired have a growing interest in the criteria being used, the numbers acquired and what British Rail intends to do with houses that it has acquired. May we have an early debate on the matter before the process, which is taking a long time, is completed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I know that the acquisition of property of this kind raises sensitive questions for the ordinary citizen. I cannot offer the prospect of an early debate on the matter, but I shall remind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport of my hon. Friend's interest in it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As a former and, indeed, famous Solicitor-General, does the Leader of the House appreciate how rare it has become for a Law Officer to attend a Standing Committee? This morning the Solicitor-General attended the complex proceedings of the Standing Committee on the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill and was most courteous and generous. Understandably, he had to take away with him many questions put to him. Is it right on so complex a Bill that in its second session the Committee sat until 7.30 pm, whereas in its third and fourth sessions, two weeks after it was announced, the Committee sat until after 10 pm, even though there had been no filibustering? Is that sensible from the point of view of the legislative process?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: From the point of view of the legislative process, it is sensible for the Standing Committee to determine and sit for whatever hours are reasonably necessary to complete its business. I cannot say more about the matter within the rules of the House.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his tribute to my ancient record of service as Solicitor-General and for his tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend. My own recollection confirms his point. During my service as Solicitor-General I was summoned to a Standing Committee only once. It was rare for a Law Officer to be summoned, and it remains rare. The hon. Gentleman will have more than excellent service from my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): When will the Second Reading of the Caldey Island Bill, which was cancelled on Tuesday, take place so that 36 of my constituents can be re-enfranchised?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend knows more about Caldey Island than I do. Second Reading had to be postponed because of the petition against it. I cannot give an express undertaking about when the Bill will come before the House again.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Is the Leader of the House aware of the scandalous position which pertains to coroners' inquests in the north of Ireland? It is so bad that an inquest has not yet been held into one incident which happened in 1976. In my constituency, two incidents which occurred eight years ago have still not been the subject of an inquest. The Attorney-General has made a disquieting appeal against a decision of the Appeal Court in the North of Ireland. If it is successful, it will perpetuate that scandal. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on the rules for coroners' inquests so that we can have rules similar to those which apply in England and Wales?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It would not be proper for me to comment on the relationship between the judicial proceedings to which the hon. Gentleman referred and the substantive matter that he raised. I shall bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. and learned Friend will not be surprised to hear that I support my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) in his comments about Burns night. I imagine that my right hon. and learned Friend consulted and was advised by the usual channels in selecting the business for next Thursday, but was he made aware that we would also be discussing Scottish business in Committee on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill? There seems to be a determination through the usual channels to keep all the Scots away from Burns suppers.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I would not want to impute such an unworthy motive to any of my right hon. Friends. Scottish business in the House should be concluded by 7 pm, so there may be some time for celebration thereafter.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Is the Leader of the House aware that Trafalgar House is proposing to close one of its subsidiaries in my constituency, Redpath Dorman and Long, a steel fabrication firm that has been there for more than 60 years? Trafalgar House has said that that factory is not viable. In response, the work force has asked for access to the books to enable it to formulate a constructive alternative to closure. Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a statement to the House next week addressing the issue of work forces' access to information?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is necessarily the right target for the point raised by the hon. Gentleman, but I shall see that it is brought to the attention of my appropriate right hon. Friends.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Bearing in mind the continued national concern about health care, would it not be appropriate to have a debate soon on preventive medicine? As my right hon. and learned Friend will be aware, that would give many of us the opportunity to say that, while we appreciate that, in a free society, it is up to individuals whether to smoke, it does not seem to be helpful for the Government to encourage smoking by instituting low levels of duty.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot offer the prospect of an early debate on that topic, but I can draw my hon. Friend's point to the attention of all my ministerial colleagues who are concerned with such matters.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on the position of British citizens who die in foreign countries which refuse to issue death certificates to relatives? A former constituent of mine, Mr. Anthony Marshall, died on 4 August 1989 in Queensland, Australia, and the death certificate has still not been released by the Australian Government. Will the Leader of the House ask the Foreign Secretary what hon. Members can do in such situations; or perhaps as a former Foreign Secretary he has the answer himself?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is always anxious to help in any such case that is drawn to its attention and I shall bring the general topic to the attention to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time for an early debate on the EC? By what authority does the European Assembly discuss, debate and vote on the ambulance men's dispute?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The European Parliament, like other parliamentary assemblies, sometimes allows itself to debate matters over which its influence is relatively limited. I remind my hon. Friend that, by legislation of this House following the Single European Act, the European Assembly is now described here and there as the European Parliament.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his reply to the hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd)? Is he aware that much life-saving emergency equipment is being stolen from front-line ambulances in London by the management? Will he arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement today to explain how he could live with his conscience if a major incident such as those at King's Cross and Clapham were to engage London in the next few days and lives were to be lost? If Members of Parliament can have 11 per cent., why cannot ambulance men be given the same and get the dispute over?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That question should most properly be directed to those who are leading the ambulance dispute. That point was made vigorously by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health in a debate only a week ago and the case that he made then is even stronger today.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): There is a complete lack of confidence in the agricultural policies being pursued by the Government. Hon. Members are receiving representations from their constituents in agriculture about a variety of matters, including high interest rates which are hitting investment in agriculture, the disparity in the green pound, and the fact that the Government have not announced whether they will make up the hill livestock compensatory allowances. Those are all matters of legitimate public concern to our constituents. Will the Leader of the House ensure that there is an early debate on them?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: While I would not express my anxiety about this in as dramatic a way as the hon. Gentleman did in expressing his multi-faceted concern, many matters are continuously under the watch of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I agree that it would be appropriate to debate those matters in the relatively near future.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate to allow the Prime Minister to mimic herself and present the nation with a visual display of what she looked like when she was fizzing with anger because the banks had withdrawn from the student top-up loan scheme?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman does not need any such special occasion.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): I am concerned about cheque book journalism, particularly because it encourages individuals to commit perjury. Surely we should have an early debate to discuss press abuse with a view to establishing a statutory right of reply to protect the general public above all else.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not sure that I entirely followed the hon. Gentleman's thought process—it is not always easy to do so. I hope that he will find an opportunity of expressing his thoughts more fully on a later occasion.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): When does the Leader of the House think that we are likely to have the opportunity to debate the National Health Service again? I ask because I have a petition from 500 of my constituents who are deeply anxious about the Government's policy on the Health Service. They are faced with growing queues for many operations, growing need in many specialties and diminishing resources to meet the growing needs of an aging population.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will continue to applaud the massive increase in resources devoted to the Health Service under the Government and give his equally urgent support to the National Health Service and Community Care Bill currently going through the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. A number of hon. Members who have not previously risen are now doing so and, therefore, I regret that I shall have to put a limit on business questions. They will continue until 4.10 pm and then, whatever happens, we must move on.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Bearing in mind that in Scotland Conservative support runs at 16 per cent., will the Leader of the House, when bringing forward the remainder of the Government's legislative programme, consider Robert Burn's other words:

"O wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oursels as others see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
And foolish notion."

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is because of my confidence in that proposition that I have been delighted to see the

growing success of the televising of the House, which I am sure will continue to present the Government in an increasingly favourable light.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Is the Leader of the House aware that one bank, let alone the Prime Minister, is fizzing—the Girobank in my constituency? More than a year and a half ago, in June 1988, the Government announced that they would quickly sell it off to the highest bidder. They totally failed in that task, but there is great rumour and uncertainty about Girobank's future. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate so that we can find out exactly what is happening? Will he end the uncertainty by announcing, or getting the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to announce, that the Government are cancelling the privatisation and that corporate customers and others who are worried need not worry any more because there will be investment from the Post Office?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The privatisation process has commended itself throughout the decade during which the Government have been in office. There is nothing to add to that in the light of the hon. Gentleman's point, but, as always, I shall bring his point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Is the Leader of the House aware that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) is not alone in seeking a full and frank statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland about the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Lord Devaird and the reported activities of certain other senior members of the Scottish judiciary? If such a statement is not forthcoming, the public will suspect, rightly, yet another establishment cover-up.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The public have the good sense not to share the motivation of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). The whole House will welcome the fact that the Lord President of the Court of Session took prompt action to dispel rumours about certain recent events in Scotland. As I have already said, the conduct of Scottish judges is entirely a matter for the Lord President, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has nothing to say.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House give time for the Second Reading of the Registration of Commercial Lobbying Interests Bill, particularly bearing in mind the "World in Action" programme broadcast by Granada Television last Monday? Such a debate could encompass also the report made to Parliament in 1976 by the Royal Commission on standards of conduct in public life which was never debated—a minor scandal in itself. It would then be seen that the Bill would plug a loophole and make the bribery of Members of Parliament a criminal offence, as recommended by Lord Justice Salmon.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The whole question of lobbyists and their relationship to right hon. and hon. Members is under investigation by the Select Committee on Members' Interests, which is as it should be. It is no part of my responsibility to deal with matters that were reported three years before the expiry of the last Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman should direct his complaint against them, for there is a limit to the number of mistakes made by Labour that the present Government can clear up.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House make a statement next week on the question of disappearing silver? Is he aware that some years ago the Prime Minister managed to get away with a number of pieces of silver from Belton house, near Grantham, which was once in private ownership but which is now owned by the National Trust? She still has 22 pieces of that silver locked away in Downing street. Some of us are worried about whether any more silver has gone missing. The Leader of the House ought to examine the property into which he moved recently, because he might find that the Prime Minister has taken some silver from there also. Some right hon. and hon. Members are convinced that the Prime Minister has erected the pearly gates at the end of Downing street to stop people fetching that silver back.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman has fallen below even his own usual standards.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): When may the House debate the subject of right hon. and hon. Members' interests? Is the Leader of the House aware of a statement that I made the other day, based on my conversation with Mr. Ian Greer of Ian Greer Associates, who told me directly that, through his company, he had paid Members of Parliament for making introductions to his firm? They were using their parliamentary position to make money. That matter is not only for the Select Committee on Members' Interests but for Parliament as a whole. It should be debated on the Floor of the House so that we can hear what every hon. and right hon. Member has to say.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The House is not impressed by the way in which the hon. Gentleman continues to return to that topic on the Floor of the House. The general question of lobbyists and their relationships with right hon. and hon. Members is under investigation by the Select Committee on Members' Interests, to which any general questions should be referred. Any specific allegations made either by a right hon. or hon. Member or anyone else about a Member of Parliament would also, in the ordinary way, be investigated by that Committee. It is high time that the hon. Gentleman took advantage of those existing procedures instead of referring back to this House.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the BBC radio programme "Face the Facts" that was broadcast this morning, which dealt with the problem confronting many steel workers who, throughout their working lives, had their lungs damaged by noxious materials and gases emanating from their workplace. Can a statement be made next week by the appropriate Minister on that matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not have the advantage of having listened to that broadcast, but if it raised a serious question of industrial health, as the hon. Gentleman describes, I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate on the future of electricity generation in the United Kingdom by both nuclear and coal-fired stations? Is he aware that 200 employees of GEC Alsthom in my constituency and a further 20 in Manchester have been given notice of redundancy because

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of cancelled orders? Future policy should be declared as a matter of urgency so that those redundancies and others may be prevented.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot promise a specific debate on the general subject or on the examples given by the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs), but I shall bring them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

BILLS PRESENTED

POLL TAX (RESTORATION OF INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY)

Mr. Harry Cohen, supported by Ms. Diane Abbott, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Kevin Barron, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Eric S. Heffer, Mr. John Hughes, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Ms. Dawn Primarolo and Mr. Eddie Loyden, presented a Bill to amend the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 and the Local Government Finance Act 1988 in order to protect an individual's privacy: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 February. [Bill 57.]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (DISABLED PERSONS)

Mr. Eddie Loyden, supported by Mr. Allan Roberts, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Robert N. Wareing, Mr. Eric S. Heffer, Ms. Dawn Primarolo and Mr. Harry Cohen, presented a Bill to amend the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 to require local authorities to publish annual reports on the steps they have taken to meet the information needs of disabled persons: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 February. [Bill 58.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the six motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Official Secrets Act 1989 (Prescription) Order 1989 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) (No. 2) Order 1989 be referred to a Standing committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Non-Domestic Rates and Community Charges (Timetable) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2436) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Standard Community Charge (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2437) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2462) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Electricity Act 1989 (Fees) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

Points of Order

4.11 pm

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw to your attention, and to the attention of the House, the fact that this afternoon, in the Manchester Crown court, criminal charges which had been laid against Mr. Kevin Taylor were withdrawn at the request of the prosecution, who accepted that the Greater Manchester police had misled the judge and the jury during the course of the four-and-a-half-months trial. Mr. Taylor was a friend of a certain Mr. Stalker. Therefore, I request that you, Mr. Speaker, consider whether this is a fit and proper subject to be debated in the House at an early date.

Mr. Speaker: I am surprised that the hon. Member did not raise that issue with the Leader of the House, as he has the authority to decide whether it should be debated.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you will agree that we are here to represent our constituents and not special interest groups, especially when we serve on a Standing Committee. I do not know whether you are aware that a meeting was held before the Committee stage of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill started at which the Confederation of Health Service Employees decided which Labour Member should represent that union on the Standing Committee. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who is here today, is complaining that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) was picked instead of him to represent the union. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Workington will be partial in Committee as he is sponsored by the union and apparently it pays his election expenses.

Mr. Speaker: Those are not matters for me. As long as it is declared in the Register of Members' Interests it is perfectly legitimate to represent the interests of a union.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) said the other day, Members of Parliament who are sponsored by trade unions receive nothing from the union. At election time a portion of their election expenses is paid to the constituency party and not to the hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker: We cannot have a debate on such matters now.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that these motions must be disposed of by 10 o'clock. Therefore, I propose to allow a general debate on the five motions on the Order Paper. As a large number of right hon. and hon. Members want to take part in the debate I urge hon. Members to limit speeches to five minutes, or it will be difficult to include everyone who wishes to speak in the debate. I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes—the only authority that the Chair has—between 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock, but I ask right hon. and hon. Members who are called to speak before that time to bear the time limit in mind.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder how you will conduct this debate. On other occasions it is relatively easy to call one hon. Member on the Government side and one from the Opposition, but, according to various press reports—I do not know whether they are true—a substantial number of Tory Members oppose the Government on this issue. How will you choose one Member who is for the measure and one who is against?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member has vast experience of these matters; perhaps he should have come to have a private word with me about it. It is not easy.

4.14 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Chris Patten): I beg to move,

That the Population Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 48), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.

I understand that it will be convenient for us also to discuss the following:

That the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1990-91 (House of Commons Paper No. 47), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.

That the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 49), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.

That the Revenue Support Grant Transition Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 50), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (House of Commons Paper No. 128), a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th January, be approved.

The reports that we are debating form the basis for local government grant settlements for next year. They are similar, although not identical, to the proposals that I reported to the House in an oral statement last November. They are different in two respects. First, we now take account of actual rather than notional capital allocations; secondly, we take account of the number of community charge payers registered with their local authorities, rather than guessing at a figure gauged from the work of the registrar general.

When I announced these decisions last week, I also announced that we intended to pay 25 per cent. of local government grant in the first two——

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Should not the Secretary of State be addressing the Chair rather than turning his back on you?

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have barely started.

Mr. Patten: I announced that we would be paying 25 per cent. of the grant to local authorities in the first two months of the year. That does not fundamentally alter the architecture of the settlement, but it brings forward our grants to local authorities. It provides them with about £2·4 billion in the first two months of the year, about £800 million more than they were anticipating, and is worth about £180 million to them in, for example, increased interest payments.

These debates are a fairly familiar way of beginning the new year in the local government calendar, but my guess is that their nature will change somewhat in the future, for two reasons. First, whatever our views of the new system of financing local government, I think that there is little doubt that local government spending will involve more clarity in future than it has in the past. Secondly, I believe that it will involve more accountability than in the past. I think that one of the reasons for the fuss that we have experienced in the past few weeks is precisely that greater clarity and accountability.

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): Would my right hon. Friend be kind enough to explain something, for the sake of clarity? If the £248 figure that he announced last week for the community charge in Birmingham is correct, why does Sir Richard Knowles, the council's Labour leader, predict the hugely inflated figure of over £420—nearly double that? My constituents in Yardley are appalled. Will my right hon. Friend supply me with figures under the eight element headings for both this year and next year, explaining where the appalling under-budgeting and discrepancies lie?

Mr. Patten: Birmingham is one of the authorities that will do best under the new system, in relation to both standard spending assessments and aggregate external finance. If there are reasons for the kind of increase to which my hon. Friend refers, one of them is the fact that Birmingham is apparently considering a 20 per cent. increase in expenditure next year. If it increases expenditure by that amount, the pain for the community charge payer will be considerable, and I very much hope that it will have second thoughts.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Birmingham is not facing anything like that kind of increase, and if I am called to speak in the debate I shall explain the position in detail.

The Secretary of State said that there would be greater clarity and he talked about the debate being part of the local government calendar. Is he aware that something else is part of the local government calendar? I telephoned a Government Department about this at lunchtime. When, in the past, the Secretary of State has made statements in the House about poll tax figures nationally—the last occasion on which he did that was 6 November—the Government, to their credit in the last three years, always deposited in the Library, in answer to a parliamentary question, exemplifications of those figures, gainers and losers by households. As yet, that has not been done following the 6 November figure. Hon. Members simply receive holding answers. It is not as though we have not asked for the details.

How can we conduct this debate in a sense of reality and with clarity when we do not have the Government's exemplifications of the poll tax figures following the

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

6 November statement, less than a week after the Secretary of State's announcement of these instruments and without an oral statement? When will those figures be available?

Mr. Patten: The final figures on gainers and losers will be available only when local authorities have made their budgets. I have not so far detected among hon. Members the suggestion that we have been providing too little information about the local government settlement. Indeed, a complaint that we have heard time and again is that we have been providing too much information every time we go out to consultation or there is a new set of exemplifications.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): My right hon. Friend said that much more information was being provided. I supported the community charge on the basis that it would be fairer and simpler. Will he explain—I have written to his Department about this and my local authority has written to his Department but has not received an answer—why the standard spending assessment which affects the grant for Hull is £131·70 and for my constituency is £77? I hope that he will not say that it is due to social conditions. I can understand that from the point of view of the county council, with education and social services, but the sort of services with which district councils are concerned—refuse collection, planning, rate collection and so on—do not vary that much. Will he explain the difference?

Mr. Patten: I shall deal later with the whole issue of the move from grant-related expenditure assessments to standard spending assessments. I shall then answer my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware—*[Interruption.]*—that, whatever Opposition Members may say, my constituents have already had their rates doubled in two years, and they now face a further probably doubling under the new process, with a community charge of nearly £500, despite unprecedented support from central Government? Will my right hon. Friend condemn Labour councils which behave in such a profligate way, with the encouragement of Labour Members such as those at present seated on the Opposition Front Bench below the Gangway?

Mr. Patten: I totally accept what my hon. Friend says about the consequences of high spending by Labour local authorities—indeed, by any local authorities. My view, given what I said about greater accountability and greater clarity in the new system, is that those matters will have more effect in getting voters to prevent higher spending by local authorities than any amount of ministerial rhetoric. That is an important reason why we should not have these sort of debates indefinitely into the future.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the courtesy that he showed me at two successive meetings. But he will accept that the SSAs are working to the marked disadvantage of many shire counties, with that disadvantage being reflected in the high community charge that will have to be paid by my constituents. It seems that the way in which the SSAs are being calculated is fundamentally incorrect, and flawed, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will deal with that.

Mr. Patten: I assure my hon. Friend that I will address the question of SSAs later. He would be disappointed if I did not. Perhaps questions about SSAs could wait until later in my speech.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Sir Alan Glyn: We are debating five motions. Will my right hon. Friend consider making more concessions, first, on SSAs, and secondly, on removal of the safety nets? I represent an area where it is estimated that the charge will be over £500. If my right hon. Friend would make those two concessions, there would be a considerable difference.

Mr. Patten: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be delighted at the enthusiasm that his recent honour has brought from the Opposition, as well as from the Government side.

As my hon. Friend knows, there is an increase in the SSA for the district council in the area that he represents, though it is not as large as he and the council would like. Taking the aggregate external finance, both the contribution from the business pool and the contribution from grants to his county and its district, there is a substantial increase of over 20 per cent. Therefore, I find it difficult to accept the community charge figure that has been mentioned for Windsor, because, for example, it would suggest an increase in spending of over 20 per cent. I am sure that local charge payers would not like that.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Perhaps I can help my right hon. Friend. He knows that I am no friend either to the charge or to rate capping, but in view of what some Labour authorities seem to be threatening, is there not a case for capping in this transitional year?

Mr. Patten: Again, I do not wish to disappoint my hon. Friend or other hon. Friends. I assure him that I intend coming to that question with enthusiasm later in my remarks.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: May I make the point that, after this intervention, I had better make progress? I want to finish my speech before my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities replies to the debate.

Mr. Battle: My question is about more information. The standard spending assessment of Leeds has been reduced by £3·5 million, according to the figures that appeared in the original consultative paper. When the Department of the Environment was asked to provide details of the reduction, the reply that Leeds received was that the details of the calculation could be supplied only after the debate. Would it not have been better if we had had the reasons and the details before the debate so that we could have made a proper judgment? What have the Government to hide?

Mr. Patten: I do not suggest that I do not believe the hon. Gentleman, but I find it difficult to believe that answer, because we have been providing an inordinate amount of information about the reasons for particular SSAs. I think that I am right in saying that the SSA for

Leeds will be more than 7 per cent. above its existing GRE. I shall be content to see the hon. Gentleman and the leader of his council at more or less any convenient time to discuss the reasons for the existing SSA.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Can my right hon. Friend come to the case of low-spending local authorities, such as West Sussex county council, which spend considerably less than the standard spending assessment? Is my right hon. Friend aware that if those local authorities were to spend as the Government think they should, they would spend even further below the SSA? What may be done about that?

Mr. Patten: I shall deal with that point when I deal with the transitional relief scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson)—who may or may not be present in the Chamber—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) have raised that important point, which I want to address, with me. It will not be debated until we consider the transitional relief scheme orders later this month.

I shall deal with the two simple issues that are at the core of the debate—first, how we should control local government spending and, secondly, how we raise money for local government in a way that combines efficiency and fairness. Those are not particularly original questions, but they have dominated the debate on the relations between local government and the Government over the past 10 or, arguably, 15 years. They are arguments with which the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who was Secretary of State for the Environment in the late 1970s, will be familiar, although he and I may reach different conclusions about the answer.

None of us doubts that local authorities undertake vital functions and play an important part in the democratic life of our country. None of us doubts that many local authorities—alas, not all—conduct those functions very efficiently and that many act more efficiently than was once the case, but, however many accolades one showers on the heads of local government, it is not reasonable to argue that there should be one rule for financial control on central Government and the rest of the public sector but completely different rules for local authorities. I do not know how one could possibly put that argument.

The argument that has provoked most of the row over the past 10 or 15 years is perfectly simple. Year after year, local authorities say that the Government are not providing them with enough money. They say that they need more money and that they intend to spend more money regardless of the burden on taxpayers or ratepayers. The Government say that they need to constrain local government spending and that local authorities should cut their coats according to their cloth.

That has been the argument, but what has been the record? It is astonishing that, whatever rows we have in the House, whatever the rebellions, whatever the arguments and whatever the petal-soft diplomacy of the Whips, the position is exactly the same year after year: the real level of local authority expenditure, on the whole, increases more rapidly than Government expenditure.

Let me give hon. Members the figures for the past five years; they are chosen on what I hope is a directly comparable basis and omit matters such as the transfer of responsibility for polytechnics. Government expenditure has increased by 2·4 per cent. and total net current expenditure of local authorities has increased by 9·4 per cent. Although the argument is that the Government are attempting unjustifiably to squeeze local authorities until the pips squeak—there are not many signs of pips around town and county halls in this country—local government has taken a larger proportion of total public expenditure year after year.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): It is true that local authorities have had to increase rates, but they have done so to make up the deficit on the rate support grant, which has been reduced by one third since 1979.

Mr. Patten: The issue at the centre of much of the argument is not how money is raised but how it is spent. Two new propositions enter the argument this year. Local authorities say that the reason for high community charges will be not their spending decisions but something inherent in the community charge or the change from GREs to SSAs. Virtually all the spending increases being suggested by local authorities for next year would mean astronomical increases in domestic rates if we were not going over to the community charge system. It is levels of spending that, above all, determine the level of community charge.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my hon. Friend realise that current spending by Lancashire county council would mean an extra 82p on the old rate?

Mr. Patten: I have seen astonishing figures for the amount by which Lancashire county council apparently intends to increase its spending next year. I hope that it will have second thoughts, but I will return to that point later.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): My right hon. Friend touches on an important point. If Lancashire county council were setting its rates today, it would have to increase them by 31·4 per cent., because it has increased its expenditure during the past 12 months by 16 per cent. That must surely increase the community charge to be paid by Lancashire ratepayers by £70 or £80. Much of that is unnecessary and casts a burden of hardship on many sections of the community that cannot afford to pay it.

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend. As he suggested, the main reason for increases in community charges will be large increases in spending. It is important for the Government to emphasise that point during the next few months. There has been a great deal of dispute about the figures during recent weeks. We are allowing for £32·8 billion of local authority expenditure next year, which represents an increase of 11 per cent. over what we were prepared to provide this year. Is that future unfair because of some meanness with the figure this year? It is difficult to argue that it is because this year's figure is 9·9 per cent. higher than the provision for last year, which itself was 7·3 per cent. higher than the figure for the year before.

There has been a consistent run of high figures for increases in total provision. Even with that 9·9 per cent. increase in provision for this year, all local authorities tell us that, on average, they are intending to budget over that provision by 7 per cent. That is 7 per cent. on top of the 9·9 per cent. increase in provision; that represents an additional £1·9 billion. In those circumstances, it may not

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surprise my right hon. and hon. Friends to know that about three quarters of the contingency reserve this year has gone in meeting overspending by local government.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Secretary of State must be aware that all local authorities—including all those under Conservative control—have to meet nationally negotiated pay deals for teachers, policemen and firemen. Those are key elements in the contingency fund point that the right hon. Gentleman has just made. The local authorities have to pay higher interest rates. All those charges are falling not just on what ghe describes as profligate Labour authorities, but on the Conservative authorities. The complaints from local government come from all parties.

Mr. Patten: I am coming directly to that point. It was not the Government who negotiated the 8·8 per cent. pay settlement with NALGO last year—it was the local authorities. Presumably they realised the consequences for their charge payers. The basis of the local authorities' case is that whatever the level of overspending, whatever the outturn of spending in one year, that should be taken as the base line for increases in spending for the next year.

The logic of that argument is that local authority public expenditure would never be within control; that it would increase every year as a proportion of public expenditure; and that it would increase every year as a proportion of the gross national product. Taken to its extreme, the logic of the argument is that eventually local authorities would consume the entire gross national product. I do not think that that is an ambition in the breasts of most district treasurers, but I cannot say the same for county treasurers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that central Government have placed huge and costly additional burdens on local government, not least in education, and that education is one of the largest elements of local government expenditure? Will he seriously consider transferring the cost of teachers' salaries to central Government, and to taxpayers nationally? That would make the new system much more acceptable.

Mr. Patten: As I am sure my hon. Friend would be the first to point out, as well as giving local authorities new responsibilities, we have taken some burdens off them. Many of those who now own their council homes are, I am sure, particularly grateful for that. We have also given local authorities the opportunities to become more efficient through compulsory competitive tendering, which I know has given so much encouragement to the Opposition.

I come to the point raised by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The best figures to compare year on year are the total amounts of the so-called aggregate external finance going into local government—the total amounts from business ratepayers, revenue support grant and special grants. The external finance going into local government next year will be £23·1 billion, which represents an 8·5 per cent. increase over this year. This year we have seen an 8·9 per cent. increase over last year's amount. On top of that, £1·85 billion goes to pay for the cost of community charge benefits and income support in England and a further £300 million to pay for the cost of the transitional relief scheme. That should mean that, with spending at the levels that we believe are reasonable, the community charge payer would have to meet only about £1 of every £4 of local government spending, which is a reasonable level.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Secretary of State address the question that the Prime Minister dodged this afternoon—why so many English Conservative Members who were happy to vote for the poll tax in Scotland are in open revolt against these measures, despite the concessions that the right hon. Gentleman parades? Might that be because, when it comes to Scottish legislation, those Members vote whichever way the Whips tell them, regardless of the issue or the views of the Scottish people?

Mr. Patten: I do not believe that. I am content to leave that issue to the judgment of my right hon. and hon. Friends, who I am sure will reach the right decisions in the Division Lobby this evening.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: After my hon. Friend's intervention, I want to proceed with my speech, or I will be speaking until the end of the debate.

Mr. Jessel: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Before he leaves the point about local authority expenditure, may I ask him whether he is aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) and I deplore the extravagance of the Liberal-controlled Richmond upon Thames borough council? That council is constructing a new town hall in Twickenham which it calls a civic centre, at a cost of £12 million, which is certain to increase the community charge for residents throughout the borough. Will my right hon. Friend send for details of this reckless piece of civic extravagance and conceit?

Mr. Patten: That is precisely the type of extravagance on which I hope my hon. Friend's constituents will make their views extremely clear.

Local authorities say that, because we are not providing them with enough money, the community charge will be higher next year than we have suggested it need be. The argument comes down to their proposition that the £278, which we have said should represent a reasonable level of community charge on average across the country, will be exceeded by £50 or £60—some say that on average it will go up to £340; others say that it will go up to £350.

My point is simple: the difference to the country between a community charge of £278 and a community charge of £340 is £2·2 billion of public expenditure. The basic local authority case is that, in addition to the £1·8 billion extra that we are putting into local government this year through external finance, we should put in another £2·2 billion, making a £4 billion increase overall. I cannot believe that anyone really thinks that that would represent a sensible prioritisation of public expenditure or that it would be sensible for the management of the economy.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) *rose*——

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I want to move on, but I shall give way to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) because I like him.

Mr. Tony Banks: The right hon. Gentleman has totally disarmed me. I put it to him in a helpful way that surely the Government's calculation that local authorities will increase their spending by only about 3·8 per cent. next year, when it is known that inflation is about 8 per cent., lies at the centre of the problem for local authorities.

Mr. Patten: I am afraid that either I have been extremely poor in putting my argument across or the hon. Gentleman misunderstands me. I have set out in detail the figures for local standard spending and aggregate external finance—the 8·5 per cent. increase. The hon. Gentleman's figure of 3·8 per cent. is valid only if one assumes that whatever is the outturn of local government expenditure for one year should be taken as the base line for the next. As I have said consistently, that is a recipe for local government taking an increasing share of public expenditure.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: This is absolutely the last time that I shall give way.

Mr. Shepherd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend,. Does not the discrepancy partially arise because local authorities are expected to chip in the same amount from balances this coming year as they did last year and that many of the local authorities depleted their balances so they are not able to do it this coming year? Were local authorities advised in early discussions of the consequences of dipping into their balances this year?

Mr Patten: Local authorities have been constantly advised about the consequences of dipping into their balances and of boosting them immediately thereafter. The House knows that the pattern of balances tends to bear some relationship to the electoral cycle. It would be preposterous if whatever an authority decided to do about balances meant that in the following year the taxpayer met the difference. In other words, if a local authority draws down balances one year to boost spending, I do not see why the taxpayer should increase spending the next year by that amount just because of the local authority's behaviour.

I want to come to three issues that allegedly blur the question of accountability. Reference has been made to the first by several of my hon. Friends—the issue of charge capping. Under legislation, we have power to charge-cap, just as we previously had power to rate-cap. Many people argue that it would be wrong to charge-cap because they think that it is wrong to interrupt the transmission mechanism between what a local authority spends and the purse or wallet of the community charge payer. I understand that argument particularly well, but if some of the horrendously high figures for the community charge bandied about are set next year, we will have no hesitation in capping the authorities concerned.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): My right hon. Friend has dealt with the issue at the heart of the matter. Is he aware that many of my constituents have lived year after year with double figure increases in rates? Many of them say that if we achieve our objectives with the community charge, it will be fair, but that if we let the likes of Labour-controlled Wolverhampton council continue to get away with murder, not to live within budgets and to set a figure in excess of £400 when we have given a guideline of £268, the Government will be getting away with murder as well.

We must not do what we did with council house sales. We left it too long before we took action and under the authorities that did not push through council house sales, people were left waiting for years. If local authorities do not see sense after April, will my right hon. Friend take action immediately and cap them from day one?

Mr. Patten: That is helpful advice to which I listened keenly. I shall now move on to the second issue.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Will the Secretary of State tell the House and the nation how what he has just described as a necessary measure to hold back poll tax charging squares with what he himself described on 6 November 1989 as a poll tax which would put the community in charge?

Mr. Patten: It will put the community in charge. However, the community may need a year of our assistance in some cases before it can make its votes plain in the ballot box.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: No. I like the hon. Gentleman, but not as much as I like his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): Until accountability at the election box begins to work, constituents such as mine still need the protection of central Government from councils such as Haringey, which will have a community charge of about £650 a head.

Mr. Patten: I can understand my hon. Friend's considerable concern and I hope that Haringey council will note what I said.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Fraser *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I shall give way a little later.

The second issue that has caused some concern is the transitional relief scheme. A number of my hon. Friends and a number of other commentators——

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for various Whips and the chairman of the 1922 Committee to go round various Conservative Members to try to persuade them to vote for the Government tonight?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I call Mr. Patten.

Mr. Patten: Some people say that the transitional relief scheme in some way blurs accountability. They have suggested that we should cover any losses in the transitional relief scheme, whatever the level of overspending by a local authority. That is neither true nor reasonable, as it would lead to the Treasury, in effect, meeting the costs of overspending by local authorities and it might encourage some to spend up. My hon. Friend the

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Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and others have referred to the particular problems that are posed where local authorities have been spending below their grant-related expenditure and are now spending below their SSA.

That is especially difficult. Many of the ramifications are not easy to work out, but I assure my right hon. and hon. Friends that we shall try to find a way through the problems by the time that we debate the order on the transitional relief scheme in a few weeks' time. If we have not been able to do so, we shall have to explain ourselves extremely convincingly to my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Fraser: Is the Secretary of State aware that, as a result of a mistake by the Inland Revenue, Lambeth borough council has to repay £1 million to the London residuary body? As a result, the poll tax will rise by £30 per person in Lambeth. Lambeth will receive £4 million of transitional relief, whereas Wandsworth will receive £24 million. Would it not be fair at least to increase the transitional relief by £11 million to compensate for the Inland Revenue's mistake and to treat a Labour and a Tory borough even-handedly?

Mr. Patten: I have gathered from what has been said in my left ear that the facts may not be quite as the hon. Gentleman described. I shall ask my hon. Friend to respond to the hon. Gentleman's point in his winding-up speech. I wish that that was the only increase in spending that Lambeth ratepayers or chargepayers were having to meet in the coming year.

The third issue that has caused particular concern to many of my hon. Friends and which is alleged to blur accountability is the safety net.

Mr. Skinner: What about SSAs?

Mr. Patten: I shall come to that.

My hon. Friends will know that, with the ending of resource equalisation, we have ended the hidden subsidies from high rateable value areas to low rateable value areas. We originally proposed that authorities that lost as a result should have their losses phased in over four years, with the cost being met by local authorities that were substantial gainers from the ending of resource equalisation. A number of my right hon. and hon. Friends argued that we should be more generous and we decided, as we announced last autumn, that, after the first year, all the gains would come to local authorities that were benefiting from the new arrangements straight away and that the losers would have their losses met by the Treasury to the tune of about £850 million over the remaining three years. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said that we should go still further and meet the cost of the safety net in the first year as well, at a cost of £650 million.

I want to face the issue squarely. One cannot bring much in the way of scientific judgment to the matter; it is wholly a matter of political judgment and of one's views of priorities. When I considered the other areas in which we need to spend money next year—and in which we shall spend more money—I could not press the case for spending £650 million extra on parts of the country that will benefit from the changes that we are making.

I apologise to my hon. Friends for putting it as bluntly as that when some of them would doubtless have liked me to put it more mellifluously, but that is a fact. It is not unreasonable that people should wait a year for half their gains when the gains coming to many local authorities will be so coinsiderable in year two. Expenditure of £650 million on the safety net in year one would not be justified in comparison with many other areas in which all of us want to see additional spending.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): The people of Wolverhampton will not appreciate that statement. The Secretary of State is not prepared to respond on the £47 surcharge that the Government are imposing on the people of Wolverhampton. Why did the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) not support her constituents and ask the Government to remove that surcharge?

The Secretary of State talks about equity and fairness. He is suggesting that Wolverhampton should spend £56 per head of its population—£10 million—below the Government's own assessment of the city's needs. That is on the Government's own figures. Will the Secretary of State tell me whether that is fair?

Mr. Patten: I can tell the hon. Gentleman what is especially fair to Wolverhampton—perhaps some of my hon. Friends may think that it is fairer than some Wolverhampton councillors deserve: Wolverhampton is to gain £88 per head out of the new system and will contribute about half that sum to the safety net in the first year. The best thing that the hon. Gentleman can do for community charge payers in Wolverhampton is to go back to Wolverhampton and tell his council to sort itself out.

Several of my right hon. and hon. Friends have mentioned the consequences of the move from grant-related expenditure assessments to standard spending assessments.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: What about the uniform business rate?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend asks about the UBR——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: And the phasing?

Mr. Patten: I hope that the House will find it acceptable if the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) deals with the uniform business rate, the revaluation and the phasing that was agreed by the House under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, because I must finish my remarks at some point this evening——

Mr. Wilson: You are doing well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Patten: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) for his commendation.

We are moving from a system of GREAs to a system of SSAs—I apologise for all the initials—on the ground that the new system is much simpler than its predecessor, although this is another illustration of the fact that all things are relative. For many years, the GREAs were widely condemned for being much too complicated, and many hon. Members on both sides of the House argued that we should move to a very much simpler system. Some suggested that we should go over to a system based entirely on population—that we should distribute all our grant on a population basis.

I do not think that that would be a fair basis for the distribution of all grant. It is reasonable to take some account of need, but as soon as one starts to try to define need and develop a methodology, one finds oneself in a situation in which some people lose and others gain—in other words, a situation such as that in which I find myself at the moment. Excluding the parish councils, there are 426 local authorities in England, and the more deputations I have received concerning SSAs, the more I have realised that there are at least 424 special cases—424 because neither the constituency of my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Wirral, West nor my own of Bath is allowed to count.

It is true that the SSAs probably take a greater account than GREs of additional educational need in inner London and in some inner-city areas, but the ending of resource equalisation means that counties in the south-east, for example, will do rather better out of the new system. We arrived at the SSA system after an inordinate amount of consultation and discussion with local authorities and the local authority associations and it is perhaps understandable if my Department does not view with unbridled enthusiasm the prospect of another round of consultation. I want to make it clear to my right hon. and hon. Friends however, that the SSA methodology is not cast in stone. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] If my hon. Friends, the local authorities in their constituencies or the local authority associations wish to come to us with fresh evidence in support of a new methodology for SSAs, we shall be quite prepared to consider changes that we can put in place for next year.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): For which year?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Lady knows that we cannot do it by next year because we have already made the settlement. I want to make it clear——

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: All right, but this is the last time.

Mr. Bruce: My right hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention to many overspending local authorities. If he runs his finger down the SSA column, he will find in table 2 that Dorset—in particular my constituency of Dorset, South—has the lowest SSAs in the country. Can he explain why, although he assured my constituents that the new system would be very much fairer and that they would be receiving more grant, education in Dorset, which must have among the lowest resources in the country, is to lose £6 million in grant? Yet the Government say that we are already underspending. Clearly, the SSA system is not fair to the community charge payers of Dorset.

Mr. Patten: I believe that I am right in saying that the move from GREAs to SSAs will mean an increase of about 7 per cent. overall in Dorset and that there will be a rather larger increase of about 11 per cent. in the total aggregate external finance going to Dorset next year. I am quite prepared to look at new evidence brought by my hon. Friend and other hon. Members concerning the SSAs.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford) *rose*——

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way!

Mr. Patten: If Opposition Members will allow me, I shall take two final interventions but no more.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: No, not a third.

Mr. Wells: I am deeply grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving us the assurance that he will look again at the method of calculating the SSAs. Is not the difficulty with the present method that on the one hand my right hon. Friend claims that the calculation of the SSAs is an objective assessment of what each council should be spending but on the other hand he is forced by Government policies and the needs of inner cities and other areas to alter their SSAs? That being so, the SSA cannot be an objective assessment of what each council needs to spend. That surely invalidates any rhetoric to the effect that councils are overspending on that objective assessment. Is not that what my right hon. Friend needs to alter?

Mr. Patten: I am accustomed to agreeing with my hon. Friend on completely uncontroversial matters such as overseas development, but, with respect, I do not think that what he says necessarily follows. Any attempt to introduce the concept of need into a distribution methodology can create problems and one has to try to be as scientific about it as possible. One could produce methodologies that were plainly unfair. We think that this one is broadly fair and that we have got things broadly right, but we are quite prepared to look at the evidence again and to make adjustments.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: No, I shall give way for the very last time to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell).

Mr. Howell: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend——

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it not help our proceedings if all those Conservative Members who were told that everything was going to be wonderful, who passed that message on to the constituents and who now feel that they have been swindled, rose at the same time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Howell: May I ask my right hon. Friend to stop bothering his head with SSAs, or whatever they are, and recognise that the scheme was flawed from the start and that nothing can repair it? Will he scrap the whole idea and replace it with a 6 per cent. charge on VAT, which everybody would pay and which would be totally fair?

Mr. Patten: I am not absolutely convinced that my hon. Friend's methodology for increasing VAT by 6 per cent. would necessarily commend itself to his electors, to mine or, for that matter, to anybody else's.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Patronage Secretary continually to intimidate and harass the Secretary of State by instructing him very audibly not to give way to his hon. Friends who are concerned about

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the inequity of the poll tax for their constituents? Should not the Secretary of State have the right to listen to the worries of his Back Benchers?

Mr. Patten: If what the hon. Gentleman says is true —[HON. MEMBERS: "It is true".] Well, I have plainly blighted my career, because I have given way about 20 times. However, I do not want to give way any more, because we are——

Mr. Dykes *rose*——

Mr. Patten: No, no, no—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] Harrow has a very good settlement.

The reason I am not intending to give way is because none of us can wait for the opportunity, in response to the few remarks that I have made, of hearing the Opposition's alternative to our proposals. We know very well that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould)I has one of the most creative minds in politics. We also know that he was so creative that halfway through the last general election campaign he sank the Labour party's then proposals on local government finance. We are looking forward to the hon. Gentleman bringing forward his new proposals on local government finance. Until he does so, we shall greet the Opposition's contributions to these debates with the genial contempt that they deserve.

I believe that the debate is about the sensible control of public expenditure. It is about priorities for public expenditure and priorities for managing the economy. I very much hope that, bearing those things in mind, my right hon. and hon. Friends will join us in the Division Lobby at 10 o'clock tonight and for some time to come.

5.12 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): The House will not need reminding that Opposition Members have conducted a long campaign against the poll tax. We have opposed it on the principle of what the Government have put forward. I am glad that that opposition has been shared not only by Labour Members but, as we have heard demonstrated this afternoon, by hon. Members of other parties, including the Conservative party.

Those who have taken that principled stand have done so because we object to the proposals first, on the grounds that they are costly and complicated; secondly, that they constitute a threat to the unity and cohesion of family life; and thirdly, that they are an obstacle to the full exercise of the rights of citizenship, which gives cause for legitimate concerns on the grounds of civil rights. Fourthly, and most important of all, we have objected to the proposals on the simple, straightforward and fundamental ground that, because they are not in any sense related to the ability to pay, they are grossly unfair and damaging.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: In a moment.

Today, while we shall certainly adhere to, and intend to continue to press, that campaign on the grounds of principle—and I expect many hon. Members of all parties also to adhere to that position—we have reached a new stage in the debate. We are no longer simply discussing questions of principle. The true significance of the reports that we are debating today is that they now allow us to look at the nuts and bolts and at the hard practical consequences of what will happen in terms of pounds and pence for individual local authorities and, even more importantly, for individual taxpayers when the bills start plopping through the letter boxes on 1 April.

We are now moving to a new phase in the debate, but our objections in principle are maintained and, I believe, will be strengthened by what we are now discovering about the practicalities. However, there is now a further opportunity for those who may never have objected in principle to the Government's proposals—who may, indeed, have endorsed the Government's proposals in principle, perhaps because they understood them or perhaps because they did not fully understand them. For whatever reason, those who may have endorsed the principle, now have an opportunity to make a new judgment about the practical consequences.

Mr. Roger King: I listened with care and attention to the hon. Gentleman's four points, the fourth of which related to the ability to pay. Some of us have discovered what is afoot in the town hall in Birmingham, where councillors have worked out that the community charge arrangements feature the concept of the ability to pay. Of its 683,000 adults, the city treasurer has calculated that 300,000 will get a rebate. We believe that it is because of that that the Labour controlling authority is putting up the rate unnecessarily to cash in on the rebate system.

Mr. Gould: I shall happily take up the case of Birmingham a little later, but I was interested to hear the slight nuance of an attack on the principle of rebates, which is a chilling prospect for any authority and for any individual taxpayer should the hon. Gentleman's view ever prevail.

We must now make—and when I say "we", I mean that the whole House and every individual hon. Member has to make—a judgment about the practical consequences of the new measures. I am delighted to see that at 5.17 in the afternoon, our Benches, and especially the Conservative Benches, are still full. It shows an almost unprecedented interest from the Conservative party in the detail of local government finance.

Mr. Dykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: By all means.

Mr. Dykes: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Bearing in mind his reputation for holding long-term consistent views on various policies, such as Europe, I advise him that another reason why the Conservative Benches are extremely well populated is not only the importance of the subject, but because we are fascinated to learn his proposed alternatives to these proposals.

Mr. Gould: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his tribute to my consistency. I shall take up his point immediately, because I am glad to have the opportunity of responding to it. I can tell him that we are making very good progress with the work that we have undertaken to prepare our alternative. There will hardly be a more pressing problem for us to face than the total unacceptability of the provisions that the Government are putting in place. We have absolutely no intention of

repeating the mistakes that are now so clearly demonstrated by Conservative Members and of hurrying the process simply because——

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will at least allow me to answer his hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) first.

I want to put this point clearly. We have every confidence that in the coming months we shall reach a conclusion that we shall be able to bring forward with confidence. That conclusion will offer us a fair and effective alternative to the poll tax. When we have that alternative, and, more importantly, when we return to government to implement it, we shall have a debate on those proposals. I hope that at least some Conservative Members who are present today will be present then when we explain the legislative effect of our proposals.

In the meantime, let us be perfectly clear. Our function this afternoon is to debate the important detail of the Government's proposals, which will be of immense importance to the constituents of every hon. Member in the House. I hope that we shall not have a volume of irrelevant interventions on Labour policy on this or that matter—*[Laughter.]* That would divert attention from matters of great seriousness. Every Conservative Member who is laughing and trying to disrupt the debate reveals only the desperation and embarrassment felt on their Benches about the debate and the scrutiny of the Government's proposals.

Mr. Chris Patten: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what happened to the last alternative and how long he expects the next one to last?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are debating a specific motion.

Mr. Gould: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I said, when we have our proposals, we shall be happy to debate them.

Mr. Batiste: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No. I want to make some progress. I shall give way in a moment.

Both Opposition and Conservative Members have an obligation to reach a new judgment on the basis of the facts, as presented in the reports. Unfortunately, that jugdment cannot be made on the basis of anything new or of substance put forward by the Secretary of State or in the reports. The facts remain substantially unchanged. Since 6 November the process of consultation has produced virtually nothing of substance by way of change.

Mr. Batiste: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I shall give way shortly, but I want to make some progress. I do not want to take an hour, as the Secretary of State did.

Bringing forward the grant is welcome but it is merely a recognition of the transitional problems that local authorities will face. Perhaps the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities can help us when he replies to the debate. It is hard to understand how bringing forward £800 million-worth of grants by two months is worth anything like £180 million worth on interest rates. The only possible explanation is that there will be some, as yet undisclosed, increase in interest rates. I suspect that he will not wish to enlighten us about that.

Mr. Chris Patten: We have plenty of other things to disagree about, so we need not disagree about this. The local authority associations would not dispute the figures that we have given. I am prepared to show the hon. Gentleman the detailed calculations by which we arrived at them.

Mr. Gould: I shall be interested to hear the detailed explanation. On the face of it, £800 million over two months does not produce an income of £180 million.

The Secretary of State deserves some sympathy from the Opposition. He faces a predicament. As on previous occasions, he revealed in his speech a certain lack of warmth towards his proposals. That is not surprising. He is not the parent of these proposals. They are not his baby. He inherited them and has little power to change them. When he first came to office, he made a brave attempt to change them by introducing a safety net and transitional relief. We must accept that the Secretary of State has reached the end of the road. He cannot, or he is unwilling to, achieve any more and he said as much when he conceded that he was unwilling to find any more money.

There is nothing that the House can do, save to vote tonight to force the Treasury's hand. This is our last chance. We can still come to the aid of the Secretary of State, who clearly lost the battle in Cabinet, by voting against the reports.

Mr. Batiste: The hon. Gentleman repeatedly asks me and my hon. Friends to make a judgment about these proposals. He will agree that, by definition, there is no such thing as a popular tax. Many of us support the proposals, because after extensive consultation lasting many years, we have concluded that they are the least undesirable among many options. May we make our judgment this afternoon on the clear understanding that the hon. Gentleman has no alternative to offer that is less undesirable than the one before us today, and that he is unlikely to produce one before the next election?

Mr. Gould: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman intervenes to such poor effect. He is trying to divert attention from an important and central difficulty which the House faces and on which, as he conceded, he must make a judgment.

The Secretary of State has a real dilemma. Not only has he lost the battle in Cabinet, but each time he talks about the safety net or transitional relief, each time he talks approvingly of the extent to which the central purse has been opened to help local authorities in their spending plans and about the need to cap the community charge or poll tax, indeed every time that he makes such a move —and he would love to move further—he undermines and destroys the only original case for introducing the poll tax. The poll tax had only one merit, or claimed merit—that it was simple, that everyone paid it and that it imposed the burden of accountability on those who received services and obliged such people to pay for them. Every move that the Secretary of State makes is a move away from the central simplicity of the poll tax. By every such expression of opinion, he demonstrates what little confidence he has in his proposals.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does the hon. Gentleman deny that the community charge will enormously benefit the vast majority of single pensioners? He said that it had only one merit. Is not that another one?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman should note that at least 1 million single pensioners will be worse off under the proposals.

The Secretary of State has attempted to find an escape route from his difficulties. He has taken refuge in facts and figures that are unreliable. The reports are based on total expenditure, as the Secretary of State described, of £32·8 billion. Everyone in local government accepts that that figure is based on a Government assumption, not on actual spending. The Secretary of State does not dispute that. The reasons for that are instructive. First, the figure based on his assumption takes no account of spending from balances and special funds, which, as some of his hon. Friends have said, had to be made to meet local authorities' spending commitments. The local authority associations estimate that that factor alone accounts for a £1·6 billion shortfall in the figure that local authorities need in order to stand still.

We then pass to the inflation rate of about 4 per cent. that has been used in making the calculation. Yet everybody, even the Secretary of State, knows that inflation is running at 7·7 per cent. and that it may well rise even further in the year at which we are looking. The local authority associations calculate that that factor means a further £900 million shortfall, leaving local authorities, even under the Secretary of State's total standard spending assessment, £2·5 billion short. That is to take no account of yet a further factor based on the further spending commitments that do not appear yet to have been taken into account.

My hon. Friends have mentioned the pay rises for fire fighters, police and teachers, but there are further commitments in the pipeline arising from the Education Reform Act 1988, the "Care in the Community" White Paper and the Environmental Protection Bill, none of which has yet been taken into account. Yet the Secretary of State assumes that local authorities will, somehow or other, be able to freeze their spending in real terms.

Mr. Chris Patten: I want to be clear about what the hon. Gentleman is saying about balances, because it is an important point. Is it the Opposition's policy that, if a council uses its balances this year in order to increase its current expenditure, next year the taxpayer should find a similar amount so that the council's current expenditure does not have to fall by that amount of balance? If so, it will be of interest to the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Gould: With great respect, the Secretary of State misunderstands my point. When we consider, as the Secretary of State invites us to do, percentage increases on levels of past spending—however strong or weak the case for doing so may be—there is no point for the purposes of that calculation in saying that spending came from this or that source, or this or that justified quarter. The fact is that that spending was undertaken. That is the level of spending. Therefore, anyone, including the Secretary of State, who wants to come to the House to say that the level of spending has been permitted to rise by a certain percentage, has to make that judgment on the basis of the actual figure rather than an assumed figure.

If the Secretary of State wishes to say that they should not have made that spending, by all means let him say so, but that is irrelevant to the question of what percentage increase he has now allowed over the actual level of spending. There is no way that he can duck that. He cannot talk in terms of percentage figures while at the same time basing his judgment on an invented figure. That is the essence of his difficulties.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): While my hon. Friend is dealing with matters that the Government have clearly not taken into consideration in the calculation of the standard spending allowance, let me add another to his list—the police precept. Avon county council, an alliance and Tory-controlled council, budgeting at the moment on a standstill budget which will produce a £500 poll tax, was allowed £34·3 million for its precept under the standard spending assessment. Its current expenditure is £38·8 million and the Home Office has just agreed an increased budget of 13 per cent. for the Avon and Somerset constabulary. That too has not been included in the calculation. The Government are forcing up local government expenditure.

Mr. Gould: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for demonstrating how futile it is to pretend that percentage increases can be based on assumed starting points. The list is long and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, East (Mr. Leighton) said, we could add interest rates as well.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I want to make some progress.

Those factors mean that the Government's assumed total standard spending is a substantial under-estimate. No one disputes that. It cannot be used with any confidence as the basis for calculating the impact of the Government's poll tax. Nevertheless, those areas are carried over in the most damaging way conceivable, in particular, into the so-called benchmark of accountability—the famous, or perhaps I should say infamous, £278 so-called community charge for standard spending.

Not only does that figure reflect all the errors that we have detailed in the assumptions that are at the basis of the total standard spending, as many hon. Members understand very well—the £278 is a direct function of that figure; it is in no sense some detailed and careful totting up of individual spending commitments, as is sometimes assumed—not only is the £278 figure flawed as a consequence of the mistakes made in calculating the total standard spending, but that mistake is exacerbated by further errors.

For example, when we look at the level of collection of the poll tax, the assumption made by the Government is that 100 per cent. will be collected. Yet everybody understands, and all the evidence is, that district treasurers and finance departments throughout Britain are naturally and properly budgeting on the assumption that they will collect no better than 95 per cent., and some may be lucky to achieve that.

Every shortfall in income and every increase in spending will have an immediate, huge and disproportionate effect on the level of the poll tax because there is no other way in which that shortfall or increased commitment can be made up. For every £1 of increased spending that

is not accounted for, or every £1 of shortfall in revenue, the poll tax will go up by £4. That means that the £278 figure, to which so much attention has been paid, is, as I said when we first heard of it on 6 November, an invention, a mirage, a fairy tale. It bears no relation to reality and no one believes it.

In case anyone needs a demonstration of that, I need do no more than turn to the Conservative controlled Association of District Councils. The chairman of that local authority association, Councillor Roy Thomason, who is himself a Conservative, in a statement issued yesterday, said:

"The total spending envisaged by Government remains at an artificially low figure. It does not allow for the actual level of inflation"

or

"the fact that many authorities took money from their balances to pay for their spending last year".

He concludes by saying:

"According to the information currently available to us"—

we must bear in mind that these are mostly Conservative-controlled district councils—

"we estimate the community charge across England is going to average about £340."

In the *Municipal Journal* of 12 January we are told:

"A 'straw poll' at a recent meeting of district treasurers showed that only one out of 246 authorities represented expected to levy a charge 'at or below' the notional figure".

It went on to say that Conservative councillor Watson from Horsham prepared a report showing that

"120 districts were expecting to exceed Government guidelines by between £76 and £100 per head. A further 65 were expecting overshoot by between £51 and £75 . . . Only nine were expecting to keep their excess to £50. And, in one instance, a district"—

unnamed—

"was expecting to overshoot by more than £150 per head."

No wonder Councillor Watson concluded that the Government's notional figures

"appear to have scant regard for the realities of life at the sharp end."

That is testimony from people involved in local government, experts in these matters and mostly members of the Conservative party. The real weight of their evidence is that many Conservative Members know that the evidence is accurate because they see it mirrored in their own experience in their own localities——

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): No doubt the hon. Gentleman will know that the Association of Labour Authorities in London has been consulting various Labour-controlled boroughs, suggesting that they should go for the highest possible community charge and thereafter blame the Government. Does he agree that the public automatically assume that the highest community charges will come from Labour-controlled authorities?

Mr. Gould: I totally reject that calumny.

The Association of County Councils may be rather more to the taste of the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey). That Conservative-controlled association has today published its comment on the Government's reports and figures. It raises the same range of objections to the accuracy of those figures as did the ADC. Under a heading,

"The unrealistic nature of the assumed £278 average community charge",

the association states:

"The wide publication by the Government of assumed community charge figures for individual areas is bound to have raised false expectations."

We also have the testimony of the much-respected Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. It has done a study which shows that if we put together the omission on inflation and accounted for a modest increase in real spending of 1·5 per cent. and allowing for a proportion of 5 per cent. of those registered adults failing to pay the community charge, this would produce an average community charge of about £344, compared with the £278 quoted in the exemplifications. The institute states:

"local authorities could only deliver an average community charge of £278 per adult by making very substantial cuts in the volume of spending—typically of the order of 8 per cent. to 10 per cent."

I am glad that the House is taking notice of the overwhelming evidence which comes from local authorities of all types and colours of political control. During the debate hon. Members will no doubt testify to the experience of their own local authorities. I mention in passing—because it has been drawn to my attention in the past couple of hours—the position in Conservative-controlled Kensington and Chelsea. In a by-election a short time ago the hon. Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) maintained that the poll tax would be about £122 per head. We now find him complaining that the poll tax bill will be at least £400. I have no doubt that Conservative Members will have similar horrific stories to tell.

I can speak for some Labour-controlled local authorities. For example, Birmingham, Wakefield and a range of other authorities have told us in telephone conversations today that for them the £278 figure is simply an invention—an absolute fiction.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Banks: If he has the opportunity I should like my hon. Friend to address the calumny perpetrated by the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) in suggesting that Labour authorities in London were being advised by the Association of London Authorities to go for the highest possible poll tax. My borough, the London borough of Newham, faces the prospect of a £503 poll tax which it realises is totally unacceptable to the poor people of Newham who will be forced to pay it. It knows that it must therefore consider making massive cuts. If the hon. Member for Surbiton thinks that we are so irresponsible that we want to penalise our own supporters, he is a bigger fool than he looks.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend offers weighty substance to my rejection of the calumny perpetrated a few moments ago.

Mr. Tracey: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is documentary evidence for what I said. It has been discussed by the Labour group on Southwark council and, it is likely, elsewhere too.

Mr. Gould: On the central question of the veracity and reliability of the £278 figure, I have produced irrefutable evidence of its rejection by everyone who has considered it. In his recent television interview with David Frost, even the Secretary of State appeared to have some doubts. He said:

"the figures may fetch up higher."

[Mr. Gould]

Why does it matter if the figure is an illusion? It matters because it is part of a propaganda battle in which a central Government—who have taken control of virtually every aspect of local government finance—will try to use that figure to show that when bills substantially in excess of £278 plop though letter boxes it has nothing to do with them. The practical consequence is that illusions have been created and expectations raised that will be shattered when the bills arrive. That is why, with that dreadful realisation, many Conservative Members are understandably concerned about what is being done in their name.

The practical consequences go further. The same mistakes that vitiate the £278 figure also affect the notional poll tax figure, on the basis of which the transitional relief is to be calculated. The transitional relief is meant to assure every poll tax payer that he or she will not be more than £3 a week worse off. The use of an inaccurate base figure means that undoubtedly many taxpayers will be more than £3 a week worse off, but will not qualify for transitional relief. There will be others who, having qualified for transitional relief, will still be more than £3 a week worse off. That is the practical consequence of the con-trick being perpetrated on the taxpayers of this country.

The Secretary of State rightly said that he was not going to deal with the national non-domestic rate which he would leave to his hon. Friend the Minister when he wound up. However, the reports set the figure for that rate—the poundage—and, therefore, we are entitled to say briefly that our objections to the national non-domestic rate follow the pattern of our objections to the poll tax. We object to this rate in principle because we see it as a further measure of unwelcome centralisation of the Government and a further attack on the autonomy and independence of local government. It breaks the link between those who receive services and those who pay for them. There is a complete and flat contradiction in the case for the non-domestic rate of the very principle which was said to commend the poll tax.

Mr. Chris Patten: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the uniform business rate. Will he confirm that the Opposition support the revaluation,?

Mr. Gould: There is no dispute on that matter. I would go further and congratulate the Government on undertaking that revaluation, which is long overdue.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I shall not give way, because I am about to conclude.

One interesting fact about the proposals by the Secretary of State is that, as far as I can tell, the inflation rate at which he thought it appropriate to set the total standard spending for the poll tax, 4 per cent., is different from the inflation rate he has used to calculate the revenue to be obtained from the national non-domestic rate. It is extraordinary that a Government who are said to pride themselves on the accuracy of their book-keeping should, in the same set of proposals, operate on inflation rates that differ by almost 100 per cent.

There are other practical problems about the incidence and impact of the national non-domestic rate. The latest Inland Revenue analaysis of 20 December shows that the combined effect of the revaluation and the new business tax will mean that 252,000, or 15·5 per cent., of businesses will face an increase in their bills of more than 100 per cent., and 246,000, or 15·2 per cent., of businesses will face increases of between 50 and 100 per cent. Therefore, nearly a third of all businesses in England and Wales will face business tax increases in excess of 50 per cent.

The Government's only defence is to point to the transitional arrangements, which purport to limit any increase to 20 per cent. in any one year, over a five-year period. Even that obscures the fact that the 20 per cent. increase is to be calculated cumulatively and takes no account of inflation, which must also be added. As a result, instead of a 20 per cent. increase from one year to the next, the maximum increase—at an inflation rate optimistically of only 6 per cent.—will be 26 per cent. in the first year, 59 per cent. in the second, and 100 per cent. in the third.

Mr. Chris Patten: Did the hon. Gentleman criticise Haringey when it increased its business rate by 56 per cent. last year?

Mr. Gould: I can understand the right hon. Gentleman wanting to divert attention from the central weaknesses of his own position, but we are debating his own proposals.

Just as with the poll tax we had the testimony of Conservative and non-Labour local authorities, so today we received a letter from Maidstone borough council—which I imagine many right hon. and hon. Members received—concerning the business rate. Maidstone, which is certainly not a Labour-controlled council, states:

"This council notes that the recently announced revaluations for non-domestic ratepayers will result in vast rate rises for the majority of local businesses, on average around 69% and in many cases in excess of 100%. This represents the withdrawal by the Government of over £bn. from the local economy".

The council goes on to express its concern and dissatisfaction.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will my hon. Friend comment on how the Government can square their claims that the uniform business rate will benefit the north when figures released this week show that, as a result of the poll tax and uniform business rate, Yorkshire and Humberside will lose more than £300 million per year? Does not that explode the myth that both innovations will greatly benefit the north?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend is right. The Local Government Information Unit has produced excellent research material to demonstrate that point.

A huge proportion of small and new businesses—particularly those using new technology, which are at the leading edge of economic advance and on which we need to rely for our future prosperity—face massive rate increases. Even on the basis of the Government's own assertions, the Government should display a decent sense of embarrassment. Year after year they have been saying that businesses were being crippled by rate increases. The situation now is that the Government themselves are imposing increases, of more than 100 per cent. in some cases, on the very type of businesses whose interests they claim to represent.

This evening, we are presented with a last chance to do something about the Government's iniquitous measure. We are opposed, both in principle and in practice, to the Government's proposals. Whatever views we may hold on the principle, we have an opportunity to modify it, by

voting down the reports. Unfortunately that would not mean the end of poll tax but—and I hope that this is of interest to Conservative Members—the Secretary of State would be obliged to return to the House with more acceptable proposals, having been strengthened in his battle with his own Cabinet colleagues.

We shall vote in the Lobby against the revenue support grant and revenue support grant distribution order reports. I hope and believe that the House will unite in attempting to improve the prospects for millions of people who are terrified by what they face. I hope that the House will unite by joining us in the Lobby this evening.

5.54 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): One of the joys of being a member of an Administration led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) is that it introduces many reforms and resolves problems that have existed for a long time. Every reform is unpopular and meets with resentment and opposition. People often fear that a reform will work against their interests. If we look back at some great reforms—those made in industrial relations are among them—it can be seen that complaints faded away when they were put into practice. Many of the trade union leaders who objected most strongly to industrial relations reforms acknowledge that responsible trade union leaders can now exercise more power because they are free from the control of Left-wing loonies, district committees, and so-called mass meetings—although they are not mass meetings in any normal sense.

Under a reform such as the community charge, some people will gain, while others will lose. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) understandably pointed out that some ratepayers will pay more in future, but he surely accepts that the average business or commercial enterprise in Britain will not pay a penny more because of the change, and in future will be protected from the violent inflationary increases imposed by some local councils in the past. For business and commerce generally, the uniform rate represents a good deal and a great step forward.

One of the problems of reforming legislation is that the large number of complaints it prompts are met by concessions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is under huge pressure to make concessions to all kinds of organisations which want to see a return almost to the status quo. It is like this House passing legislation to abolish alcohol but then excluding five categories of consumers—including, as always, farmers—and allowing drinking between 5 o'clock and 7 o'clock in Scotland. If changes are repeatedly made, the principle behind the new tax will be destroyed.

Some of the concessions made by my right hon. Friend will mean that Southend borough council, which has under different parties operated extremely efficiently and is a low spender, will have to charge its ratepayers an extra £67 per person because the benefits that it hoped to enjoy are being undermined by the transitional relief arrangements. The benefits offered by the poll tax that a low-spending council such as Southend should enjoy are being held back because of the concessions made to other areas. To that extent, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will exercise great caution before making further concessions to those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who are concerned about the effects of the reforms.

I ask my right hon. Friend to consider also two other matters. The effects of the new business rate on certain shops in London will be horrific. Shops in some parts of the country will gain but those in London—and even some shops in Southend, where the increase in the general business rate will be hardly anything—will be hit badly. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will reconsider whether the 20 per cent., 26 per cent. or 29 per cent. rate could be lower.

As to rebates, I find it difficult to explain to constituents who are married or who are living together why the £8,000 saving that is allowed in respect of a single person is applied also to a couple. That seems very strange, particularly when compared with the situation of a mother and daughter living together—who are treated differently from a husband and wife living together.

I assure my hon. Friends, who understandably have deep worries about the proposals, that if by any chance the orders are voted down tonight, there would be resentment in Scotland of a kind that we have not seen for a long time, and it would be fully justified.

I get the impression that people in Scotland are not just concerned about cash spending. They think that hon. Members in England are not concerned about their welfare, and that they do not show the same attitude towards Scotland as they show to their own country and their own constituencies.

The community charge has been working in Scotland for some time, and the Scots face exactly the same problems that we are worried may arise in England during the next year. If right hon. and hon. Members who voted for the community charge in Scotland—not one Conservative Member voted against it, although there were three Conservative abstentions—vote against its being applied in England because they are worried about its implications, it could undermine the basis of the Union.

We live in the United Kingdom, and we have a genuine obligation to treat every part of the country in the same way. Hon. Members may say that we have learnt from the way that the charge is working in Scotland, and we now have the figures for our constituencies. However, that would give credence to the belief that Scotland was used as a scapegoat to try out the measure before it was introduced in England, and that is not the case. The Secretary of State for Scotland—who works so hard for that country—thought that it might be helpful if the new charge was introduced there after the rate revaluation.

The Conservative party believes in the United Kingdom, and I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends, who want to maintain that unity, will realise that we are not simply discussing whether one area will pay £50 more and another area £60 less, or what the Gallup polls will say next week. Something more significant is at stake.

If a party that almost unanimously supported a measure to apply the charge in Scotland undermines the charge in England, without a great deal of discussion and thought, the party would let down democracy throughout the United Kingdom, and we all believe in democracy.

6.2 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I think that what the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) has just said is that, if one makes a ghastly mistake once, one should make it again. People in Scotland would be delighted to see the charge removed in England, and would hope that its removal in Scotland would follow.

It is not the merits of the poll tax that are at issue tonight, but the arrangements that the Government have made to bring it in. There are better alternatives to poll tax. Frankly, even the rating system begins to look attractive when compared to some of its deficiencies. A proper local income tax would be a better alternative.

The poll tax is unfair to individuals, and that unfairness will be multiplied by the deficiencies that have been shown up during the debate. Average earners will pay the same amount as the Duke of Westminster, Richard Branson or the Prime Minister and her husband. That is absurdly unfair.

Worse than that—the Government have pegged relief for the worst-hit individuals and households at a wholly imaginary level of what the poll tax might be. The Government have set that level, and the promise that initially individuals and households will not pay more than £3 a week will not be realised because there will be a huge gap, throughout the country, not just in Labour-controlled areas, between what the Government say the poll tax will be, and what it actually will be.

The standard spending assessment is the fundamental reason for that gap. What an extraordinary title—it suggests that an official from the Department of the Environment has gone round the country, interviewing everybody, to work out which services are needed, and how much it would cost to administer them in each area. Of course that has not happened. A few statistics have been thrown around by the Department. They cover only a handful of the services that local authorities provide at the moment. Some averaging out has been done, and a figure has been plucked out of the air, after a grossly simplified exercise that bears no relation to the real costs of administering those services.

Among the extraordinary features included in the arrangements is an assessment that clearing snow will cost more in Brent than it will in Cumbria.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. David Hunt): The hon. Gentleman is sadly out of date. That is not correct and if he reflects on the figures he will see that it is not the case. Many recommendations have been made about a different way to deal with snow clearance in highway maintenance, and they were accepted. Will the hon. Gentleman please look at the new figures, rather than figures that are some eight weeks out of date?

Mr. Beith: I know that the Government got the same figures completely wrong for Northumberland. They have revised the snow clearance figure and we are glad of that, but it is absurd that they got it so wrong in the first place.

What is more important in relation to the figures, is that inflation is not running at 4 or 5 per cent., but at twice the level that the Government had assumed when they first devised the figures. Each 1 per cent. by which they mistake the inflation figure adds £9 to the poll tax paid by an individual.

Each poll tax payer in Northumberland will pay £80 more than the Government's original forecast, before rebates, because of the failure to allow for the real level of inflation, and how it affects council services, and because of other mistakes and miscalculations in the measurement of spending. Those factors will push up the poll tax in areas such as Berwick.

Local authorities cannot prevent that unless they sack teachers or fail to honour the pay awards for the education, police and fire services. When local authorities study the figures, as they have done in Berwick, they are completely mystified. For example, Teesdale has a higher standard spending assessment than Berwick although, in nearly every way, the two authorities are exactly comparable—for example, in the size of population and its sparsity, and in other rural characteristics.

In many cases the figures are clearly absurd. The East Yorkshire borough council's figures are out of line with all comparable surrounding authorities.

How can the Government insist that everyone in local government has got it wrong and that they have got it right? The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has criticised the figures. The Select Committee on the Treasury has pointed out that the figures are dubious, although they are the only figures that it can use. Conservative local authorities, Conservative councillors throughout the country and the Conservative-controlled Association of District Councils—of which I am the vice-president, a post which carries no salary or fee—says:

"The Association emphatically rejects the proposition that the DOE's notional figures for Community Charge, based on their assumptions, represent what the charges would be, if authorities continued to provide services at the present level."

That body includes members from all political parties, although it is dominated by the Conservative party, and it knows that the figures are wrong.

Local authorities cannot meet the poll tax figures put forward by the Government without cuts, which is not what the electorate wants. One is bound to ask whether that is incompetence on the part of the Government, or a cynical device to limit the amount of relief that they have to pay, under the transitional relief scheme. Or is it a confidence trick? Are they advertising a product at a price at which no one can offer it? If that happened in the marketplace, the Government would attack and criticise it, but that is what they have done. They have said to poll tax payers in Britain, "It's all right, you only have to pay so much." However, they must know, because of all the representations that they have received, that their prophecies will not be fulfilled anywhere in the country.

Are the Government asking local authorities to sack teachers or not to honour the police pay agreement and not to pay their own staff the nationally negotiated rates? Only the most drastic cuts will enable many local authorities to meet the poll charge figures that have been put forward.

Mr. David Hunt: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is arguing that there should be no controls at all on local government spending. Perhaps he could clarify that. Surely there must be some protection for individual charge payers, as there has been for individual ratepayers in the past. Why, for instance, does the hon. Gentleman think that the Liberal-controlled Isle of Wight council

decided in 1986-87 to increase spending by 20 per cent. —far more than the rate of inflation? It has never justified that increase.

Mr. Beith: The mechanism for controlling local government spending is called the ballot box. It enables voters to vote out councils that pursue policies that they do not like. That is supposed to be the essence of what the Government are doing, but the system that they have devised does not achieve their aim. I might add that the electors of the Isle of Wight showed confidence in what their council had done by voting it back into office after it had improved the quality of its services.

The safety net provisions have added to the confusion. People whose local authorities provide a lower level of service—many of them not well off—must, in the first year, contribute money to keep the poll tax down in other authorities with higher levels of service. That is evident in Northumberland and other areas.

The Secretary of State opened his speech by saying that it would be clear to everyone that the level of poll tax reflects the spending policy of local councils. Will anyone seriously be able to say that after today's debate? The Secretary of State knows perfectly well that it is not true. The level of poll tax will reflect Government decisions on standard spending assessments; it will reflect safety net provisions; and it will reflect the endless mistakes and miscalculations on the part of the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Chris Patten: Name one.

Mr. Beith: The Secretary of State was not in the Chamber a moment ago when I did name one. His hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities rose to point out that the mistake about snow clearance had been corrected. Another obvious mistake was the one related to inflation: the present inflation rate is very much higher than it was when the calculations were made.

The Government's published poll tax figures are a cynical exercise in pretending that local public services could be run at much lower cost if the Secretary of State himself controlled every local authority in the country. Conservative-controlled councils and Conservative councillors around the country tell him that that is not so, and we all know that it is not so. The right hon. Gentleman has left the councils with a choice between a squalid collapse of the services on which our children's education, our environment and our law and order depend, and castigation by him for overspending.

Unless Conservative Members realise the folly of it all this evening, a grossly unfair tax will be made even more unfair by the way in which it is being brought in. That has already done irreparable damage to the future of the Tory party in Scotland; it will do the same in England, as I believe at least some Conservative Members have come to recognise.

6.12 pm

Sir Ian Gilmour (Chesham and Amersham): The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) certainly found a brilliant solution to Labour's policy-making difficulties: to have no policy at all, and to say magnanimously that if and when he had a policy we would be allowed to discuss it. That strikes me as marvellous technique, and I recommend it to some of his shadow Cabinet colleagues.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State opened the debate in a masterly way, and I think that the whole House will agree that any deficiencies that Government policy may contain should not be laid at his door. He and my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government had a very ugly and unwelcome baby planted on their doorstep, which was certainly not their fault, and they have already done their best to make it slightly more acceptable.

I want to stick to the general point, but perhaps I could illustrate it by means of a local example. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities has told me, Buckinghamshire, being a rich county, has done very well out of the new system, obtaining an increase of some 30 per cent. in its external finance. The capital guidelines, however, show us something very different. Buckinghamshire has much the same population as Cambridgeshire and is growing in much the same way; its capital expenditure in the current year is only a little less than Cambridgeshire's. According to the guidelines, however, Buckinghamshire is one of the six counties that will experience a reduction—the biggest, in fact, of 24 per cent.—while Cambridgeshire will receive an increase of 55 per cent.

As a result, while the present position is one of approximate parity, next year Cambridgeshire will receive nearly two and a half times as much as Buckinghamshire. Already, serious cuts have had to be made, particularly in education spending. I realise that the Department of the Environment is only the umbrella Department, but it is nevertheless the Department holding the umbrella. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has spoken of the importance of his capital projects, and of giving more to places with higher populations. Those criteria certainly apply to Buckinghamshire, but, while general LEA expenditure is rising by 38 per cent., that of Buckinghamshire is falling by 42 per cent. Such examples demonstrate, surely, that there is little reason in the system.

On Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill, I opposed the whole system, and voted for the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). Since then, along with many of my hon. Friends, I have stayed away from debates on subsidiary legislation: we thought that we would let the Government get on with it. We have now reached what could be described as the final coping stone—hardly a triumphal arch, but the last bit of a stone wall into which we shall all be walking, bumping our heads and barking our shins, for some time ahead. In those circumstances, I felt that today's debate required different considerations.

My hon. Friends and I opposed the original legislation——

Mr. Teddy Taylor: In England.

Sir Ian Gilmour: In England. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that I abstained on every part of the Scottish legislation.

My hon. Friends and I opposed the original legislation on four main grounds. The first was the obvious ground that the tax is wholly unfair. That is obvious from its name, apart from anything else: a Government who were doing something fair and sensible would not need to come up with an Orwellian euphamism line "community charge"; they would simply say, "A poll tax is a poll tax is a poll tax," as Gertrude Stein might have said.

[Sir Ian Gilmour]

Secondly, it is wholly illogical to impose a property tax on businesses and do away with such a tax on individuals. If there is a justification for a property tax on businesses, there must presumably be one for a property tax on individuals. Thirdly, the tax is extremely expensive; fourthly, it is very difficult to collect.

Those are the four grounds of principle. There is a fifth ground that affects only Conservative Members—the political unpopularity of the measure, and the fact that it is potentially disastrous. I understand that that is giving particular concern to my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), and I agree that the tax is very dangerous for the Conservative party. I disagree with him and his supporters, however, in that I believe that its unpopularity flows from the four dangers and disadvantages that I have already mentioned. They are not separate from it, or an excrescence on the face of it; this tax is innately wrong, and its unpopularity stems from that—although, no doubt, adjustments can and should be made.

I welcome my right hon. Friend and his associates to our colours, although I wish that they had enlisted a little earlier, as we could have done with their help on Second Reading and in the debate on the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East. My right hon. Friend's conversion is especially significant because he was in the Department of the Environment at quite a significant moment, and was very much involved in the proposals. In fact, I have a feeling that he even announced some of them himself.

That important conversion leads me to suspect that my right hon. Friend is not the only one to be converted. I cannot help thinking that, now that he is the chairman of the Conservative party, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has also changed his mind, although for understandable reasons he cannot express his views very openly. I believe that almost every Conservative Member has been similarly converted. After all, the tax was thought up at a time when it was believed that the Labour party was completely unelectable and that the electoral consequences were therefore of no importance. In my view, the election of the Labour party is still highly unlikely, but no one can say that it is impossible. The terms of political trade have changed fundamentally, which makes the imposition of this tax a political disaster as well as something that is entirely wrong in every other way.

I believe that new Government thinking is necessary. That is not unheard of: we have had 12 or 13 different systems of local government finance since 1979, so one more would not make any difference. The only common feature of the systems so far is that each has been worse than the last. There are now grounds for optimism. Because the present one is so bad, the next one must be better.

I urge on my right hon. Friend some new thinking. For all those reasons, some of my hon. Friends and I will be unable to support him tonight.

6.20 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) made a number of general points with which I agree and which I shall reiterate. The Government's proposals on total standard spending represent their assumption of what local authorities should spend to provide what they consider to be an adequate level of service.

We learned today from the Secretary of State that he has not taken account of the needs element in the new system. The old needs element has been done away with because, according to the Secretary of State, it is not scientific or objective and it is difficult to quantify. Local authorities have been saying for some time that the needs element is indeed difficult to quantify, but that since it exists, it should be taken account of properly.

Ingenious formulae were devised by civil servants to try to represent the needs element in the old system of financing local government. But the Secretary of State has now done away with that element, and the Government say that they will not take account in any scientific way of what local authorities, particularly those in inner cities, need to reflect in their spending because of the situation they face.

That situation, it must be remembered, has been brought about by the Government. Their policies have caused problems for local authorities, such as unemployment, cuts in the housing programme and changes in social security benefits. Those actions by the Government have forced local authorities, particularly inner-city ones, to recognise that the needs of their residents cannot be met in the normal run-of-the-mill way of financing.

The Government have created the needs, but they now refuse to recognise them in the new formula. That is why the Government are in difficulty in squaring the situation between SSAs and the actual expenditure of local authorities, because that expenditure would be based on needs of which the Government will not take account.

In the Government's figures for so-called aggregate external finance—being special grants, revenue support grant, uniform business rate and so on—we find that for 1991, the amount is put at about £23·1 billion, of which the business rate will contribute £10·5 billion, while the revenue support grant will contribute only £9·5 billion. In other words, the uniform business rate will be contributing more than the Government's revenue support grant towards local government expenditure.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Why not?

Mr. Grant: The answer to the hon. Lady's question is that business people will be contributing more than the Government's major contribution towards the cost of local government services.

Mrs. Currie: Where does the hon. Gentleman think the Government get their money? Most of it comes from business.

Mr. Grant: The Government get their money from business in a number of ways, including taxes. I suspect that business people will feel injured when they discover that the Government are extracting even more from them, when the Government should themselves be responsible for that aspect of financing local government. The Government have, in effect, conned business people into paying even more towards local government finance.

The Government proportion of local government finance has been reducing steadily throughout the last decade. In 1980-81, the Government were reponsible for about 60 per cent. of local government revenue finance. In 1990-91 they will be responsible for 38 per cent. a decrease

of over 22 per cent. in a mere 10 years. In other words, the Government have cut their support for that sector, have forced businesses to increase their share of local government finance and have forced ordinary ratepayers in local authority regions to increase their share of it.

For total standard spending, the Government argue that £32·8 billion is more that adequate to pay for all the services that local authorities provide. The Secretary of State arguod today that there had been an increase of 11 per cent. over the level of Government provision for 1989-90. But the Government are not taking into account what local authorities are spending in the current year.

Officers from central and local government estimate that the real amount needed to continue present local authority policies and service levels in 1990-91, including a realistic assumption of inflation at 7 per cent., is about £35·3 billion. That is £2·5 billion more than the Government provision, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said. If the realistic figure of £35·3 billion were used, the average poll tax would rise to £348, an increase of £70 on the Government's figure of £278.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham spoke of the changes in the spending assessment having a pound-for-pound effect on the amount of revenue support grant that an individual authority will receive. Where actual expenditure differs from standard spending assessment, that difference will be wholly reflected in the poll tax to be levied, and my hon. Friend mentioned a ration of 1:4.

Once a local authority is over the threshold of the SSA, local people will be forced to finance the expenditure of the local council. The Government will accuse any local authority which levies a poll tax in excess of £278 of being profligate, whereas the main reasons for levying such a poll tax will be that the level of Government provision is inadequate and its distribution is arbitrary.

Being a Haringey Member, I wish to discuss the effect of the new scheme on that area. It has been estimated that Haringey council will have the highest possible poll tax, in the region of £550. A reason used by the Government to justify the introduction of the uniform business rate was that it would protect business from high spending and so-called profligate local authorities. Haringey would undoubtedly be included by the Government in that classification.

In 1990-91, the London borough of Haringey will collect about £57 million in rates from local businesses and others. But Haringey council will receive only £41·3 million from the national pot. That will hardly protect local non-domestic ratepayers from so-called greedy Haringey. How can Haringey be more accountable, which is said to be the object of the scheme, when it will receive less than three quarters of the business rate that it collects?

The Government determine rateable values and fix the rate in the pound which must be levied. In 1991, Haringey will lose about £20 million as a result of the switch from rates to the national business rate. In the consultation paper which was issued in November 1989, the Department of the Environment indicated that Haringey would have a standard spending assessment of £171 million approximately and would receive revenue support grant of £111 million——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time.

Mr. Grant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I thought you indicated that I had two minutes.

Mr. Speaker: The limit is 10 minutes. When the lights on the digital clock stop flashing, the hon. Gentleman must sit down.

6.29 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I have voted consistently for the reform of local government finance, and I intend to support the Government tonight. It is a great pity that many Opposition Members, whose constituencies, like mine, stand to be substantial gainers from the reform, have absented themselves. They will not stand up and say that the reform is good, so some of us on this side have to do so.

The new system of community charge and business rate is a major improvement over the old system, which gave far too much power to local government to soak local businesses without redress. That happened a great deal in my area. It gave far too little power to ratepayers, who in some areas were a minority of voters, to control the actions of spendthrift local councils like the incompetent and inefficient idiots who are currently running Derbyshire county council.

When it comes to the community charge, in my area of the Derbyshire, South constituency the population has been growing steadily for some years and a large proportion of the people are in newly rated properties. As a result many will benefit considerably from the community charge; I am pleased that that will be the case.

The current domestic rate per hereditament in Derbyshire is £503 on average, 20 per cent. higher than the average domestic rate for comparable county councils. It is considerably more, for example, than the rate in wonderful Wandsworth, which stands at £327. The rate that my constituents have to pay per property is as high as the deprived inner-London average. By no stretch of the imagination can we say that Derbyshire is a deprived area except in so far as its unemployment is higher than unemployment in London. One reason is that for so long our rates have been very high.

The main gainers will be single elderly people. I have many people like that who live in bungalows and who are currently paying £900 or £1,000 in rates. The main losers will be families where there are several working adults, living perhaps in a terraced house. I can live with that. I can explain that to my local people and I believe that it is widely understood and accepted.

Mr. Ralph Howell: How would my hon. Friend explain to my constituent, a lady of 72, who has a total income of £2,000 a year and about £13,000 capital, that she should pay exactly the same as the most wealthy person in north Norfolk?

Mrs. Currie: First, rebates are available for many groups; secondly, with all due respect to my hon. Friend, in my area anyone with £13,000 capital in the bank would not be regarded as poor.

The message that has to go to many people in areas like mine is one that we have been trying to put across for a long time. Recently I spoke to a business club in Derby. Some business men who are not in my area but who will face high charges asked what they could do. The answer is to ask how many of them turned out last May to vote in the county council elections and support sensible policies.

[Mrs. Currie]

How many people did not bother to vote but stayed at home out of pique or for whatever reason? They find themselves once again with a Labour county council which is one of the most high-spending councils in the country. The message to people like that in my area, as in many other Labour areas, has to be, "If you do not come out and support sensible policies at elections, don't be surprised if you do not like the rate or the community charge that is set; if you did not vote, then don't moan, because that is the way the system works." In my view that is right.

Coming to the real gainers, business people throughout Derbyshire think that the change to the national business rate is super. They are delighted. In my area the business rate has been so high that valuations would have to go up nine times for people to pay as much. That is the break-even point for business—nine times. Most of the factories, warehouses, workshops and shops will see their valuations increase only by two, three or four times. They are set to be big gainers.

I accept entirely that it is right and proper that if we cap the losers we should cap the gainers. If my right hon. Friend ever feels like uncapping the gainers, we will be delighted. We recognise in Derbyshire that it is not just a question of politics, as the Secretary of State said. If we were to do as the Confederation of British Industry suggested—cap the losers but not the gainers—that would put £2 billion extra into the economy all at once. I understand that that would be inflationary. It seems to me odd that that is called for by the Opposition, who never normally listen to the CBI, at a time when they are saying that taxes and income tax should not be cut. Two billion pounds is the equivalent of a 1·5 per cent. cut in income tax. If it is inflationary to do that, it is inflationary also to do what the CBI suggests.

In Derbyshire my business people have given a sigh of relief and a loud call of welcome for the suggested change. We have a small number of losers. Some supermarkets in the out-of-town shopping centres, which were extremely conservatively rated in 1973, will have to pay more. Sainsbury's will be out of pocket. On the whole the supermarkets are doing very well these days and it seems right and proper that they should support the local economy.

The new system will be a big improvement. For my local business people to be on a level footing with the rest of the country is the best news that any of them could have. We do not want subsidies, regional aid or Government grants. We just want a fair crack of the whip, the same as everybody else. I hear colleagues talking about how rates in their areas will go up. Our rates will come down to their levels. Businesses in my area have been paying five to 10 times as much as businesses elsewhere.

I appreciate the concern of my hon. Friends, but it is in Derbyshire that we have the unemployment and derelict sites. We will be able to get cracking on redeveloping our areas and leading the country's resurgence in manufacturing business once again. I am delighted to welcome the reform and I look forward to seeing it in operation as soon as possible.

6.37 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I have made enough speeches about the principle of the poll tax in the past few years, so I shall confine myself to my own constituency. I want to explain, and also complain bitterly about, why Birmingham will be forced to levy a poll tax of about £410. We have been told that the average poll tax bill should be £278. The poll tax surcharge, which is called the safety net but which is not a safety net when one has to pay it, will be £69. That puts the charge up to £347. Birmingham is not a high-spending authority. In fact, it spends bang on Government guidelines. Some of us have complained that spending on social services and education has been on the low side. In 1989-90 we are spending £3 million more than the grant-related expenditure assessment of £624 million. Therefore, our expenditure is very close to the Government guideline.

The people of Birmingham will be affected by the Government's underestimate of the rate of inflation and their failure to take account of realistic pay awards. The average pay award for teachers will be 7·5 per cent. The Government's failure will cost Birmingham an extra £6 million. Changes to the debt repayment arrangement and accounting changes to the transport supplementary grant will cost the city £20 million on top of Government assessments.

How is the poll tax figure of £278 reached? Without Government grants, the city would have to levy a poll tax of £1,060 for the standard spending assessment. The joint boards add an extra £88, making a total of £1,148. If the Government grant of £870 is removed, that leaves the average figure of £278. The cost of the safety net is £69, making a total of £347. Inflation and pay awards will add an extra £9; changes to the debt repayment and transport grant add an extra £28; and other items, including the capital programme for the national exhibition centre, overspending by the police and fire brigade and growth, with which I will deal in a moment, add an extra £26, making a total of £410.

Growth is forecast to be 2·4 per cent. or, to be precise, £17 million. Growth in social services will be £2·4 million and in education £8·4 million. There is nothing in Birmingham's SSA to take account of nursery education. We have more places in nursery classes per head of pre-school children than any Tory authority in the country —we are not even the best among Labour authorities—but there is no grant for nursery education provision.

More cash must be spent on social services. Community care is a key element of local government, yet the Government have placed an impost on it. There is no question but that community care will become more expensive. Its purpose is not to save money but to improve the lives of people who can better live in the community.

On Thursday 4 January, Birmingham city council held a seminar at Council house to explain to interested parties the consequences of the community care costs. My city council is rubbished by Tory Members, yet not one of the six Conservative Members of Parliament for Birmingham attended that seminar. That demonstrates their interest in care in the community.

Mr. Roger King: The hon. Gentleman will know that we have various other commitments. I sent a letter to the

authority explaining that I could not attend the meeting, which was held at an inconvenient time. It knows well that the best time for such meetings is Mondays and Fridays.

Mr. Rooker: Yes, but Thursday 4 January was during the recess and the invitations were sent out in November. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) was quoted in one of the midlands newspapers last Sunday as speaking with all the authority of a former number-plate salesman who will not be able to sell the Government's poll tax numbers to the citizens of Birmingham.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South) *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: I will not give way again because of the time limit.

Assuming a 10 per cent. increase next year, revenue from rates in my constituency would amount to £18 million. Assuming a figure of £410, revenue from the poll tax in my constituency will amount to £29 million. My constituents will be required to pay £11 million more in poll tax than they would have paid in rates. Those figures are irrefutable; I have checked the rateable values of 7,000 dwellings—about 20 per cent. of my constituency. Assuming that half the households were on half rebate, they would still pay £8·5 million more in poll tax than they would have paid in rates. Birmingham will collect the same amount of money—the poll tax is designed only to replace domestic rates. Who will pay £11 million less because of the additional £11 million that my constituents will pay?

The massive dislocation that that will cause to family incomes and finances does not bear thinking about. The Government have said that no one should pay more than £3 extra, which is ludicrous. For a single person in Birmingham to benefit from the transitional payments, he would currently be paying a rate bill of £92—a rateable value of £36. Nowhere in Birmingham has such a rateable value. Other households will not benefit unless their current rates are £340—a rateable value of £133. Average rates in Birmingham are £500, so few people will benefit.

The figures are fiddled. They do not take account of the reality of expenditure, of the population or of the ability to pay, which, as the Secretary of State knows, is Labour Members' central objection.

There must be accountability through the ballot box and annual elections. We in Birmingham would like annual elections again, and there should be annual elections in the shires and in London for a quarter or a third of the councils. That would be one way of achieving true local government accountability. If the Secretary of State wants to improve local government accountability, he should arrange for annual elections for all councils and return to the big cities the missing year of no election resulting from the abolition of county councils.

I want to draw the House's attention to early-day motion 258 on Tory-controlled Mid-Suffolk district council. It has complained bitterly to the Minister and asked its Member of Parliament to take action. It makes exactly the same complaints as Labour Members and Labour-controlled authorities—that the Government have not taken account of the use of balances to cushion the rate levy and have not taken sufficient account of the realistic rate of inflation. Inner-city and rural areas and Tory and Labour-controlled authorities are complaining justifiably about how the Government have introduced the poll tax.

I reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said about this being the Government's last chance to think again. I ask Conservative Members to do the sensible thing tonight —to vote against the reports and to get a more sensible arrangement for the immediate future.

Mr. Devlin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Was it in order for the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) to criticise my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) for being absent from a meeting when all but eight Labour Members have absented themselves from this important debate?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. What the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said certainly was not out of order.

6.47 pm

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on at least one point. If there is to be accountability in local government, we should again closely reconsider annual elections for quarters or thirds of local authorities. That may be a good path to take. If we are to have such accountability, those who authorise spending should be called upon to pay the bills. If they can pass the bills on to someone else, such as the taxpayer or that lovely creature the Government, who distribute largesse at no cost to anyone, there will be no pressure on voters to consider the cost of the proposals for which they are voting. The hon. Member for Perry Barr will probably agree that voters should know what proposals will cost when they vote. On that basis, he should support the community charge, although I shall return to some of the problems that may arise from that in a moment.

I declare an interest as a director of several public companies, which are listed in the Register of Members' Interests——

Mr. Tony Banks: The right hon. Gentleman has only 10 minutes to list them.

Mr. Tebbit: It was just as well that the hon. Gentleman was in order.

Some of those companies are favourably affected by the introduction of the new business rate and others are unfavourably affected. That has given me an especially good overview of how the national business rate will operate. As I think the House knows, in general it will increase the burden on businesses in the south and decrease the burden on businesses in the north. It will increase the burden on service industries such as retailing, and decrease it on manufacturing. In effect, it will do precisely some of those things that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) has always asked the Government to do. It will help to close the north-south divide. I am surprised that he is so critical of the measure. Many of us are in favour of proposals in theory, but when we realise how they will work out we often quibble about them. Perhaps my right hon. Friend is suffering from that.

In the domestic area, it is a little more difficult to consider the question of gainers and losers. In some respects, we have moved away from what some of us thoght to be the purity of the concept of the community charge. Why have we done so? Every step taken has been

[Mr. Tebbit]

an endeavour to make it easier for those who will be adversely affected. To some extent, that has blunted the effect of the principle upon which we are all agreed—that those who vote for expenditure should pay for that expenditure.

Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent constituents who consistently voted for low expenditure over the years complain that they are now being called upon again to help pay for the high expenditure of other local authorities. My right hon. and hon. Friends have made proper and laudable efforts to ease the impact of the community charge, and especially to do something for those many people who live in low-rated areas and who, until now, have paid a relatively small part of the cost of local government services.

I hope that all my right hon. and hon. Friends will take into account the fact that, if the community charge were not introduced, there would have to be a rating revaluation. I venture to suggest that, had that happened, different hon. Members would be complaining, but that there would no fewer of them. We should make up our minds that this is the system of local government for the future. At the very least, it is no more unfair than the old rating system, which was absolutely absurd and should have been swept away years ago. We should put some of the blame for the excessively high community charge figures where it belongs.

I received a letter today from a constituent who, as a local employer, attended a meeting in the London borough of Waltham Forest to discuss the proposed community charge for that area. I remind those hon. Members who are not familiar with my borough that it has the distinction of being second only to the borough in which the Leader of the Opposition lives for the highest ever rate rise in one year. It chose the year of the general election to increase its rates by more than 60 per cent. Politically speaking, the local Conservatives probably felt that that was a monstrous own goal for the Labour party.

After a 60 per cent. increase in one year, what can the local electors expect other than a high community charge bill? The authority has been a consistent overspender, yet its services are far worse than they were under the previous administration. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) is familiar with that local authority because he once served there as a Conservative councillor. At that time the rates were well under control —not because there was a rating system rather than a community charge system, but because it was a well-managed authority that maintained a good level of services and a low level of expenditure.

My constituent said that at the meeting one of those present questioned council expenditure and specifically asked what steps, if any, were being taken to reduce the financial burden on both non-domestic and domestic ratepayers. The answer was none. When there are complaints about the level of the community charge in my borough, the blame should fall upon those who flatly refuse to take any measure to cut expenditure in what has been a grossly extravagant council. Only recently, I was told by a senior member of the town hall staff that, in his opinion as a long-serving local government officer, the community charge in my borough could be reduced by £100 if a sensible administration were in force. That would make the proposed community charge figure very different.

I have no hesitation in supporting the Government tonight in carrying through the final stage of the implementation of the community charge. Of course it will be uncomfortable in places, but I beg my right hon. and hon. Friends to remember that we would also have faced an uncomfortable time with revaluation, which would have shifted the burden in what would have seemed to those who had received arbitrary benefit over the years to be an arbitrary increase in their share of the expenditure.

I hope that tonight my right hon. and hon. Friends, whatever their misgivings about some of the detail, will accept what was said by the hon. Member for Perry Barr —that we want accountability in local government. It is my view that that accountability comes only when those who call for expenditure are called upon to pay for it.

6.57 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): By now the Secretary of State must be in no doubt that the Government's attempts to simplify the standard spending assessments for local authorities, and their selective was of calculating the safety net grant, will be disastrous for many local authorities. What my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said earlier in a whisper needs repeating in a louder voice—that the SSA has made an ASS of the Government.

The provision of the safety net grant is supposed to protect local authorities such as Tameside from changes in grant between this year and next. Instead, the reverse is likely as a result of direct actions by the Government and Ministers. Although local authorities are facing inflation that is currently running at 8·5 per cent. and rising, the Government have decided that Tameside's spending will increase by only 4·8 per cent. That decision alone will affect the safety net grant by £4·7 million, or £29 per adult.

As a result of Government legislation, local authorities face many new responsibilities such as implementing local management of schools, the national curriculum and others that have been spelt out by hon. Members. Nevertheless, the Government have chosen to ignore that when calculating council's spending figures for next year. In Tameside, that will result in an underpayment in grant of £10 per adult. As the Secretary of State has decided that the first £25 per adult loss in grant is not to be protected, that will cost Tameside poll tax payers £25 per adult, or £4 million, in lost grant.

I wish to illustrate another glaring injustice in my local authority. Tameside recently made a one-off contribution of £2·5 million to the housing revenue account to pay off debt. Hon. Members must agree that it is outrageous that that exceptional payment has been included in the Government's calculations, and so deducted from the safety net grant, not only for next year, but for the next three years. That will amount to £7 million over that period.

All these factors mean that the residents in my local authority area face a poll tax bill of £358 instead of £278. Each adult will have to pay £70 more. Next year new legislative requirements will force the council to spend an additional £1·5 million on debt repayment. On top of that, the poll tax is expected to cost £1·3 million to collect—more than the cost under the previous rating system.

Those two factors will add £17 per adult to the poll tax, without any benefit to the residents. What will happen in 1992, when the safety net grant is no longer available, is clear: the poll tax payers will have to bear the full burden. If the Government believe that the ratepayers will blame all this on local councils, I assure them that that is wishful thinking. We will ensure that the focus of attention is those Members who join the Government tonight in the Division Lobby. That is a promise.

Changes in the formulae used to assess spending needs will cost my local borough about £5 million of its rate support grant. As I am sure the Minister of State knows —when Ministers go to my area, they recognise this fact —my borough is already greatly underfunded and this is a direct result of the policies of this uncaring Government, although Ministers may not agree with that. It is a deprived borough, which needs assistance and better treatment than it gets from the Government. Last year, for example, the Government thought that Tameside should spend £19 million on social services. Under the new rules, this has been slashed by 13 per cent., to £16·6 million. Furthermore, Tameside is suddenly expected to make large cuts of £2·1 million in the so-called minor services —community protection, recreation and the like—and £1 million in education. Once again, the Government are completely out of touch with reality.

Our population is aging rapidly. We need more spending on social services to care for our elderly—not less —yet the Government expect authorities such as Tameside to make cuts of £2·4 million. Such cuts will affect the most vulnerable in our society. Tameside will be forced to restrict the free use by voluntary groups of minibuses which have been specially adapted for the disabled and the handicapped. Meals-on-wheels charges will have to be increased above the inflation rate. The standards of provision of home help services, of which Tameside is proud, will deteriorate.

These are the inescapable effects of the Government's proposals. Councils throughout the country are forced against their will and the collective will of the people whom they represent to take central Government decisions, not local government decisions. So much for setting the people free. The issues which I have highlighted may be considered by many hon. Members to be parochial, but they are real and worrying to the people whom I represent, and I make no apology to the House for raising them.

On a different note, I wish to draw attention to the concern which is widely felt in the sporting world about the Government's decision to include sports clubs in the uniform business rate. The outcome for many clubs could be catastrophic, with many forced into bankruptcy and others forced to raise membership subscriptions to a level that it will be impossible for the less-well-off to afford. Clubs are faced with one more example of the Government's disregard for the future of sport.

It was hoped that, in view of the increasing worry which was expressed across the board about the decline of sport in our schools and the poor standard of fitness among our nation's children, the Government might have thought twice before further jeopardising the 150,000 voluntary clubs that provide sporting opportunities for thousands of people. Such voluntary clubs are non-profit-making and make no demand on the public purse, yet, following the Local Government Finance Act 1988, they are facing higher bills and increased rate charges.

Although local authorities have been urged to give discretionary rate relief to such clubs, senior finance officers throughout the land say that there is little hope of it being granted. The general secretary of the Central Council of Physical Recreation told me today that his initial optimism on receiving the news from the Minister for Sport that sports clubs would get a better deal, following the announcement on 12 September by the Minister of State, has completely evaporated. The Minister failed to tell the CCPR that local authorities would not have the cash to release the kind of money that was necessary and that was expected by sports clubs.

Unfortunately, sport does not come high on local authorities' lists of priorities, as it is clearly in direct competition with many other demands, such as housing and social service provision. I can fully understand the dilemmas faced in choosing priorities, but those choices are made much more difficult by Government legislation that continually burdens them with extra duties while reducing their resources.

If hon. Members want clear evidence of the effect of the uniform business rate on sport, I suggest that they look at this evening's *Evening Standard*, where they will get plenty of evidence. When I was a Northern Ireland Minister, I introduced a rates order which gave mandatory rate relief of 65 per cent. to sporting clubs in the Province. I hoped that that would merely be a start which would be followed by the rest of the United Kingdom and, 10 years on, be improved upon. Alas, under these proposals, local sporting clubs and associations cannot expect anything like that kind of relief. Charities rightly receive mandatory 80 per cent. rate relief, and I believe that sports clubs should have the same.

If no relief is forthcoming, many clubs will be forced to close. Some increases in rateable values will exceed a staggering 1,600 per cent. Faced with the detrimental effects of compulsory competitive tendering, the selling off of playing fields and the implications of local management of schools for dual-purpose facilities, it is vital that we preserve these voluntary facilities before this country's once world-renowned sporting prowess passes into mythology. The Government have clearly got their rating policy wrong. They should scrap it and think again.

7.6 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): Mr. Deputy Speaker —I mean, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wrote the words down on my notes, rather than made them up.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I thought that I made a better impression on the House.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I was carried away with the impression, Madam Deputy Speaker. In fact, I was speechless, which is rare for me.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is in the Chamber, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for my meetings with them and their help. I am not saying that more help will not come—we await with great interest the wind-up speech and any extra help that it will give. As always, I am an optimist, and I feel that our views could influence that speech greatly.

I supported the Government on the introduction of the community charge and I still support the principle. Past revolutions were based on the words, "No taxation

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without representation." The rates position is "representation without taxation"; only one in two, one in three or, as in Brent, one in four of those who vote pay rates. Some people vote to spend other people's money. That is political immorality. I support the community charge principle on the basis of accountability.

The slant of emphasis that I gave to the community charge changed following a conversation that I had with some colleagues, and this shows the importance of not just being in the Chamber but of speaking to one's colleagues. One evening in the Smoking Room, I was approached by a fellow Back Bencher who represents a northern seat. He asked whether three or four people could see me one evening and eat together so that he could show me what the community charge on low-rated properties would mean. I said, "Certainly. Why not tonight?" I am always a man who likes to move quickly, so we met that evening. They showed me figures, which I checked on a computer the following day. The figures were horrific. I had not seen such figures before, including during the eight months when I have been a local government Minister in the Department of the Environment, where I inherited the system and passed it on.

In certain northern seats, instead of what we said as a party—which was that those in households of fewer than 2·1 people would be better off—we now know that approximately 1 million people in single occupancy will be worse off. In low-rated properties in the north which were built before 1939, 60 or 70 per cent. will be worse off and in some cases, 80 per cent. will be worse off.

That was the beginning of my road to Damascus and the realisation of that fact was the blinding light. It seemed to me wrong and politically disastrous that people who looked forward to a system under which they would be better off would be worse off. I know that I have changed my mind on the issue, but if the leader of the Gadarene swine had changed his mind before jumping over the cliff, many of his followers would have lived. All of us make a reassessment of the situation from time to time, and I make no apology for that. People can say that at least I am open-minded, even if my brains may have fallen out on the way. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) should listen to me, because it is good for him. Like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I have respect for him.

I shall give an example, as a northerner. Let us suppose that there is one big house and that the owner pays rates of £1,400. Let us also suppose that there are four small houses with rates of £150. Let us suppose that it is then decided to raise that £2,000 by dividing it among the five houses, so each house will pay £400. The man from the big house who gains so much may feel guilty about it and may vote Liberal. The other four will be worse off and will be horrified that £400 is being taken from each house rather than £150. I respect what has been done. I paid tribute earlier to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to the way in which he dealt with the issue in a brilliant speech this afternoon. As I listened to it, I had to hold on to my seat so that I was not carried away. His speech was fair and generous to right hon. and hon. Members of all parties, and ideal for the House of Commons.

The problem is the £3 maximum loss, and Opposition Members and some of my hon. Friends have referred to that. I am pleased that the most that people will lose is £3, but that presumes that their authorities are spending only at the norm. What came out yesterday from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy is that the figure will be £1·25 a week in community charge more than that. If that is right, people will lose £4·25, which is a lot of money to an old-age pensioner. Some people live in a Labour authority which is spending more than normal —an example of that is Brent, which is a wasteful, spendthrift authority, where people could be £7·75 worse off.

It is no good telling people in my constituency to vote Conservative. Already 19 out of 21 councillors in my constituency are Conservative because the voters have such pride in their Member of Parliament. How can I get 23 out of 21 Conservative councillors? We have done all that we can. We are regularly evangelists in the rest of Brent and I am sorry that the hon. Members for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) are not with us this evening. Perhaps we shall win a landslide.

I am worried that we shall create a new poor. Twice as many people will require help, yet we came in as a Government who wanted to end or lessen dependency. We are recycling money, which is politically disastrous and morally wrong. When the two are linked, I can speak with confidence that comes from both lungs.

The safety net arrangements were not proposed in the 1986 Green Paper. I was a Northern Ireland Minister at the time and listened to the proposals, which came to me like golden pennies and I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who is now Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, was right at that time. It was said that the community charge would come in over 10 to 12 years, that inflation would ease it, that one tenth or one twelfth of rates would be taken up by the community charge each year, and that it would be eased in generally. The safety net proposals came up during my eight months at the Northern Ireland Office, and I thought then that it would help people.

It was only later, after discussions last June when I became involved, that it came to me that the safety net arrangements went against the basis of accountability. For four years we have been giving warnings about accountability and yet we now propose to move money from careful authorities to spendthrift authorities, such as Brent, and to destroy that principle. When the bills go out in April and people see that £70 or £75 is to be transferred to other authorities, we shall find it difficult to sell that change because people will say that they thought that we stood for accountability.

I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend announced in October that he would take away the safety net in the second, third and fourth years. However, I hope, even at this late hour, that he will end it this year. In the London boroughs, voters will not go to the polls for four years after the poll this year. It is of no help for those of us who represent London constituencies that the safety net will be taken away in the second, third and fourth years.

Other hon. Members have mentioned capping. We must have capping to protect our people in spendthrift Labour areas, or people will leave and the inner city will come out and destroy other areas. If my right hon. Friend proposes to cap at 25 per cent. above the norm—that is £347·50—or at 50 per cent. above the norm—that is £417 —he should say so now, so that people can live content

and will at least know that help is coming. They will know that those riding off into the sunset will be there to help to some extent. Something should be done immediately after the community charge is introduced to assess the political effect of the charge and its effect on local authority finance.

I have learnt much from this. The Government started out with good intentions. Ministers have passed through and civil servants have passed through, so no one guides the legislation through from beginning to end. Eventually, as the old saying goes, a camel is a horse invented by a committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must call the right hon. Gentleman to order. It hurts me more than it hurts him, but I must point out that he has spoken for 10 minutes and that I am governed by Standing Orders.

7.16 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Some of us might have preferred the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) to grasp the basic injustice of the poll tax a little earlier, but it is right that I should pay tribute to his courage in accepting that he was wrong. There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

Traditionally, this is the time of year for many gloomy predictions about next year's rate levies. It has been normal for borough treasurers—or directors of finance, as we now have to call them—to make our flesh creep as part of the exercise in getting budgets through. However, Ministers will make a serious mistake if they believe that what is happening now throughout the country is another example of that trend.

Ministers may discount what local authorities say because they are interested parties, and they may discount what local authority associations say for the same reason, but they cannot ignore the cool, analytical judgment of a body such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which has been known for years for its careful analysis of problems. It is hard to argue with its judgment, to which other hon. Members have referred, that the Government appear to expect the local authorities to struggle with the additional burdens placed on them by central Government and with the problem of inflation with an increase over last year's spending levels of about 3 per cent. In the real world, we know that retail prices are about 8 per cent. higher and that pay awards are nudging double figures.

I find it hard to dispute CIPFA's suggestion that a sensible estimate of what the impact of inflation will be, a reasonable assessment of the extra burden of new Government policies and a prudent judgment about what will be lost through evasion and avoidance suggests an average poll tax figure not of £278 but of £344 for the country as a whole.

The institute's final assessment is that local authorities could deliver an average community charge of £278 only by making substantial cuts—cuts of 8 per cent. to 10 per cent. CIPFA says—this is important—

"Even if local authorities wanted to cut spending on such a scale it is doubtful that they could do so, so the most probable outcome is higher community charges. . .than those indicated by the DOE."

My own local authority, Greenwich, appears to have done just as badly out of the much vaunted standard spending assessment as it did out of the late and unlamented grant-related expenditure assessment system. The Government have given Greenwich a standard spending assessment of £153 million, an increase of 16·4 per cent. over its grant-related expenditure assessment. At first glance, that looks generous, but if one excludes education responsibilities, which will be taken over for the first time on 1 April, one finds that for the remaining services the increase is 7·7 per cent, as compared with a national increase of 11 per cent., so Greenwich seems to have missed out compared with some local authorities.

Some inner-London boroughs have education SSAs representing as much as 98 per cent. of their Government-assumed spending, but in the case of Greenwich it is 81·8 per cent. and the discrepancy will have to be made good by the poll tax payers.

The worst impact of the SSA on Greenwich will be in social services, for which Greenwich has a lower SSA per head of population than any other London borough. The figure for Greenwich is £118·66 and the gap between that figure and the next lowest—£153·02 in Lewisham—is substantial. Yet neither the Department of the Environment nor the Department of Social Security has made any suggestion that Greenwich is massively overspending on social services. I would argue that the reverse is true: there are obvious and worrying deficiencies in the council's social service provision.

Let us look at the "other services" block of SSA. For inner-London boroughs generally, the SSA is up 19·5 per cent. on the GREA, but for Greenwich the figure is down by 2·6 per cent. The reasons would appear to be artificially low population figures, a low estimate of social deprivation based on the 1981 census, which is now very out of date, and a low assessment of numbers in private rented housing, again based on out-of-date information. All those errors will have an impact on the likely poll tax in Greenwich.

In the exemplifications before us, the Government have assumed that, allowing for the safety netting, Greenwich poll tax payers will face a charge next year of £252, compared with an average rate bill of £290 per head. That looks like a very good deal, but the longer-term trend is far from encouraging. After the safety net has gone, the Government estimate a poll tax for Greenwich of £537, the second highest in the country. Figures based on the council's current budget show a poll tax not of £252 but of £495, rising to £768 when the safety net is phased out. That is simply not acceptable, even to those who run Greenwich council. The council is now engaged in a programme of last-minute and hasty cuts to try to reduce spending by about 10 per cent, but that will still leave us with a poll tax of about £350—£100 above the Government's prediction and £60 per head above the present rate bills.

The need to cut spending is forcing the council's political leadership to reveal its priorities—and they are very strange priorities. The council seems to be protecting the new, trendy, fashionable services introduced after 1982 and targeting for cuts the basic bread-and-butter services on which many ordinary people depend. For example, there is no proposal to reduce the grant of £105,000 to subsidise entertainment at the Albany, even though that institution is not in the borough, but essential staff in the parks department are to be cut by 18 per cent., library hours are to be reduced and spending on children's playgrounds cut.

The council proposes to close long-established community centres with a long history of service to the community, but donations amounting to almost £80,000 a year are being continued in respect of groups such as the

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Greenwich mural workshop, Emergency Exit Arts, and a group called—equally unbelievably—"Fooled Again Puppets". Those organisations are to continue to have council help when basic services are being cut. The total sum of those contributions—£80,000—is the cost of running one of the community centres now threatened with closure.

The council is also considering cuts in road sweeping services and increased meals-on-wheels charges, while it continues to publish its own newspaper at a cost of about £300,000 a year.

The Government may succeed in forcing cuts on what they regard as profligate local authorities through the poll tax system—particularly if they use capping—but they may not be the right sort of cuts. The crudity of the system does not allow that to be prevented.

The Government's main claim for the poll tax has never been that it is fair and just. There is no way in which they could make a case along those lines. Their case for the poll tax has always been based on the argument that it introduces a better level of accountability and makes it easier for local electors to judge the financial performance of their councils. The botched settlement before us tonight leaves even that claim in ruins. The mysteries of the standard spending assessment and the safety net and the Government's totally unrealistic estimate of councils' need to spend make it quite impossible for high poll tax charges to be placed at the door of those responsible. Councillors will blame Ministers and Ministers will blame councillors. Tonight's debate underlines the fact that the poll tax is not only inherently unjust in principle but a bureaucratic nightmare in practice.

As we get nearer to the moment at which the bills start dropping through the letterbox, I believe that more and more people will come to accept that the fairest way of paying for local services is the way recommended by Layfield 14 years ago—a local income tax. The sooner that that is accepted, the sooner we shall have a sensible system of local government accountability.

7.26 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): We are regularly told that the electors are very unhappy with the community charge. That is good. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities will reflect on that fact in his reply. I do not see why any of my electors should be particularly happy about paying the community charge, or their national taxes for that matter. When I entered the Tory party at the age of 15, one of my motivations was to get taxation—both national and local—reduced. I am glad if my constituents are unhappy about the community charge.

The question must be whether the community charge is fair, and I believe that it is, although I suggest that the levels are unacceptable. My county council is controlled by an alliance of the Labour and Liberal parties, and I do not believe for one moment that the charge that it levies will be good or acceptable. People write saying, "I shall never vote Conservative again." They are entitled to have a good moan and get it off their chest, but the price of vengeance will be high because they will find that in the county of Shropshire the re-election of a bungling alliance of Labour and Liberal councillors will only serve to increase the charge that they will have to pay. Their vengeance will not taste sweet.

I know that this is not a Second Reading debate and that we must therefore be cautious and not be tempted into discussing the principle of the community charge. Undoubtedly, the mechanics are not only unpopular but extremely confusing. I do not know how many of my hon. Friends have ploughed through the reports. I got as far as the second one and could not make head or tail of it. From now on, I shall leave my hon. Friends on the Front Bench to explain these matters to me.

I appreciate the fact that, under the standard spending assessments system, there is one bit of good news for counties such as Shropshire. Extra weighting has been given to the population sparsity factor. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) is in his place. He has one of the largest constituencies in the country and that extra weighting will no doubt be as welcome in his constituency, which lies to the south of mine, as it will be to the 117 villages that lie around the county town that I have the pleasure to represent.

The Department of the Environment's computer is positively lethal, although hon. Members who have served on local councils will know that there is nothing new in that. About 16 years ago, when I first became a councillor, we were suffering under a Government made up—like Shropshire county council—of Labour and Liberal politicians. That Lib-Lab Government used to issue their rate support grants, but then we had a series of clawbacks. First, we had the primary clawback and then, just as the council's budget was settling down, they suddenly realised that the figures were wrong and we had a secondary clawback. The complexities of the system of local government finance cannot therefore be laid at the door of the present Secretary of State for the Environment and those who preceded him, in bringing about the community charge. Complex local government settlements are nothing new to those of us who have experience of local councils.

The one encouraging thing is that councils are now getting £2·3 billion in advance. When I was a councillor, we used to complain about the lateness of the settlement, yet now, when councils are getting that huge sum of nearly £2·5 billion in advance, there has been not an ounce of gratitude from any side about it. Perhaps that shows my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities that there is, indeed, little gratitude in politics.

The safety net is undoubtedly unpopular. It is unpopular in my constituency. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) expressed the feelings of many who did not realise the unfairness and the imbalance of it, but at least it will be for only a short period. The concession that the Government made in the autumn of last year, to phase out half the safety net this year, is welcome but costly to the taxpayer.

In my constituency, in addition to the £251 assumption that the Government published, which included £4 for the safety net, there will be an extra £30 for the increased spending by Shropshire county council and another £12 for the parish precepts. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent city areas forget that those of us who have large rural constituencies have an additional charge that is levied by the parish councils.

Mr Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on that point. Hon. Members who

represent urban constituencies might be interested to know that many parishes pay only a matter of pence in precepts at the moment but, as my hon. Friend has just pointed out, in The Wrekin district council of Shropshire it is possible that community charge payers will pay £12 instead of a matter of pence.

Mr Conway: My hon. Friend is quite right. I hope that parish councillors around the country will remember that we in Parliament will be watching the levels of increase to ensure that they do not try to confuse electors with the new system. In addition, my borough council is allowing for a 5 per cent. collection deficit, which amounts to £16 per head. Therefore, straight away the local electors will be paying £62 per head more than the Government assumption. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, it is for the councils to decide, so the Government should not be defensive about this. In fact, my county spends about 90 per cent. of the money raised on local government services. Its budget, as planned, could be £28 million up on last year, which is a 14 per cent. increase, considerably above the rate of inflation and, I would argue, quite unnecessary.

I agree absolutely with the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who is clearly not of my party, but who is right to say that we need to look at the frequency of elections. I advised my hon. Friend the Minister that I shall support the Government enthusiastically about the community charge tonight, with no apologies at all, but that we need to look at the frequency of elections for county councils in shire areas because they are not accountable enough on the basis of being elected every four years. That interval does not give the electorate enough of a chance to get at them, which is the whole point of the community charge.

Of course, my constituents can always say, "That's it, Conway, you're out," and they can vote for somebody else. They can turn away from the £250 that my right hon. Friend's Department has calculated that they should be paying in community charge and can turn instead to the one alternative that was published by the Labour party, which would cost my constituents £623 per head, nearly three times as much. That is the alternative.

Mr. Rooker: No, it is not true.

Mr. Conway: That is the alternative.

Mr. Rooker *rose*——

Mr. Conway: I would give way to the hon. Gentleman if his party published a policy that we could debate.

We are talking about a fairer system that will undoubtedly bring back voter power because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) rightly told the House, those who vote for expenditure will pay for expenditure.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the plight of my constituents over the level of the community charge because, as I live in the constituency and am married to one of my constituents, I shall hear regularly about the cost of the community charge.

People in the county of Shropshire have a simple option. They can kick out the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition at the next opportunity because it is forcing up the community charge. I shall make absolutely certain in my area that the blame for the level of the community charge will rest fairly and squarely with the bungling opposition parties that control the local councils. But they will not be there for long.

7.34 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): This debate is the last occasion on which the Government can take action to try at least to salvage something from the disastrous poll tax and to prevent some of the difficulties that will be encountered by so many people who are ratepayers at present and who will be poll tax payers from 1 April this year.

One thing is quite clear. Because of the basic unfairness of the Bill that went through Parliament and despite our repeated protestations and attempts at the time to amend the Government's failure to take ability to pay into account, unfortunately whatever the Government do at this stage, they will not be able to overcome the main difficulties of implementing the poll tax.

I hope that the Conservative Members who trooped through the Lobbies last year to support the legislation but who now recognise its implications will at least recognise that if the Government are to do anything to ease the burdens and to assist some of the people who will be penalised, it is no good those hon. Members abstaining tonight. They must vote with Labour and the other Opposition parties against the proposals.

I recognise clearly that the only way in which we shall be able to end the poll tax and the unfairness of the system is by electing a Government who are committed to replacing it with a system that is based on fairness. I am sure that that will be a major factor at the next election, when it comes.

The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) referred to accountability and to annual elections. I have always believed that borough councils should be elected annually and I would support any move to make councils more accountable by making them frequently elected and thus more answerable to the electorate. The borough council that I represent already elects one third of its council three years out of four, and in the fourth year the county council elections are held. Therefore, it is accountable.

I should like to say a few words about my local authority because I had experience both as finance chairman of the council and as leader of the council before being elected to the House. Our budgets were never a case of spending for the sake of spending because we used to spend a lot of time trying to achieve a budget that was both fair and reasonable. We tried to achieve a budget that would provide the services that we needed while being fair to the people who had to meet the bills. The expenditure could be roughly divided into three—one third for interest and debt payments; another third for salaries and wages; and the final third for the items that could be adjusted. However, there was not much room for adjustment once one began to analyse those items.

The Minister should recognise that at present two thirds of the expenditure of many councils is for debt and interest payments, and salaries and wages. He should also recognise that the Government are responsible for the level of pay increases that the local authorities have had to make. The Government are also responsible for the level of

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

interest rates, yet they have used the figure of 4 per cent. for inflation in the figures that we are debating. What nonsense.

The Government have moved to a system of standard spending assessments. Of course the old system of grant-related expenditure assessments was unfair and even the Department of the Environment could not explain it. The Secretary of State has repeatedly said that the new system was "simpler". Indeed, he used that word time after time, but the one thing that he did not say—that he could not say—was that the new system is fairer; he could not say that, because it is unfair. Although I welcome any moves towards something that is simpler, if the system is changed, it is much more important that it is changed to something that is fairer. That has not happened, and the Government should think again on that important matter.

I turn now to another important issue that affects Burnley. The Association of District Councils has assessed the total spending of authorities at £32·8 billion. That figure has been used several times. The Association of District Councils, which is not Labour-controlled, says that that is an understatement of about £1·6 billion. The Secretary of State says that it may be £2 billion. Whichever figure is right, we all know that many local authorities supplement their spending from balances. Lancashire county council and Burnley borough council have both done so. Some £800,000 has been spent from balances this year by Burnley council.

The Secretary of State challenged my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) to say whether spending commitments will have to be met in future if there are no balances to meet them. It was implicit in his comment that the expenditure of local authorities is not necessary. From whatever source it comes, local authorities deem their expenditure necessary. If the Secretary of State is saying that this year's expenditure from balances cannot be repeated next year and must be met by poll tax demands higher than the Government's figures, what services would he cut? Would he close nursery schools or old people's homes? Would he stop grants to citizens' advice bureaux? Would he cut grants for running sports facilities, arts centres and leisure centres? Those are all important services. If he is saying that the level of expenditure of local authorities as a whole or individually is wrong, he must say what should be cut or where additional income should come from. Of course, he cannot do that.

I represent a deprived area. The Government recognise that it is deprived because they have designated it under the inner-area programme. Additional resources have been announced during the past few days. If anything, we are not spending enough money on the problems of dereliction and poverty in my area. Under the present system we cannot spend more because we must take into account what we can ask ratepayers, whether domestic, commercial or industrial, to pay. The Government have got it wrong.

In Burnley, the population figure that the Government have used to calculate the grant, taking into account the non-domestic rate, is the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys figure of 61,000. The population is now 67,000 because we have the highest electoral roll for many years. In some ways the poll tax has encouraged people to register, rather than the reverse. The Government have not taken into account the higher population figure in calculating the standard spending figures. They should have done so, because that figure will continue.

We shall receive relief as a low rateable value property area but the transitional payments, low-rate relief and other help will be phased out. We must tell people what their poll tax bills will be without the safeguards, safety nets and transitional payments which are given to con people that the poll tax is not as bad as it is. The population figures used should be re-examined carefully.

I shall conclude by making a few remarks about low rateable value areas. The hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) knows north-east Lancashire well. He comes from a Labour background. He is aware of the low rateable values in the area. He knows that the ratepayers of Burnley, Nelson, Colne, Accrington and Rawtenstall will suffer considerably because they will face a massive increase because of the poll tax. Even with safety net protection and relief for low rateable value properties, people will pay heavily from year one and in year two it will be worse. Year three will be even worse and year four will be worse still. The Government must think again.

I hope that Conservative Members who have any doubts and any fairness at all will vote with us against the proposals. This is the last chance that we have to say to the Government, "You have got it wrong."

7.44 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): For more than 25 years I have advocated reform of the ludicrous old rating system. I have done so because I have always thought it outrageous that the whole cost of local government expenditure was borne by only one third of the electorate. It was not borne by the richest by any manner of means. Therefore, I have no difficulty in supporting the reform brought in, at last, by this Government, after it had been sunk by previous Governments, both Labour and Conservative.

Those who are dissatisfied and complain about the proposed system should have an alternative system to propose. The reform that I advocated for 25 years was that the cost of teachers' salaries should be borne by the Exchequer. When they opened their rate demands, people always found that the largest item of expenditure was education. The largest item of education expenditure was always teachers' salaries—which now cost about £7 billion a year.

Even under the Education Act 1944, the Secretary of State has a statutory obligation to maintain the supply of teachers. It is absurd to propose that teachers' salaries are negotiated anything but nationally. The idea that they can be negotiated by Hogsnorton borough council is ludicrous. I hope that the Government will not lose sight of that in future as a possible solution to some of the problems. If they did so, inevitably some irresponsible councils would simply take advantage and spend money like water in place of education expenditure. That is why I am wholly in agreement with my colleagues who say that we should not reject the idea of community charge capping. I was glad that, in the Secretary of State's remarkable speech, he seemed to respond to that sympathetically.

Cambridgeshire has been unfairly treated for many years. I remember that, when I first represented my area,

Cambridgeshire Members of Parliament had to rebel against the Government. I do not refer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) but to Lord Pym and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James). We had to do something that we did not like doing. Unusually for us, we rebelled simply because the Government persistently refused to recognise the problems of Cambridgeshire, which is the fastest growing county in Britain. Many problems arise from that fact. They may be problems of success, but population is the problem in Cambridgeshire.

When Ministers considered the SSAs—as they are now—for last year, I found that they still had not taken Cambridgeshire's population problems into account. We had to tackle the Minister and we had a good argument about it along with local authority officials and councillors. I am grateful for the way in which he responded, and I am happy to say that a change has taken place. The SSA for Cambridgeshire county council is now 8·5 per cent. higher than the grant-related expenditure for 1989-90. It is £2·3 million more than the figure originally proposed in November last year.

The SSAs for the Cambridgeshire districts range from 11·6 per cent. for the city of Cambridge, to 52·3 per cent. for east Cambridgeshire district council. It is right that I should publicly thank the Government and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for that. It is up to the district councils in Cambridgeshire to respond by conducting their affairs prudently and wisely. I am satisfied that they will do so, although I have grave doubts about Cambridge city council where I am a ratepayer, and Peterborough city council, both of which are in alien hands. We hope that all councils will respond properly. In addition, the Government treated our credit approvals favourably.

Only the area cost adjustment is outstanding. Like many south-eastern areas, Cambridgeshire has high labour and high industrial costs. However, we were suprised to find that we did not get an area cost adjustment. We were even more surprised and appalled when we noted that Oxfordshire did. Why on earth should Oxfordshire of all places have an area cost adjustment and Cambridgeshire not? I defy my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to give a reason for that. He has said that the matter has only been dealt with in a rough and ready arbitrary way. In a letter to me he said that the case is somewhat technical and that the results of the new earnings survey were not robust enough to apply county by county. I ask him only to give me an assurance that perhaps next year the matter will be looked at in much greater detail and Cambridgeshire put on the same basis as Oxfordshire.

We in Cambridgeshire have had our rows and we have had to rebel. But in all my time in Parliament, no Minister has responded so carefully and sympathetically and taken so much trouble in dealing with all our complaints as my hon. Friend. He may not have pleased everybody, but he has seen them. On this occasion I shall support the Government because of the concessions that have been made for Cambridgeshire, but I hope that those who are doubtful will show a little gratitude to my hon. Friend for what he has done.

Several Hon. Members rose——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The 10-minute limit on speeches has now ended, but it would be helpful if all hon. Members speaking from now on would impose a voluntary time limit on their speeches.

7.51 pm

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I shall endeavour so to do, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant), have highlighted the fact that the Government have simply not met the objectives that they set when they began on this sorry course, the introduction of the poll tax. The poll tax, as Conservative Members have demonstrated today, is far from achieving the Government's initial main aim of accountability. As the tax has been adjusted to try to match one anomaly here and another there, it has achieved less and less accountability rather than more.

Many Conservative Members do not seem to be content with the idea that accountability begins with the ballot box. Many Conservative Members wanted to use the tax to attack those who voted through the ballot box for councils that Conservative Members did not approve of.

The poll tax is no simpler than the system that preceded it. No hon. Member or anyone trying to administer the poll tax believes that there is any sense in the nature of the administration or that administratively it will be more simple or more fair. In addition, it is costing infinitely more than the system that it replaces.

More and more problems are arising each week. The Government talk about wanting to encourage young people to stay on at school, but a 19-year-old at a sixth form college rather than at a polytechnic or a university is not classed as a student and so is not entitled to a rebate. Therefore, a 19-year-old in full-time education in a school will not be entitled to the same rebate as a brother or sister of 20 who happens to be in higher education.

That is the sort of anomaly that the Government keep tripping over which highlights the sort of problems that accompany the poll tax. That is because the tax has never sought to be a fair tax for services received.

Mr. Pawsey: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Armstrong: I will not give way because I have given a commitment to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

From the beginning, the Government have had specific aims in mind, and their main aim has been to attack local government. In doing so, they have brought upon themselves enormous problems. They cannot even meet their own objectives. The further down the road they go, the more problems appear and the more difficulties they get into. They are discovering that the poll tax does not simply attack Labour-controlled local government; it undermines any commitment that the Government might have had toward local democracy. That is one of the major problems that the tax is now bringing. It never set out to be fair, and that is why no Conservative Members can find an element of fairness when they look at their position. Having set out to be so unfair, it is not surprising that Cambridgeshire, Brent, or wherever, ends up with problems. The problem is the tax and the way in which it has been implemented.

Let me illustrate my point with Durham. Durham is a Labour-controlled authority. It is solidly Labour, but even

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so we won a further seven seats in the county council elections in 1989 and we won a seat in my constituency which the Labour party has never held in the history of that county council. Durham is not known as a high spender. It has never been castigated by the Government for high spending. Yet if Durham were to spend within the SSA as most recently presented—an exact account of which the Government cannot give me—there would, in real terms, be an increase of less than 3·2 per cent. over this year's figure. That would mean a cut in services.

If Durham stuck to the SSA, the cut would be equivalent to closing down the social services department or the police and fire services. We are talking not about cutting a little spending here and there, but about substantial amounts, and that is if the council manages to collect all the poll tax that is due to it. There has always been a reasonably good collection under the rating system, but now we shall be collecting for more than twice that number, so the default rate is likely to be higher and the implications will be greater than ever before.

We are left with enormous problems. There are problems of collection, but most of all there are problems with delivering the service. When the original SSAs came out at the end of November or the beginning of December, I calculated that overall in the northern authorities we would lose about 15 per cent. for education spending. I was corrected by the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science. She said that it would be about 12·9 per cent. But even if I am wrong and she is right, a cut of 12·9 per cent. in education spending at a time of teacher shortages——

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Not in Durham.

Ms. Armstrong: Even Durham has problems in recruiting science and language teachers in order to deliver the national curriculum. I was there last week talking about that. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members seem to think that I am making these things up, but I am not. There are teacher supply problems in every authority throughout the country. Even in Durham we have to implement the national curriculum. In Durham we have been asked to take specific action by Her Majesty's inspectors following their latest report.

If authorities are to stick to what the Government say, there will be the equivalent of a 12 per cent. cut in education. The Minister knows that that is nonsense and will leave an authority totally unable to meet its statutory responsibilities. He has the opportunity this evening to demonstrate that he cares more about the lives and opportunities of people in this country than he does about sticking by something which he knew from the beginning was wrong. I hope that he is big enough and magnanimous enough to take that opportunity.

8 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): I shall certainly abide by your injunction, Madam Deputy Speaker, as if the 10-minute rule were in force.

This is the first of these debates in which I have had a sporting chance of understanding what is happening, because the revenue support grant distribution report is quite the clearest that I have ever seen. That has to be an improvement for people inside, as well as outside, the House who wish to understand what the new system is and how it works.

What happens to county councils is much more important than what happens to district councils, because of the effect on the ratepayer. A besetting sin of the Government has been to increase more and more the duties of local authorities, particularly of county councils, without transferring proportionate resources to them. For example, the changes in the national education curriculum have resulted in a massively increased need for new books and computers. Some of the need for new computers arises because often we can no longer get spare parts for the first generation of computers purchased. That is not reflected in changes in the cost of living index. These massive changes in expenditure were knowingly brought about by the Government when they changed the curriculum.

The golden rule should always be, "If you can't afford it, don't do it." That should apply as much to Government as it does to private individuals. We have seen expensive changes made in the respective responsibilities of district health authorities and county councils. Those health authorities started with joint funding and are ending up with unique funding by the county councils. Those changes are not embraced by a figure of 6 per cent. or by looking at the cost of living index. They represent a quantum change.

The counties which were traditionally low spenders were caught by rate capping, so that they had to run down their capital assets because they had no alternative. If a road surface is allowed to remain broken up for more than a certain time, the road's understructure suffers damage which will be much more expensive to repair than it would be to maintain the road surface in the first place. But councils such as Devon had knowingly to permit this to happen to many of the lanes because it was not allowed to spend the necessary money to keep them in good repair.

In Devon there are still a large number of schools with outside lavatories which can freeze over in winter. I am not talking just about discomfort but about the fact that, when frozen, the lavatories will not work. There is a backlog of capital expenditure which has never been spent.

There was an era when architects believed that, owing to a change of Government, water no longer flowed downhill. We had an era of flat, rather than pitched, roofs. They saved money originally, but the rooks have now come home to roost in the form of maintenance costs which were never incurred when we had pitched roofs, when the worst that happened was for a slate or two to come adrift after a storm.

We can get away with this for a certain number of years, but then we have to raid our reserves. If the formula is applied not to expenditure, but to the previous year's revenue, such realities are totally ignored. My right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) is the present Secretary of State for Education and Science; a series of Secretaries of State for Education and Science have imposed frightening new costs on education authorities. Although it has been said that teachers' pay is negotiated nationally, that is not so for supply teachers. The more teachers who have to go to committee meetings or training courses, the greater the need for supply teachers. In some counties, such as—I regret—Devon, financial constraints on the local education authority have resulted not only in teachers being paid a miserable rate per hour but in their not being paid at all for those hours

in between classes when they were not teaching as supply teachers. They often have to travel long distances, uncompensated.

Is it not utterly incongruous that we are moving to individual taxation in terms of national tax, so that husbands and wives will have their own allowances and be taxed separately, yet for the community charge, a couple have only half the capital exemptions? They each have half of the £8,000—a total of £8,000 between the two of them—compared with the £8,000 for an individual. It is utterly incomprehensible that the Government are quite rightly moving in one direction in terms of central Government taxation, but defy the logic of that when they bring in a new taxation system for local government. If £8,000 was the right capital limit for income support when that was introduced, it cannot still be the right limit, without valorisation, for the tapering of community charge.

When I wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister about this matter, I was more than surprised to receive an interim reply saying that my letter had been passed from him to the Department of Social Security because his Department did not accept responsibility for the £8,000 limit.

Mr. David Hunt: I was unaware of that letter. The £8,000 limit, which I thought was increased from £6,000 for income support, is consistent with social security policy. If we were to make any move it would be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. That is probably why my hon. Friend received the interim reply and I shall ensure that he receives a much fuller reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I have received a full reply, but it is utterly unconvincing. There is no essential reason why community charge—based on a poll tax system abated by rebates—should have the same limit as income support. There is no logical reason for that. Income support is related to the many different circumstances of a person, as are family credits, but the community charge is not. Therefore, there is no essential, self-evident reason why the figure at which the taper starts should be the same for both.

When the community charge was voted by the then Government, it was understood that grants to enable students to pay it would be increased by 20 per cent. of the national average community charge. Students would then have the same incentive as others to encourage economical local government and to punish extravagant local government. However, that got lost in the wash.

I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science asking what has happened to the proposal to add that 20 per cent. to student grants, but I am still waiting for a reply—which I thought someone would take the trouble to see that I received before this debate. The question of where the money is to come from that will allow students to pay the charge has, at this moment in time, received no answer.

The points that I have raised are not trivial but are very serious. Taken together, they constitute the basic reason why I shall not be able to vote with the Government tonight.

8.10 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): For some time, I have wanted to make a long speech on the constitutional and democratic implications of the poll tax. I shall not do so tonight, because although the poll tax is of relevance to the revenue support grant, it is technically secondary to the main subject of tonight's debate.

The revenue support grant is an injustice inside an injustice. If one could imagine that the initial injustice did not exist and that the poll tax was fair—which it cannot be—there would still be something very peculiar about the operation of the revenue support grant. I would only add that the poll tax is the unfairest general form of taxation that has ever been introduced into any western democracy, which is why it has serious implications for our democratic and constitutional system. However, that is for another occasion.

On 19 December, I wrote to the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities asking him to meet a deputation from North-East Derbyshire district council. I wrote to him again on 12 January. We do not wish to discuss the poll tax or the national business rate; we specifically want to discuss the 1990-91 revenue support grant.

On the basis of information published on 6 November, it appears that the poll tax in north-east Derbyshire will, in accordance with the Government figures, be £297—or £366 when the safety net is removed. However, because the revenue support grant will be so low, it will be impossible for north-east Derbyshire district council, which is not a profligate authority, to observe those figures—no matter how carefully it behaves. As the revenue support grant will be woefully inadequate, the poll tax will be nowhere near the figure suggested by the Government but closer to the figure of £400—unless the deputation that I hope the Minister will meet can persuade him to alter north-east Derbyshire's poll tax figure and the revenue support grant formula.

When the Local Government Finance Bill was in Committee, the Conservative party made a party political broadcast about the benefits of poll tax and produced a rough and ready formula. It was never meant to be exact, but was intended to give a general idea of how the new arrangements would work. It was estimated that about 50 per cent. of an authority's income would come from revenue support grant—25 per cent. from the national business rate, and 25 per cent. from poll tax. The Government's standard spending assessments show a revenue support grant for north-east Derbyshire of £9 million, which is less than 20 per cent. of the amount required. Poll tax will contribute £21 million, as will the uniform business rate. Together, they will account for more than 80 per cent. of total income, which represents a dramatic change for that authority, brought about by the nonsensical rate support grant formula.

One aspect of the formula relates to population, including inflow and outflow. During the working day, the area covered by north-east Derbyshire district council loses many people to their places of work in Chesterfield; to Markham pit, near Staveley; and to Sheffield. East Staffordshire authority, which is of comparable size to north-east Derbyshire district council, gains from that because its area experiences a net inflow of the working population. Nevertheless, east Staffordshire can raise money because of the car parking and other facilities that it must provide for people working in its area. No such revenue is available to north-east Derbyshire, whose residents will have to contribute to the costs incurred by other local authorities in the provision of certain services. What district council services are so dramatically changed

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by either a net inflow or outflow of its working population? Dustbins must still be emptied, houses repaired, and other general services provided.

The revenue support grant formula also incorporates a density and sparsity factor. A highly populated area naturally requires additional money to provide adequate services. Likewise, a sparsely populated area such as the Derbyshire dales in west Derbyshire will incur higher costs in the provision of refuse collection services, for example. North-east Derbyshire is an intricate mix of areas that are either densely or sparsely populated, so it will lose out. It still has to cope with problems of communications and congestion in respect of its sparsely populated and densely populated areas respectively. That aspect of the formula makes no sense to north-east Derbyshire or, I suspect, to many other areas.

The revenue support grant formula also takes into account an all-age social index. Its parameters include the numbers of persons sharing a property, the number of baths and lavatories available, the number of lone-parent families, whether more than one person occupies a room, and the number of Commonwealth residents. North-east Derbyshire is divided into east and west. The "EastEnders" comprise the working population, while the west of the district is more rural and middle class. The working class areas could benefit considerably from the all-age social index, as neighbouring Bolsover does, but the social mix of the district means that they will lose entirely. That makes a nonsense of the revenue support grant formula.

The formula's social deprivation factor is more appropriate to county councils than to district councils in terms of education and social services, yet compared with other authorities in Derbyshire, north-east Derbyshire will lose out considerably. On 12 January we were given a fresh set of figures for the special grant. Bolsover will get a low-rateable-value-area grant of £1,216,000. North-east Derbyshire and the other authorities in the area will get nothing, but the heartland of north-east Derbyshire is identical in its social characteristics to Bolsover. I am happy that Bolsover will get the money, as it obviously needs it, but at least 50 per cent. of north-east Derbyshire needs that money as well. That shows that the whole arrangement is nonsense.

Some of the new arrangements are supposed to overcome the problem of high poll taxes for people who are relatively socially deprived.

Socially deprived people who live in a rich area will suffer, but rich people who live in a socially deprived area will gain from a slight alleviation in the charge.

I hope that the Minister will agree to meet the deputation from north-east Derbyshire, and that he will discuss seriously with it the technical problems, which will cause financial difficulties for authorities in my constituency. I am sure that similar problems exist in many other areas.

8.21 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Since 1981, Labour-controlled Lancashire county council has been taking those citizens who are unfortunate enough to pay rates, manufacturing and service industries, hospitals, education colleges and the university to the cleaners. The only way to get a lower community charge is to kick out the Labour county council.

Labour's first act on taking office in 1981 was to slap an extra 18p on the rates above the already budgeted spending. It has continued to increase that burden every year until, oddly enough, last year when there was a county election, and the council raided the reserves to keep the rates increase down. Now there is only three hours' county spending left in the kitty because the Socialists have been spending merrily since then.

The massive rates increases that the council has imposed have placed a huge burden on our industries, which had no vote and could do nothing to protect themselves. The rates increases have also been a terrible burden on the local hospitals, which had to pay millions more—money that should have been spent on patient care. Similarly, the university had to divert funds that should have been devoted to education to feed the insatiable county council appetite.

As long as there was no connection between demanding services and paying for them, the county council could get away with it. It was essential to change the system so that everyone paid for the services that they demanded. I am happy to say that the new system will achieve that.

However, those on low incomes must be protected from sudden steep rises——

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No.

People who live in small terraced houses must be protected. Many of them will be among the 9·5 million who are eligible for rebates, and others may be eligible for the transitional relief to cushion rates that was announced in the autumn.

Although rebates apply to the whole charge, transitional relief applies only up to the amount that local councils are supposed to need to provide proper local services. Any excess is not covered. People will still have an incentive to vote for a council which will not spend charge payers' money as though there were no tomorrow, which is what is happening now in Lancashire.

Businesses, especially manufacturing industry, in our part of the world will benefit substantially, but the new revaluation is designed to give equal treatment to everybody. It has put the fear of death into many business men, who have not yet understood transitional protection or the lower poundage. They do not all appreciate that in future the unified business rate will rise only by the rate of inflation, and we ought to stress that. That will prevent the robber barons at county hall from holding them to ransom, as they have done for the past nine years.

Businesses in the northern and north-western areas will gain £900 million in transfers from southern England. This is the best general regional policy for the north-west since the war, and it is better than anything that Labour has ever brought in. Even so, I think it is wrong that companies in my constituency, which have had too high a rate burden for too long, will not get the whole relief at once. I have raised that matter with the Minister on several occasions, and I shall continue to do so.

Transitional relief for those in the south who are hard hit by the rises should be paid for by the Exchequer and not by stallholders in Lancaster market or small firms on Caton road.

The Labour-controlled Lancashire county council is having a field day. It has increased its estimates three times since September, and it proposes to increase expenditure by 31·5 per cent., which is equivalent to an 82p rate under the old system, which it will gaily blame on the new community charge—fibbing as usual. The council has to refill the county coffers, which it emptied to cushion rate rises before last year's election. It also has to pay for the above-average wage settlement that it persuaded the local authorities to concede.

Mr. David Hunt: Lancashire was in the chair.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: As the Minister observes, Lancashire was in the chair at the time. On top of the 8·8 per cent., which was well above the going rate when it was conceded, the council is handing out an extra 20 to 30 per cent. on the salaries of higher paid officers. It cannot be justifiable to ask lower-income charge payers for some £15,000 extra for a pay increase for the chief executive.

The administration at county hall has become increasingly top-heavy. The number of teachers employed in our schools has gone down, while the number of staff in the county education department has steadily increased. That was before the Education Reform Act 1988, which it might have used as an excuse for more staff. In future, the Labour group will not be able to rob industry in Lancashire to pay for its extravagant spending, and everyone will have an interest in keeping spending down since everyone will pay, and those who pay the piper call the tune.

For those reasons, I support this long overdue measure of justice.

8.27 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): What is the standard spending assessment—the SSA that has been referred to today—which is so essential to the whole tax figures for individual boroughs? It is the amount that the Government say that local councils should be spending.

My council, Waltham Forest, is spending £30 per head less than the Government's SSA for it. Judging by that criterion, Waltham Forest must be a low or a reasonable spender, according to the Government. However, the poll tax will go through the roof—the latest estimate is £488 per head and that is with a standstill budget. That is a long way from the £297 that the Government have mentioned. Why is that? One reason is that Waltham Forest will have to put £42 for everyone who pays the tax into a safety net. That is grossly unjust. The neighbouring borough of Redbridge will pay nothing; nor will other boroughs in the surrounding area which are in a better position than Waltham Forest. The money will go to Conservative-controlled Wandsworth council to help with the Conservative election effort, and that is grossly unfair.

There are many other reasons, and they are all factors that are outside the control of Waltham Forest council. For example, high interest rates will add £1·1 million. Inflation is 7 per cent. this year and is forecast at 8 per cent. for next year, but the Government have only allowed for 4 per cent. That adds another £5·5 million. The police precept is £2·5 million, the cost of setting up and running the poll tax is £1·7 million and budgeting for non-payment will mean another £3·5 million. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) pointed out, the Government have said that every penny will be collected. That is ludicrous—every local authority accountant knows, as many other people do, that there will be bad debts.

Thus we have a total of £14·3 million to cover factors outside the council's control—and, for every £1 million, £6 can be added to the individual's poll tax bill. On top of that, there is the cost of the Government's new legislation—the Children Act 1989, the Education Reform Act 1988 and the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. Presumably the Government want local authorities to implement their laws, but that will add another £1 million. To arrive at the Government's figure of £297, the authority would have to cut services by £32 million. Even its Conservative members are discussing cuts of only £11 million, and that would require major education and social service closures. If they had their way, the poll tax bill would still be £420 per person, far above the Government's assessment.

The poll tax is a redistribution of money from the poor to the rich. Let us compare the results of the rating system in Leyton with the poll tax figure of £450—and, as I have said, the latest estimate is £488. Two adults will pay 79 per cent. more, and three will face an increase of 169 per cent. In Chingford, in the same borough, the increases—although large—are much smaller than those in poor areas such as Leyton. Few of my constituents will qualify for transitional relief, which is granted to those paying £3 more than they paid in rates—according to the Government's unreal poll tax figure of £297.

The Secretary of State could not even justify SSAs in his speech; he said that they were not cast in stone and could be changed next year. That is not surprising, when we consider some of the facts. Tory Gloucester, for instance, receives £5·3 million for under-fives, but provides no services for them. It receives its grant on the same basis as councils that do provide such services. Similarly, seaside resorts contain many old-age pensioners but provide no direct services for them, as such services are provided privately. They are treated in the same way as boroughs that provide old people's homes, home helps, day centres and so on.

SSAs are ludicrous. I have just put out a press release in which I have observed that the SSAs are making an ASS of the Government—and that is the truth.

8.33 pm

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I shall be supporting the Government tonight. In debates such as this, it is all too easy to lose sight of the problems and inequities that have existed for years in the domestic rating system. Over the years, I have attended a multitude of conferences and meetings at which pleas have been made for an end to that system. In Hertfordshire and the other home counties, huge levels of rates have been paid, suggesting a level of disposable income far beyond the reality.

I must confess that the huge differences between payments per adult in Stevenage and those in other parts of the country staggered me. The treatment of different areas has involved massive injustices, and there have also been great injustices on an individual basis. It has been

[Mr. Timothy Wood]

said many times before—but there is nothing wrong with repeating it—that single elderly people have, typically, been severely disadvantaged. In contrast, many young adults—who are the main users of subsidised local authority sport and leisure facilities—have not been required to pay anything.

Mr. Pawsey: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that there is not a single Liberal Member in the Chamber? I find that staggering, and I am sure that he will as well. Is it not disgraceful that there is not a single Liberal Member present to comment on a debate that touches every constituency?

Mr. Wood: I agree with my hon. Friend. Not only have we seen hardly any Liberal Member apart from the one Liberal contributor to the debate, but we have seen large expanses of green Bench owing to the sparse attendance of Opposition Members in general.

I am convinced that sweeping away the domestic rating system, together with the paraphernalia of penalties and so forth, will dramatically improve both accountability and equity. Having said that, however, I do not wish to give the impression that some great Utopia has arrived in local government finance. Further improvements can and should be made in the standard spending assessments, and I welcome my right hon. Friend's willingness to consider further the methodology by which such assessments are set.

First, the formulae used to define SSAs run to excessive and spurious numbers of significant figures. I remember complaining about exactly the same features of grant-related expenditure assessment. For example, page 7 of the relevant report informs us that the number of students aged over 16 is multiplied by £2,315·54. To that figure is added £33·42 multiplied by an "additional needs" factor, and to that is added £347·33 multiplied by a "scarcity" factor. The result is taken with another table for 11 to 15-year-olds and multiplied by "area cost adjustment for education"; that result is then scaled to a control total given in annex B of the report.

As a science graduate in mathematics, I see no satisfactory justification for the pseudo-accuracy implied in some of those figures. Furthermore, I am convinced that such spurious accuracy confuses both local councils and hon. Members. I had hoped that the introduction of the SSA would lead to a simplification and clarification of the figures in comparison with GREA. Some of the frustration and discontent that such assessments sometimes reveal is a result of the opacity of the calculations.

Secondly, greater clarity in the tabulations presented to Parliament would be helpful. I suggest, for example, that to give the SSA per capita in each local authority area would aid ready comparison. I have observed during the debate that some people have obviously made the appropriate calculations and presented them, but it would surely be easier to assess the expenditure that was relevant to a particular area if the figures were readily to hand.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important, I believe that the SSA figures contain anomalies. I shall tolerate that this year, but I feel that rectification will be necessary in due course. My constituency contains three local authorities: Stevenage, North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire. For some reason, North Hertfordshire is given the highest per capita SSA. I live in that district, and I know it well. I do not believe that its per capita needs are greater than those of Stevenage or much greater than those of East Hertfordshire.

I also know both the borough of Stevenage and Bracknell district very well. They are both new town areas; I have been leader of one, and I now represent the other. Bracknell has the higher per capita SSA, but I am convinced that Stevenage's per capita needs are greater than those of Bracknell.

Perhaps most extreme is the amazingly high standard spending assessment per capita for the borough of Slough. I can see no justification for the Slough borough spending needs to be set at double the per capita figure for such areas as Bracknell and Stevenage. It appears that Slough borough shares my view, as council spending is significantly less than the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Wilshire: Slough is next to the borough which I represent. Does my hon. Friend share my view that when a borough such as Slough, controlled by the Labour party, is able to suggest that it will be setting such low charges, it is extraordinary that a thrifty and sensibly run neighbouring authority, Spelthorne, should be faced with a charge of £400? Does he agree that that proves his point that something is sadly amiss?

Mr. Wood: I said that there was great need for a further detailed examination of some of the anomalies that emerge from the figures. Clearly—one does this in any scientific assessment of anything—if one finds exceptions, one looks for the causes of them and assesses whether there is a factor that is playing an excessive part. That must be happening in view of some of the effects that we are seeing. I hope that during the next year some of those factors will be sorted out and that a better position will be presented.

I press those points because Stevenage borough council spends excessively and I do not wish to defend that extravagance. But equally, I hope that a reconsideration of the SSA methodology will remove the anomalies and thus more readily enable me to criticise the council for not doing what it should in giving value for money.

In relation to safety nets, I welcome the response of the Government to the representations that were made in the autumn. A great political error would have been made if safety net contributions had been made by local authorities for a period of four years. One of the principal objectives of the community charge is to improve local accountability. Just one year of safety net contribution will enable local residents to make easy comparisons of local government spending more quickly.

I confess that there seems to be some curious safety net anomalies in the first year, even though they have been reduced since the first proposals were published. I have drawn the attention of the Minister of State to some of those. Regrettably, those anomalies seem to favour the high, rather than the low, spending authority.

For example, in Copeland the average rate bill per adult is £191. In Kerrier, Cornwall, the figure is £194. Copeland overspends by £28 per adult, while Kerrier spends at £50 below the SSA. But Kerrier will receive a £9 safety net payment per adult and Copeland a massive £91 and a special grant of £25.

As a result, the residents in the prudent Kerrier district will have to pay at least £216, while in high-spending Copeland the figure will be £191—no change, assuming

that spending is not increased excessively. It seems that the safety net arrangements are often over-generous to the high spenders. While this matter will automatically reduce in significance, I hope that a further look will be taken at the methodology before the figures are set for next year.

I have raised those concerns because I want to see the new system of local government finance work with even greater effectiveness in future years. I am convinced that there will be much improved accountability. I am also convinced that the uniform business rate should boost the position of manufacturing industry in the north of England, which we wish to see. Councils will no longer be able to indulge in rash spending without regard to the local consequences.

The measures may not bring perfection, but a giant stride forward is being made to give us better value for money in local government spending, and they deserve our support tonight.

8.43 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is interesting to speak after any Conservative Member who has suddenly realised that he has been sold a pup by the Government. I recall that in the early days of this matter there were a few Conservative Members who were consistent in their opposition to the poll tax, but in the main they were those who just saw it as unfair and inequitable. The great majority of them were swept along by the Government's propaganda. Here was another way to get at the spending patterns of Labour local authorities, they thought, and they went into the Division Lobby with great glee.

As those Conservative Members saw the proposals unwind, they realised with a degree of horror and shock —which we have taken great pleasure in witnessing today and which we witnessed in subsequent days after the original decision—that it would be a bad deal for them. Then the whingeing started. I await with interest what happens tonight. One often hears of a Tory rebellion, though often it is more mooted in the press than turning into reality in the Division Lobby.

I suspect that the Government have a serious situation on their hands tonight. The way in which the whole of the Cabinet was reeled in to sit on the Front Bench, stoically listening, gave one food for thought. I watched the Prime Minister look at her watch—she does not often stumble into local government debates; I am sure that the way in which the new system will work is as clear to her as it is to the rest of us—as she sat there in a sort of demonstration of support for her beleagured Secretary of State, hoping to quell with one of her icy glances the rebellion on her Back Benches. I hope that she has not succeeded because, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, this is the last chance Conservative Members have to do something about the iniquitous poll tax and bring the Government up short.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster) *rose*——

Mr. Banks: I give way to a man who is obviously suffering badly.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: That is extremely kind of the hon. Gentleman. Opposition Members should appreciate why some of us will be in the same Lobby as him tonight. The reason is not because we do not like the community charge but because the SSA has been geared in such a way that it is having precisely the opposite effect to that which we were promised it would have. Authorities such as mine, which are low-spending, well-run Conservative councils, are being penalised, and authorities run by the Labour party, which overspend and waste taxpayers' money to a huge extent, are benefiting. That is why some of us will reluctantly be walking alongside the hon. Gentleman in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Banks: I wish that I had not taken pity on the hon. Gentleman, in view of the unkind remarks he made about my local authority. As I said, the hon. Gentleman has been sold a pup and he and many of his hon. Friends have suddenly realised that, especially in view of the way in which the whole system has been moved around, tinkered with, manipulated and pulled and pushed to try to meet all the objections. Those movements have made it all the more grotesque and absurd.

But I shall be pleased to be in the same Lobby as the hon. Gentleman, and at that time he may care to tell me how he sprained his wrist. Perhaps he was picking up some of those heavy wine crates that I know he disposes around —*[Interruption.]* I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is a very good vintner.

My hon. Friends and I object to the poll tax in principle, basically because it is unfair. How can anyone defend a system by which someone in a castle, and there are not many of those in London, pays the same as someone in a damp flat, of which there are many hundreds of thousands in London? That is grotesquely unfair and why we shall oppose it throughout.

We are now confronted with a new system of local authority finance. Frankly, if that is designed to make the whole thing simpler, the Schleswig-Holstein question would now be a good candidate for an entry in "Trivial Pursuit" or would be easy meat for some readers. I say that because the new system does not make any more sense than some of the other ridiculous systems that went before it.

How do these systems work and who devises them? There must have been an outbreak of acromania at the Department of the Environment. That source gave us GREAs—granted-related expenditure assessments—and now we have SSAs, standard spending assessments. What does it all mean and how has it been calculated? A bunch of number crunchers at the Department of the Environment in Marsham street have decided that my borough has a certain sort of need and that this is how much our standard spending assessment should be. It bears no relation to reality for Newham people and councillors. Indeed, I suggest that SSA could easily stand for "some silly sod's assessment," because it bears no relationship to what goes on in the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Wilshire *rose*——

Mr. Banks: I will not give way, because other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Wilshire: It is a good point that I wish to make.

Mr. Banks: It will be the first one the hon. Gentleman has ever made, so I had better give way to him.

Mr. Wilshire: I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's debunking of the attempts of other people to assess what Newham needs. Can he confirm that it is Labour party

[Mr. Wilshire]

policy that Newham should simply state the figure that it wants and the Government should provide it, irrespective of whether the borough needs it?

Mr. Banks: I am rarely consulted over Labour party policy, but were I consulted, I certainly would not argue for such a ridiculous idea. That is not what we want. We want a realistic assessment of the needs of the area, determined by councillors who know and who have to stand for election——

Mr. Wilshire: And then have the Government pay it.

Mr. Banks: No, not at all. The Government will always set the broad parameters. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that those parameters have been very much narrowed by the Government. In 1981 central Government used to contribute about 60 per cent. to local government expenditure; the contribution is now down to about 38 per cent. That is the essence of the problem. Local government finance has been squeezed and squeezed as the ground rules have been changed over and over again at the will of the Government.

We cannot have properly organised, efficient local government finance when councillors do not know what the rules will be from one year to the next. That is the ridiculous rubbish trotted out from the Dispatch Box every year since 1979. As we all know, the position has not got better; indeed, it is far worse.

I take a close interest in what the London borough of Newham does. I am proud to say that it is a Tory-free zone. We have no fears of the Dispatch Box. There is not a Tory on the local council. The Tories could not win in Newham for the simple reason that the people can see through them every day of the week. Looking through the budget papers of Newham, I notice that in the second most deprived local authority area in the whole country, according to the Department of the Environment's indices, if we just maintained our current services for next year at £220 million of expenditure, the poll tax would be £503 per person against the Government's estimate of £337. The average rate bill in Newham is £628. Therefore, with a poll tax of £503, two adults in a household will have to pay £378 more. The increase for three adults will be £881, and so it goes on.

Newham's standard spending assessment has been reduced to £195 million. At the current rate of expenditure we will spend £25 million or about 13 per cent. over the SSA. I understand that we might be capped at that level. The old capping used to start at about 12·5 per cent. As the Secretary of State mentioned the possibility of capping, I should like the Minister to tell us how it will work. At what level will capping be triggered? What mechanisms exist for it? We do not know how the mechanism of capping will work for the poll tax.

What really rankles is that Newham, despite its manifest problems, will still have to make a net contribution to the safety net of £21 per head. Next-door Tory Redbridge, which has far more facilities and is a more affluent area, will make only a £1 per head contribution. The Minister has had complaints from his own side, but what about the complaints from our side? How have we got into a position where a deprived local authority area is contributing more than an affluent area? Why is the money going to the London borough of Waltham Forest? When my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) mentioned it, the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who has nipped out to get a fresh pint of blood, said, "Good, that is what we want." That aside demonstrates the manipulative nature of the Government and the way they are prepared to twist the system to suit their party political purposes. That is what it is all about.

I objected strongly to the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) saying that London Labour boroughs, which must include mine, as the strongest Labour borough, would go for the highest possible poll tax and then try to blame it on the Government. We would have great difficulty trying to put the blame on the Government because part of the strategy is to shift all the blame on to local authorities. The Government strategy is to keep attacking and vilifying local authorities, and to keep taking money away from them. As the services deteriorate, people are expected to blame the local authorities when the Government are entirely responsible. We know what is going on. We are not stupid.

We will not impose great burdens on the people who live in Newham. We will have to consider cuts of about £17 million so that we can get down to a poll tax that is at least reasonably acceptable. We do not need lectures. We are not playing politics with the people. We are trying to protect the people from the vicious, avaricious and disreputable Government who are attacking them.

It is not just the poll tax that we face. Council tenants also face an increase of £10 a week in rents because of Government diktat. Then the Government start lecturing us about high-spending and spendthrift local councils. We do our best in Newham and we get very little assistance from the Government; indeed, we usually get a great deal of abuse.

The poll tax, which has been dreamt up by some halfwit in the Department of the Environment, is unfair, unloved and unclear. That is a reasonably good description of the Minister and of the Government.

8.56 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I want to deal head on with the question that is legitimately posed to those on the Conservative side who plan to vote against the report. We are asked what we hope to achieve, given that defeating the report would not remove the community charge but would simply deprive local government of resources. I hope to answer the question in three parts.

Some of us have consistently opposed the policy that underpins the report. We voted against Second and Third Readings of the Bill, and we voted in favour of the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). We came within 25 votes of changing Government policy. Nothing that has happened since has allayed our fears. On the contrary, those fears are now shared by more colleagues in the party who at the time were prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt, but who have seen some of our predictions come true. At a time when more colleagues are voicing their unhappiness, when there is a better chance than ever of defeating a policy-related motion, it would be absurd to abandon one's opposition and support the Government. For that reason I plan to vote against the report.

It is said that opposing the report is not a vote against the poll tax but a vote against local government, and that

the House should give local authorities the resources to carry through the reform. Conservatives voted against the RSG measures between 1974 and 1979 without being accused of being anti-local government. We did not do that because we were anti-local government. How could we? We controlled most of local government then. We did it because the RSG contained a broad political statement with which we disagreed. We took a broader view then and we are entitled to take a broader view now.

Conservative Members who feel squeamish about voting against the RSG report should read a speech that was made against the RSG order. It says:

"The Secretary of State"—

which of course was a Labour Secretary of State—

"claims that his is an equitable solution. We claim that he has abandoned equity and substituted an arbitrary decision. He claims rough justice. We say that he has abandoned any semblance of justice in what he is doing in the Rate Support Grant Order."

The speaker continued:

"It is no good trying to explain to them"—

our constituents—

"an increase in rates by reference to the resources element, the domestic element, the needs element, the relevant expenditure, and so on. They say 'I still have to bear a certain percentage of the increase in rates, and what are you going to do about that?'"

The action urged on me and my hon. Friends was to protest in the only way possible and

"to vote against the order tonight."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1974; Vol. 871, c. 60-61 and 70.]

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister led the Conservative party into the Lobby against the RSG order, having made that excellent speech. Therefore, let us not lean too hard on the argument that Conservatives should not vote against the RSG report. That argument does not hold up.

The final reason for voting against the report is not just about money. This is the first time that we have debated the new style RSG—the new regime and structure for funding local government. A better grant system was an intergral part of the reforms, of which the poll tax was but a part.

I shall quote from "Paying for Local Government", which was written in the optimistic prose of the present chairman of the Conservative party almost exactly four years ago. It says:

"Effective local government must be the cornerstone of successful local government. All too often this accountability is blurred and weakened by the complexities of the national grant system."

Amplifying that criticism, the Green Paper says:

"Central Government grants are calculated in a complicated say that conceals the real cost of local services from the electorate."

Looking ahead to the new system, we were promised

"a grant system which compensates for real differences in local authorities' needs, and provides additional help in the form of a flat-rate sum per adult."

Chapter 10 stressed the need to

"develop a grant system which was more understandable and did not obscure the link between changes in local spending and changes in local taxation."

The House is entitled to ask whether the report lives up to those high expectations.

I listened to my hon. Friends say that they can live with the community charge but do not like the RSG settlement, but the reasons why they do not like it are inherent in the philosophy of the community charge—the jump in taxes for those who live in low-rated property in the north-west; the redistribution of wealth from the less-well-off to the better-off; the problems for those who move to smaller accommodation to reduce their costs but find it not worthwhile; the increase in the number of people on benefit—that objection was voiced by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson)—the sheer bureaucracy and expense of a tax designed to catch everybody, regardless of means; and the problems of evasion and enforcement. Those are objections not to the RSG settlement but to the principle of the community charge.

Tonight, the House is asked to pay the bill for this reform. Despite the respect and admiration that I have for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, that cheque will not have my signature on it.

9.2 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I shall try to be brief. All the fears that we had about the poll tax have been more than confirmed by the reports before us. The figures bandied about by Ministers will be meaningless to many people. We should concentrate on why the Government decided to introduce the poll tax, which has no friends of any standing in the political, industrial or economic world. It stands condemned by almost every section of society. The revaluation in Scotland panicked the Government into taking ill-thought-out measures, the evidence of which is before us tonight.

I want to deal with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). The Government have conducted warfare against local authorities since 1979. They have made it virtually impossible for local government to fulfil the needs of people at a time when public expenditure has become more necessary for several reasons. One reason of which we are all aware in my area—and it is probably true of all the major conurbations—is the aging population, which requires more help from social services. A commitment from local authorities is necessary to relieve the worst excesses of unemployment. Changes are taking place in local government because of falling rolls. Although the population is declining, it is still the responsibility of local government to maintain excess school buildings, and roads. That has created great problems for local authorities. I wonder whether the Prime Minister ever visits an inner city? If she did, she would realise that since the Government came to power inner cities have become impoverished to the extent that there is not a road to walk down in my constituency that is not riddled with potholes and in a state of decline and decay.

Government policy has left local government incapable of providing for the needs of the people whom it represents. When the Liverpool city council decided to tackle the prevailing slum conditions and the badly designed post-war housing, and it began building bungalows for elderly people and pulling down the worst types of multi-storey flats, it was accused of being irresponsible. If the Government think that it is irresponsible to house people decently or to make provision for leisure centres, there is something wrong with their thinking. Those changes were necessary to benefit the local people.

The Government know nothing about what is happening in the inner cities. If they did, they would not introduce the poll tax. In my area and those of all my hon.

[Mr. Eddie Loyden]

Friends, it will be a question not of people not paying, but of being unable to pay, the poll tax—they will have no choice in the matter. With existing levels of poverty in our towns and cities, that is the inevitable consequence of the imposition of the poll tax for many people. The party that is supposed to represent the retention and sanctity of the family unit will be responsible for parents chasing their children from home because they cannot afford to pay the additional costs of having two or three young people living with them. The Prime Minister should accept that the responsibility for that lies at the door of the Government.

I hope that tonight it will not simply be a question of the nitty-gritty of the poll tax that is opposed by Conservative Members. No comprehensive view has been expressed by the Tory party on the poll tax. Conservative Members are looking for minimum concessions to satisfy their constituents while they are biting on the ballot before the next general election.

The tax is unfair and iniquitous and has no right to be introduced. If this is an honourable House—as it is supposed to be—the No Lobby will be packed and this legislation ditched in the dustbin of history, where it belongs.

9.3 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I have had two unusual experiences this evening, one of them pleasurable. The pleasurable experience was that I agreed totally and enthusiastically with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The unpleasurable experience was that, unfortunately, I had to disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), whom I have known for a long time. I used to have even more in common with him as, when we first met, I also had whiskers. We have diverged in few other respects during the past 20 years, so I am sorry to have to diverge from him this evening.

Some Conservative Members take a principled view on the reform of local government expenditure. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) has a principled objection to the basis of the change to the community charge. Other Conservative Members, who will oppose the Government in the Division Lobby, do not take the principled view against the change in the tax but object to a facet of it. I regret that some of my hon. Friends will join the principled rebels in the Division Lobby, because that is unnecessary.

Unfortunately, there is an air of utopianism about those who oppose the change to the community charge. They seem to seek a perfect solution. As my wife continually reminds me, when she was looking for a husband she was realistic and sought the least imperfect of the available options, so she chose me. In respect of local government finance, we must choose the least imperfect of all the options. The community charge corresponds to that description. Everyone knows that the existing system is arbitrary and incomprehensible. Because of that arbitrariness and incomprehensibility, the system lacks any meaningful accountability. Most of the complaints that we have heard in the debate arise from the revelation of the arbitrariness and incomprehensibility not of the new system but of the old. The revaluation of the rateable values of property, above all else, reveals for the first time the iniquity and inequity of the previous system.

I shall support in the Division Lobby not the move to a perfect system but the move from an unfair system to a less unfair system. The virtue of the new system is that it has simplicity and transparency. That transparency is to some extent diluted because of the introduction of community charge benefit. One in four of all community charge payers will receive some form of benefit to cushion the effect of the change. That will cost nearly £2 billion next year. In addition, transitional relief will cost £700 million over three years and will have 6 million beneficiaries. No Conservative Member can say that the Government have not attempted to meet the criticisms of those who oppose the new system, many of whom will, alas, vote in the Division Lobby against us this evening.

The Government are correct to keep the lid firmly down on aggregate local government expenditure, because it constitutes about one quarter of all Government expenditure. Any Government who believe in keeping tight, firm control over public spending as a macro-economic tool must appreciate that local authorities cannot run riot with public spending, because that undermines the Government's economic policy. That tight, firm control must be the aim of any Government, even a Labour Government. Previous Labour Governments had difficulties of this kind, too. I welcome the change from the incomprehensible old system of GREA to the new standard spending assessments.

No one can argue that the increase in SSAs for next year is unreasonable. The Government have accepted that an 11 per cent. increase in local government spending for the coming year is reasonable—that is much higher than inflation. The total amount that local government should spend, according to the Government, can increase by what I regard as a more than reasonable amount.

There are local authorities—usually Labour—that intend to spend a good deal more than that. My council, Cheshire county council, which is responsible for 92 per cent. of all local government spending in the county, proposes to increase its spending next year not by 11 per cent. but by more than 19 per cent. In addition, it will have to find the equivalent of another 5 per cent. of its total spending because, having emptied the tills last year in advance of the county council elections in order to blow the lot on a vote-buying spree, it will have to top them up again. Next year, Cheshire county council will have to find the equivalent of a 25 per cent. increase in its income. My prophecy about the likely levels of the community charge has been undermined by that proposal.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): My hon. Friend has been describing the overspending of Cheshire county council. Does he agree that to make the county councils more accountable, we should have elections every year rather than once every four years? Does he agree further that the time is fast approaching when the county councils should be abolished and that many of their services should be devolved to the boroughs or to central Government?

Mr. Hamilton: I have no difficulty in agreeing with my hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). The role of county councils will diminish gradually and "wither away", to use a Marxist phrase which is now out of fashion in the Labour party. As

more and more schools opt out of the local education authority system, the rationale for the county councils will ultimately disappear.

Cheshire county council is controlled by an alliance of the Labour party and Liberal Democrat councillors. In my constituency, the Liberal Democrat councillors are now squealing about the high level of community charge that the county council will impose on us, which is the direct result of spending decisions that they themselves have taken. They are now trying to disclaim any responsibility and are trying to have the penny and the biscuit. Fortunately, they will not get away with it. In future local government elections, the electors will have a simple choice —whether they want the council to spend more or less. That will not only make local government more accountable, but will restore the importance of local government issues in local government elections. They will no longer be the equivalent of opinion polls on the standing of the Government at Westminster, but will restore interest in local government and accountability. That will transform the basis of local government, which will benefit everyone.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton pointed out, we shall not have county council elections for several years. The results of the county council elections last year will prevent the community charge from having the beneficial effects for which we all hope for at least another two or three years, not because we are stuck with this Government, but because the decisions that local government electors took last year were not based on sensible local government issues, but on national issues. In the case of a county council such as Cheshire, which intends to spend enormously above the standard spending assessment, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should seriously consider charge capping. There is every reason for doing so. If the electors do not have the opportunity for several years to pass their judgment on the spending pattern of the local authority, that is the only way in which the interests of the community charge payers in Cheshire can be protected.

I also very much welcome the change from the old business rate to the national non-domestic rate, which will especially benefit the north. I am astonished that Opposition Members object in such vocal terms to the change in the business rating system as there is no bigger boost for the north and for the midlands. Manufacturing industry especially will have enormous reductions in its charges in cities such as Liverpool and Manchester.

I had much sympathy for the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) when I heard him earlier because he was unable to demonstrate a policy in opposition to the policy that my right hon. Friend put forward. I had thought that the Labour party policy review was intended to decide what policies the Labour party should propose, but in fact the Labour party policy review was intended to decide whether to have a policy. It seems that the Labour party has decided that it is far safer not to have a policy. I hope that the hon. Member for Dagenham will be present tomorrow for the debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), when we shall be debating a motion which says that the Labour party's policy deserves scrutiny by the House. He may then be able to give some of the answers that he was unable to give us today.

It is utter hypocrisy for the Labour party to oppose the motions tonight, as it is unable to offer an alternative and only criticises for the sake of it. However, the day of reckoning will come for all those overspending Labour authorities because at the general election, the people will see the cynical trick that the Labour party is trying to impose on us and once again, they will restore a Conservative Government to Westminster. These motions and our policy on the community charge will contribute considerably towards that.

9.19 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): First, let me thank the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and his office for providing me with information in a Brailleable form.

I understand from the media that he has been invited to advise the Polish Government on decentralisation and the establishment of democratic local government. I wish the Poles well. Once they have learnt about our system they may well feel that General Jaruzelski has a great deal to offer. I imagine that they will yearn for a poll tax and for water privatisation like a hole in the head. I wish the Minister luck with his advice.

It is 11 years since the big experiment in tinkering with local government and local democracy began. Today's debate and its subjects—the standard spending assessment, the safety net and the new distribution system—are the culmination of 11 years of interference and muddle. As we have said on a number of occasions, each change has brought its own nightmare for the Ministers responsible. Ministers have asked civil servants again and again to devise new ways round the labyrinth that they have created. They have created new obstacles that have had to be overcome. They have tried to find ways of preventing local government from using ingenuity. Then they have blamed local government for using ingenuity. Then they ensured that there were low spending targets that bore no resemblance to reality, and blamed local government for not managing to meet those targets. When local government could not meet those targets, the Government cut grant and suggested that local government was to blame for not managing the impossible.

We have come full circle since the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and the introduction of the new block grant system—all the way round to the poll tax and the new standard spending assessments. Environment Ministers are facing the dilemma that every Environment Minister has faced since 1979. If they are determined to block the local democratic system and to fix the amount that local authorities should spend, they must take the consequences.

Earlier today, we had the challenge from the Secretary of State: if local authorities do not spend near to the targets that they have been set, the Government will introduce poll tax capping. The chairman of the Conservative party advised strongly against rate capping four years ago. He was rapidly moved from his post, but since then he has undergone a resurgence, so perhaps there is hope yet for the Secretary of State for the Environment. The chairman of the Tory party advised that capping was undemocratic and intellectually unjustifiable. Of course it is, especially coming from a Government who claimed that the poll tax brought new accountability and new choice to the voter.

The Government cannot have it both ways. They cannot suggest that local electors will be able to choose the

[Mr. David Blunkett]

local administration that they want and determine the amount that it spends through the new system and then, in the next breath, propose to stop that happening. Matters are made worse by the fact that the Secretary of State has so often repeated the brief that he was originally given, which said that the community charge puts the community in charge. It was a trite phrase when it was used on 6 November. Now that poll tax capping has been dreamt of so that the Government may wave a stick over local authorities, and that phrase has seemingly been forgotten, it is shown in a hypocritical and disgraceful light.

One Conservative Member had the audacity to let the cat out of the bag when he said that capping would be necessary until democracy "started to work better". In other words, democracy is fine, so long as it yields results for the Conservative party. As the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) would put it, that is quite immoral. It is unnecessarily provocative and leads to the assumption that the Government have not only got their figures wrong, but their assumptions that the poll tax would prevent public spending and hold down spending levels by resulting in further cuts in public services have also been proved wrong.

I challenge the Secretary of State on the figures he gave this afternoon in relation to whether central or local government has increased its spending most in recent years. Taking 1978-79 as the base level—the year the Conservative Government came in to office—and the current financial year of 1989-90, central Government spending has increased by 177 per cent. in cash terms, whereas local government spending in cash terms, even taking into account the transfer of housing benefit to local government, has increased by 146 per cent.

Those figures come from table 4.4 of the public expenditure White Paper and they are the honest truth. Under the Conservatives, central Government have increased their spending whereas local government has had to cut its spending. Of course, it is central Government who have increased the overall general level of taxation and local government which has got the blame for what has happened at local level. As inflation has risen, as the problems of local government have increased, as grants have been cut to the tune of 5p on national income tax, local government and the rating system have been blamed for the resulting anomalies and difficulties.

However, tonight, some Conservative Members have had the audacity to say that, if the electors of Conservative authorities are faced with large poll tax bills, it is because of a mistake in the way in which the Government have operated the safety nets, the transition, or the standard spending assessment formula. However, if Labour authorities are likely to be spending over the Government's targets, they say that that is because of profligacy and uncontrolled public spending. The Government cannot have it both ways. If Tory authorities are miles over the likely spending targets—if Conservative boroughs cannot keep down to the £278 level—and if neighbouring Labour-controlled authorities are in exactly the same position, the same reasons must, of course, apply.

The reasons that apply tonight are simple. The system is not working properly. Indeed, it cannot work properly because it was predicated on the wrong assumptions in the first place. If a tax initially attempts to take a flat rate from every adult, but rebates, transition, and safety nets then have to be introduced, if the standard spending assessments then have to be altered to try to help, and if there is then something called special grants, which are commonly known in the Department of the Environment as "the Poodle factor", which means "saving Conservative seats", all that adds up not only to muddle and confusion, but to an impossibility for local government which is already struggling with a variety of problems and difficulties.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew and Inverclyde): Does my hon. Friend know that in Scotland many people who are entitled to a rebate are not getting it? When I wrote to the Minister, I was told that rebates were too costly to administer if they were for less than, say, £25. Many people in Scotland, including elderly and disabled people and desperately poor people, are not getting their rebate because the Government do not think that £25 is enough for them to claim. That is lamentable. The problem is that the Government are taking from the poor. Although they guaranteed to give folk their rebates, people who are entitled to them are not getting them.

Mr. Blunkett: I appreciate the particular problems that have already been experienced in Scotland, and especially the difficulty and confusion that there has been about the rebate system.

I advise the Secretary of State and his Minister of State that if they introduce poll tax capping this year on top of the existing administrative chaos that will result from transition, special help and the rebate system, they will create the most incredible havoc in local government, which could not possibly have been envisaged, as local authorities try to return to poll taxpayers the amount that the Government have specified, while cutting services to make that possible.

I must make it clear that the rebate system already results in major confusion. Even in a Tory borough such as Harrogate, which is fairly well off, the Government's television advertising has resulted in 5,000 coupons being returned. The district treasurer believes that only 2,000 people will be found to be entitled to relief.

There is already a problem in local government administration. District treasurers across the country are spelling it out. Two thirds of local councils will have to raise between £60 and £100 on top of the Government guidelines in order to maintain their present level of spending. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has already spelt out in a recent study that the Government's belief that only 15 local authorities in England will spend over £350 in the coming year is sheer mythology. At least 139 authorities, and probably many more, will spend more than £350. If the Secretary of State chooses to rate-cap authorities on the basis that they spend 25 per cent. or more above their assessment or notional figure, he will have to rate-cap in excess of a quarter of local authorities in England.

On the figures currently available, the Secretary of State will have to rate-cap his own district council in Bath. I look forward to his going to Bath, Roman helmet in hand, to say that the figures that he dreamed up, upon which the council will be rate-capped, are right.

Mr. Chris Patten: The hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that if it was left to the district council in Bath, it would have no difficulty in coming within the

figures that we have suggested. If there are problems in Bath, it will be because of the overspending by the county council, which proposes a budget increase of 15·7 per cent. next year.

Mr. Blunkett: It is always someone else when it is a Tory council. The burghers of Bath must be seething about what is happening to them. Whatever the reason, it will be the district council that the Government will have to cap. It would have to levy that particular rate in that district. The Secretary of State should face his poll tax capping with open eyes. As we advised the then Secretary of State six years ago that rate capping would not achieve its goal, I advise this Secretary of State that poll tax capping will not achieve its goal. He will have to invent something else. That something else in the end will be that central Government will take over direction of local government spending and will fix local authority budgets. When that happens, the Government will be held accountable for massive cuts in education spending, and social service spending on care of the elderly, the disabled and the disadvantaged.

It is interesting that, whenever the Government want to say that they have done something good, for example, in education, care of the elderly or taking care of the environment, they are happy to parade how much local government spends. When the tables are turned, and people talk about high-spending local authorities—which are responsible for the statistics that the Government wheel out on education spending, pupil-teacher ratios and spending on books and equipment in schools—it is always the Labour authorities who are to blame.

Let us get the matter clear. Local government spending is spending on our children, our parents, the family next door and creating a decent, caring community. The poll tax was devised to prevent that and to push down public spending. When the Government do that, even in their most-favoured authorities such as Wandsworth, in which I live when I am in London, the worm will turn. When that council saw its figures, it dissociated itself from the Secretary of State's spending assumptions. Next time the Secretary of State wheels out Wandsworth, he should remember what it told him. Even with a favourable safety net, it does not agree with the Secretary of State.

The figure of £278 is a myth. The spending assessments are compiled out of fairyland. The safety net does not work. The special grants have failed to mollify the Secretary of State's own Back Benchers. The electorate are not fools. They have woken up to what is happening. The simplified system has turned out to be a sillier system. Assessment of needs has become political gerrymandering.

In the end, that will catch up with everyone in the Conservative party. That is why tonight it is important that those who have wavered, those who are unsure, should make a concrete decision, not simply on the spending assessments or on the safety net, but on the Government's failure to spell out what their cushioning effect will mean to the unified business rate.

Conservative Members from the north must not delude themselves. After five years, manufacturing industry in their areas will reap the bitter fruits of the revaluation. In the end they will not benefit. The combination of redistribution of cuts in grants and the delay in implementing the revaluation will cost them dear.

When the safety nets are off, Yorkshire and Humberside will lose £289 million, the north will lose £171 million, the east midlands will lose £41 million, the north-west, I must tell the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), will lose £113 million and inner London will lose £515 million. Far from there being automatic gains and windfalls, if hon. Members examine the figures more closely they will see what is really happening in their own back yards.

Mr. Booker: As my hon. Friend is appealing to Tory business men and reflecting on the back yards of Conservative Members, would he care to reflect in his final few minutes on the dwellings of Conservative Members, not one of whom will lose under the poll tax? They will march into the Lobby for massive personal gains under the poll tax at 10 o'clock tonight. The larger the property in which they live, the bigger their gain. They will vote for themselves at 10 o'clock.

Mr. Blunkett: If they vote for themselves, they might have a lower poll tax for two years, but in two years' time they may not have a job in the House to come to. As we have seen with some Cabinet Members, that may mean for some a trebling of their salaries rather than a downturn, so there may not be the interest in that which we would expect. But perhaps tonight Conservative Members will take cognisance of what the right hon. Member for Brent, North had to say about that shining light on the "Rhodes" to Damascus that he described. Perhaps they will have in their minds the moral wrong and the political ineptitude that he described as they go through the Lobbies tonight. Perhaps they will hear in their minds his words about a "death-inducing draught". Perhaps they will take on board that immovable and ingenious phrase "the big fleece"—the big fleece that attempts to pull the wool over the eyes of the electorate, the big fleece that comes from those who, like sheep, will go into the Lobby with their tails between their legs tonight.

The challenge to every Conservative Member is not to be frightened of the Whips, not to be worried about what will happen to them next week, but to be more concerned with what will happen to them in their localities at the local elections and in their constituencies at the general election.

The challenge tonight is to those who care, to those who have a conscience about what is happening to those who cannot afford the poll tax. It may be that tonight cowards will flinch and their colleagues will sneer, but tomorrow the electorate will ensure that they have something to fear.

9.30 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. David Hunt): Every year we have an interesting and vigorous debate about the level of support for local government. I have had the opportunity of sitting through 26 speeches. Although I cannot say that I agreed with all those made by Conservative Members, I disagreed with every one made by Opposition Members. The debate has been of a high standard. Points have been made effectively and competently and, where a divide has been exposed, it has been done clearly to enable us to make the decisions which we have to take tonight.

Although I welcomed the kind, opening words of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), he did not follow the debate as arguments were developed on each side of the Chamber. If he looks at his speech and

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some of the statistics, he will see that he made a series of statements which are not borne out by the way in which the debate has progressed.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State started the debate with a quite brilliant speech. It was so good that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), whose absence is now noticed, was heard to shout, "My God, this is a seminar." I always pay close attention to what the hon. Member for Bolsover says, and I rushed to the dictionary. A seminar is defined as an opportunity for education and advancement. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has gone, but he has missed an opportunity.

My right hon. Friend has asked me to deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). Lambeth faces not a mistake involving £11 million, but an appeal result on the rateable value of county hall. That has meant that Lambeth will bear half the reduction and must pay back money which the appeal decided it should never have received. That was not the way in which the hon. Member for Norwood put it. I hope that he will accept the facts as I have presented them.

Mr. Fraser: Does the Minister accept that, whatever caused it, that is a huge loss of income which, because of the way in which the system operates, will not be compensated for in the same way as Wandsworth or any other local authority will be compensated for a rise in expenditure of more than £25 per head per annum?

Mr. Hunt: We shall have to consider elsewhere—between officials—the points which the hon. Gentleman has made. I was making the point that the hon. Gentleman described the incident as an error on the part of the revenue valuation office officials. I am putting that in context.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) and——

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that it seems quite clear that a number of Labour councils, including my own of Kirklees, are intending to set as high a community charge rate as possible so that they can try to score party political points by blaming the Government for the high level of community charge? Does my hon. Friend agree that councils which act in such a way and penalise many people on modest and low incomes will be acting in a wholly immoral and cruel way? Will he assure me now that he will not flinch from capping those irresponsible Labour authorities?

Mr. Hunt: I give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. I am told by my officials that this is not a time of year when district and county council treasurers are known to underestimate the level of spending that lies ahead. What is wrong is that this year certain Labour councils made a policy decision to increase spending—as in the case of Kirklees, with an increase of about 18 per cent.—with the result that there will be a high community charge.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Is the Minister aware that St. Helens has suffered a £9·8 million reduction in its revenue support grant? That represents an extra payment of £65 for every poll tax payer. St. Helens borough council, which, as the Minister knows, is not a profligate authority, faces imposing a poll tax of more than £400 per person. Is that fair on St. Helens?

Mr. Hunt: I do not accept that from the hon. Gentleman. I ask right hon. and hon. Members who want to intervene to allow me to respond first to those right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House who attended the entire debate. I have evidence to show that Labour councils are artificially inflating the community charge that they intend to impose. I shall return to that point.

I believe that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) misunderstands the figure of £32·8 billion for total standard spending. He stated, as he will discover if he reads his speech in *Hansard*, that that figure did not take into account balances. The hon. Gentleman should have compared spending against spending, not spending against the way in which the money is raised. The figure of £32·8 billion represents an 11 per cent. increase over the equivalent figure in this year. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State clearly made the point that there has been an adequate increase in the assumed and appropriate levels of spending to produce the standard level of service.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the CIPFA report, which illustrated what the situation would be if spending were substantially increased on top of the overspending this year. The point has been echoed in speech after speech, particularly by my right hon. and hon. Friends, that CIPFA is suggesting overspending on top of overspending. In 1989-90, local authorities budgeted to increase spending by 9 per cent., making a total increase over two years of 20 per cent. The 1989-90, budgeted overspend was 4 per cent., so CIPFA is building overspending on top of overspending.

What would have been the effect if we had accepted those figures and had continued with the existing system? I reiterate the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) that there would have needed to be a domestic revaluation. If the domestic rate system had continued, on CIPFA's figures, rates would have increased this year by an average of 24 per cent.

Mr. Gould: The Minister's 11 per cent. increase is meaningless because it is an increase on an assumed level of spending for the current year by comparison with the total standard spending of £32·8 billion for the forthcoming year. It is a comparison between two assumed levels of spending rather than a comparison with the actual level of spending, which is what local authorities must face.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Member for Dagenham ought to think again about my right hon. Friend's speech. It was a seminar to which he should have paid more attention.

The hon. Member for Dagenham also came to the House in an irresponsible manner to give us what he described as a progress report on Labour's alternative. He said, "I'm coming to give you a progress report on where we are." The progress report was—no progress at all.

Ms. Armstrong: Before the Minister gets himself into real trouble, will he tell the House why he assumes that any decisions taken in local government are automatically against the interests of people and that therefore the Government have to protect people? That is his attitude to local government, and how it makes its decisions. Local

government has been accountable to the electorate since the election of the Government. Why is he so against local government? Why is he right and it is wrong?

Mr. Hunt: I think that that was a brave attempt by Durham to move to the aid of Dagenham. I shall return to that subject in a moment.

If the hon. Member for Dagenham intends to be taken seriously then—*[Interruption.]* I am winding up the debate and I am responding to points that hon. Members have made. If the hon. Member for Dagenham wants to be taken seriously by the House, he should explain what has happened to the policy that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) announced at a press conference. *[Interruption.]* I am responding to the point that the hon. Member for Dagenham made. The Opposition may not like it, but next time the hon. Gentleman makes a progress report, would he please report progress, because we are getting impatient and so is the country?

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: In a moment.

We heard an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), who pointed out the importance of making the same decision in this debate as we did when we debated the introduction of the charge in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made an interesting speech and proposed an alternative to the charge, as did the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright). They proposed a local income tax, but I do not think that that is a proper alternative because, as I have pointed out on many occasions, it would mean having a "Chancellor of the Exchequer" in many town halls, and that is unacceptable.

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: Just one second.

The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) made a good speech, and I give him credit for staying in the debate for some considerable time. He said that the amount of money provided is not sufficient. He missed the point that my right hon. Friend made—that, if one considers the aggregate external finance coming in to local authorities, one sees that the figure in the coming year of £23·1 billion will mean 8·5 per cent. more financing coming in from outside than in this financial year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) made a good speech, and she reminded us of the profligacy of Derbyshire county council.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) made an interesting speech on wage increases. My record is reasonably good on that issue. When the 8·8 per cent. National and Local Government Officers Association settlement was announced, on the casting vote of Lancashire, as a result of Labour forcing through an inflationary pay increase that took no account of productivity, all the employers met afterwards, and said that it was a disaster. I said that the settlement was bad news for the community charge payer. How can the hon. Gentleman now expect me to fund that increase in full? The community charge payers now realise the price that they will have to pay for that inflationary pay award.

I think that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) was wrong about sports clubs, which pay rates at present. Some will experience a drop in value. The hon. Gentleman's main point, however, was that some local authorities—I think that he meant Labour authorities—did not, sadly, recognise the importance of sports clubs. I have given local authorities more power to give sports clubs greater preference, and it is to that that the hon. Gentleman should address his comments.

I listened carefully to what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). I recognise that he is one of the most distinguished of my predecessors as Minister for Local Government, and that he did much to sell the principle of the community charge during the 1987 general election campaign. I commend him for that. He would have introduced the charge in a different way, but I hope that he will give us credit for having introduced a transitional relief scheme which, I believe, will provide real relief for just the people he mentioned.

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of overspending by Labour councils, will he consider the overspending by Liberal councils? One of the issues that worry us in the west of England is that of the many dwellings that will face the standard community charge. Is that taken into account in revenue support grant, or is it a bonus for the councils? If it is a bonus, will the councils be able to return it to the ratepayers in reduced community charge, or will it encourage higher spending?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend is right to recognise that the standard community charge is not included in the settlement that we are debating tonight. According to our calculations, it represents an increase of about £80 million over and above this settlement. It is concentrated in particular parts of the country, such as my hon. Friend's constituency. I have, however, set a discretion for local authorities to use the multiplier in the way that they think fit for local considerations, and they now have the power to reduce the standard charge in a number of cases. I should be happy to deal with that point, and others that I cannot cover now, by writing to the hon. Members concerned. *[Interruption.]* I have to do that only because of the time constraint.

Responding to my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), the hon. Members for Dagenham and for Newham, North-east (Mr. Leighton) said that it was an outright calumny to suggest that Labour authorities were trying to push up the community charge level that they were now announcing in an attempt to turn people against the community charge. *[Interruption.]* A document has come into my hands—unfortunately, someone seems to have left it behind after a meeting in Southwark—which advises Labour councillors to consider:

"What is more important—short term protection of people by setting low"

community charges, which the document calls

"poll taxes"—

[Interruption.] This is a genuine document—

"or longer term protection by getting rid of the poll tax?"

It refers to

"the highest rate you can get away with".

I readily make this available—*[Interruption.]*

[Mr. Hunt]

I say to my hon. Friends, let us turn the attack where it belongs. Let us concentrate our fire on the Opposition Benches. It is a generous settlement in the present financial climate. It will give local authorities 8·5 per cent. more in business rates and government grants. There is the most generous form of rebates and community charge rebates. We have decided to accelerate the payout to local authorities in payment of grant this year. It is a good settlement. I have no hesitation in recommending it to the House, and I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby tonight in voting for what I sincerely believe will be a simpler and fairer system.

Mr. Speaker: I shall put the Question on each of the motions separately. I understand that it is desired to have a Division on motions Nos. 2 and 3. I shall put motion No. 1 first.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Population Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 48), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [12 January], to put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motions.*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith,

That the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1990-91 (House of Commons Paper No. 47), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved. *—[Mr. Fallon.]*

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw) *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Because they find themselves in severe difficulties tonight, the Government have asked the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) to come to the House on his crutches and the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) also to be here, although I understand that he has not been well. Do you agree, Mr. Speaker, that, in those circumstances, it would be right to nod those two Members through the Lobby, thereby helping the Government to maintain their majority? That would be preferable to the disabled being dragged through to save the Government.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the usual channels. I am sure that it could be arranged.

The House having divided: Ayes 318, Noes 272.

Division No. 38] **[10.00**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'Ys)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meller, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Begg, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'ist'n & R'dish)*
Benyon, W.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gordon, Mildred
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heller, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'hauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loftthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri

Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. (W'shawe)
Morris, Rt Hon J. (Aberavon)
Morrison, Sir Charles
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray (Ogmore)
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allen (Bootle)
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter (Belfast E)
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie (Dundee W)
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Richard (Aldridge)
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew (Oxford E)
Smith, C. (Isl'ton & F'bury)
Smith, Rt Hon J. (Monk'ds E)
Smith, J. P. (Vale of Glam)
Smyth, Rev Martin (Belfast S)
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann (Dewsbury)
Taylor, Matthew (Truro)
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack (Wansbeck)
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth (Gower)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow, C)
Welsh, Andrew (Angus E)
Welsh, Michael (Doncaster N)
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. (Carm'then)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, Sir George (Acton)

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith,

That the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 49), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.—*[Mr. David Hunt.]*

The House divided: *Ayes 313, Noes 277.*

Division No. 40] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arnos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques (Gravesham)
Arnold, Tom (Hazel Grove)
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. (Mole Valley)
Baker, Nicholas (Dorset N)
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert (Harrogate)
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas (Pembroke)
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A (Brighton K'pto'n)
Bowden, Gerald (Dulwich)
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael (Brigg & Cl'th)
Browne, John (Winchester)
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, (Luton N)
Carlisle, Kenneth (Lincoln)
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan (Plym'th S'n)
Clark, Dr Michael (Rochford)
Clark, Sir W. (Croydon S)
Clarke, Rt Hon K. (Rushcliffe)
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony (Wyre F'rest)
Coombs, Simon (Swindon)
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. (Stamf'd & Spald'g)
Davis, David (Boothferry)
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicksons, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David (Welwyn Hat'd)
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry (Isle of Wight)
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael (Stirling)
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony (CambsSW)
Greenway, John (Ryedale)
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon (Bury St E')
Griffiths, Peter (Portsmouth N)
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie (Eyesore)
Hamilton, Neil (Tatton)
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. (B'ham H'll Gr')
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen (Wolv' NE)
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas (Gr'th'm)
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan (Strat'd-on-A)
Howarth, G. (Cannock & B'wd)
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David (G'ldford)
Hughes, Robert G. (Harrow W)
Hunt, David (Wirral W)
Hunt, Sir John (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym (Cardiff N)
Jones, Robert B (Herts W)
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger (B'ham N'field)
King, Rt Hon Tom (Bridgwater)
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg (Derby North)
Knight, Dame Jill (Edgbaston)
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward (Gainsbor'gh)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian (Havant)
Lloyd, Peter (Fareham)
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew (E Berkshire)
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John (Hendon S)
Marshall, Michael (Arundel)
Martin, David (Portsmouth S)
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew (Gedling)
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M (N'hampton S)
Morrison, Rt Hon P (Chester)
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard

Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Begg, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'ht'n & R'dish)*
Benyon, W.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Chwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gordon, Mildred
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leighton, Ron
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert

Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wiggin, Jerry
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant Transition Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 50), a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (House of Commons Paper No. 128), a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

PETITIONS

Human Embryos

10.29 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I have great pleasure in presenting on behalf of the constituents of York a petition signed by no fewer than 1,243 people since December. I pay tribute to Mrs. Angela Brefitt and her colleagues.

The petitioners pray that the House

will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding or freezing of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment, unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned; and forbids all forms of trans-species fertilisation.

I welcome the petition. I, too, believe that we need legislation that will forbid the purchase or sale of human embryos and their use for experiments. Cloning and the creation of hybrids are reminiscent of the Hitler era and have no place in a civilised world. I am not surprised that the strongest law to date is that passed in West Germany, where people have terrible memories of experiments carried out on human beings.

To lie upon the Table.

Broadcasting (Deaf People)

10.30 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for this opportunity to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in support of the campaign that many people have been mounting to seek to ensure that our broadcast media provide services for the deaf. It is signed by Mr. David Buxton of Brunswick quay, Redriff road, Surrey docks, Southwark and by more than 150 other constituents of mine.

The petition makes the three clear points made in many other petitions presented to the House. First, broadcasters are still not providing enough access to deaf television viewers, either by subtitles or by sign language. Secondly, more than 4 million viewers are affected—a significant number by any definition—and, thirdly, deaf viewers, as equal members of the viewing public, are entitled to equal access to television programmes.

I happen to know that the first signatory of the petition is himself deaf and therefore feels as strongly as the other signatories and I feel. The petitioners pray that our

Honourable House will ensure that legislation be passed placing an obligation on the television channel operators to make their programmes more accessible to deaf people by using Teletext subtitles, sign language or other means, and to reach complete coverage by a fixed date.

I hope that, in the context of statements made by the deputy Prime Minister and other members of the Government, we shall soon have an acceptable answer to such petitions.

To lie upon the Table.

Time Harmonisation

10.31 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I have a petition from 400 people in Scotland who oppose the EEC proposals to harmonise United Kingdom time with European Community time. These proposals, if implemented, would mean that in parts of Scotland the sun would rise at 10.30 am during the very short days of winter.

Mine is the first of many petitions on this matter. It says:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House reject the European Community proposals to harmonise all of the Community into one time zone.

To lie upon the Table.

Brogdale Fruit Station

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

10.33 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I am glad to have the opportunity tonight of raising on the Adjournment the question of the proposed closure of the Brogdale fruit station and the future of the national fruit collection.

In the House on 14 December 1989 I said that, as the Member of Parliament for Faversham for nearly 20 years, I have never been as badly treated by Labour or Conservative Ministers of any Government as I have been on this issue. I still remain angry and bitter, as much about the way in which the decision was reached as about the decision itself. I feel that resentment not only behalf of myself, but much more on behalf of the people I represent and the many dedicated people who have been working constructively and energetically towards an exciting future for the Brogdale fruit centre, and who suddenly found all their efforts guillotined by the Government's announcement of their decision to close Brogdale and to transfer the collection to Wye college.

I accept that there is little to be gained by recrimination, although I advise my hon. Friend the Minister that I intend to pursue further the manner in which this matter was concluded in other ways because I feel thoroughly dissatisfied with the way in which I personally was treated, together with my constituents and others.

There is, however, a lot to be gained tonight and I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to help us greatly. We can gain something of the utmost importance because if my hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will now give us their positive support, we can ensure that we can establish for posterity a splendid national fruit centre on the Brogdale site—a fruit museum in the heart of the garden of England that will be a heritage centre of national and international importance and contribute to the commercial future of the British fruit industry. However, if my hon. Friend and the Government do not provide us with that assistance, posterity will curse us for our failure to see even a little further ahead.

All that we really need from my hon. Friend at the moment is an assurance that the Government will give their encouragement to the establishment of a privately funded trust on the Brogdale site. That has real meaning because tonight I want my hon. Friend to give the assurance that there will be no grubbing of collection trees or even of trial trees in the immediate future. An assurance from the Government means that they will allow us time to assemble the resources that would secure the trust that I have mentioned. That will take time. It means that we want the Government actively to encourage the establishment of the trust.

We attach such importance to the Brogdale centre because of the number of things that it represents. It represents a remarkable fruit collection—indeed, one of the most remarkable in the world. It also engages in variety testing. It is, in a sense, the patent office of apples and many other fruits. It is of immense importance. It also engages in fruit trials that contribute greatly to the future of British fruit.

The national fruit trials are a unique collection of fruits, including apples, pears, cherries, plums, soft fruits,

[Mr. Roger Moate]

quinces, medlars, and nuts. It is an international gene bank and a world resource of fruit varieties for plant breeders and horticulturists. It is part of Britain's agricultural and gardening heritage. The collection is a living reference library and contains 2,300 varieties of apples, some of which can be dated back to medieval and Roman times. It contains 500 varieties of pears, 300 varieties of plums and 220 varieties of cherries.

Its location in the Faversham area is of particular importance. It is appropriate for historic as well as for horticultural reasons. The first British centre of fruit growing in the 16th century was nearby at Teynham. Here, around Sittingbourne and Faversham, Henry VIII's fruiterer, Richard Harris, created orchards of cherries, apples and pears and planted the first pippins that were subsequently distributed all round the country. For today's purposes, the Brogdale site, with its range of soils, its coastal position and its freedom from late frosts, is admirable for growing all temperate fruits. It is a site of particular significance and the decision to move this national collection away from Brogdale makes no sense at all on scientific, economic or heritage grounds. I hope that my hon. Friend will tell me that the Government remain open-minded about the decision.

I have explained why the matter is so important. I should like to ascertain from my hon. Friend why the Government have decided to close the centre. Even on financial grounds, it does not make sense. What will be the cost of moving the collection? I have seen a figure of between £300,000 and £330,000. What is the point of trying to sell this asset when it will take five, six or seven years to transfer the collection and, therefore, there can be little immediate commercial value attached to the land? What will be the lost resource value of retaining the collection there and, ultimately, of transferring it to Wye college?

What will be the grubbing costs? What asset value has the Ministry placed on the value of the buildings, which are of crucial importance? We believe that the Government have placed an entirely disproportionate value on the buildings. They believe, perhaps, that the land has great development potential. There would be tremendous local resentment if it were assumed that the site would be the subject of major commercial development. The land is completely unsuitable for development.

Mr. hon. Friend the Minister has probably not seen an interesting and important article in the *New Scientist* dated 13 January. The headline is:

"Britain uproots the world's biggest fruit collection."

That is an appropriate title and an important way of presenting the Government's extraordinary decision. They propose to move the world's biggest fruit collection 12 miles away to Wye college. They are doing that in spite of a proposal by local interests that would give the Government everything that they want and protect the scientific interest and the collection without the nonsense of moving the collection 12 miles away. I ask the Minister carefully to consider the *New Scientist*'s article.

When the Government announced their decision, Swale borough council was leading a group of dedicated experts and people ready to raise the funds necessary to create the trust that I have described. The Government's decision interrupted the negotiations. If the Government decide —despite all the requests not to do so—to move the collection, that group will still be willing to establish the trust to create a magnificent new fruit heritage centre in Swale.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, as a contributor to the *New Scientist* for 21 years, I found that that article was extremely carefully researched?

Mr. Moate: I accept absolutely what the hon. Gentleman says. Not only was it well researched: it represents the tip of the iceberg. The iceberg is a large body of expertise and well-backed knowledge that believes that Brogdale is the right site at which to keep the collection.

If we can generate locally the resources necessary to acquire the site, does it not make sense that the collection remain where it is? Will my hon. Friend reconsider the possibility of leaving the collection exactly where it is? He will know that the local proposal has immense and widespread backing. If we can produce the financial resources to acquire the asset which will satisfy the Treasury's desire to dispose of the land within the immediate future, and if we can provide the opportunity to protect the scientific future of the site, what is the point of moving it 12 miles away?

Does it not make much more sense to allow the new trust to be established, I hope with powerful patronage; for the scientists from Wye college, if that is what the Government want, to continue to supervise that interest while at the same time allowing the new trust to exploit all the many other opportunities that exist for education; for the public to proclaim, as I readily concede that we have never done in the past, the immense attractions and virtues of this great national fruit collection; for other experimentation; and for offering commercial growers opportunities to develop new fruits on a commercial basis?

It would be a tragedy if we threw away that opportunity simply because of the mistaken belief that somehow the Government have to adhere to their decision. I hope that tonight my hon. Friend will be able to give me some assurance that the Government will now, despite the recent sad experience, put their weight behind a commitment to help us to create at Brogdale near Faversham a national fruit centre, privately financed and, I hope, retaining the national fruit collection.

But if the Government do adhere to their insistence that the fruit collection must move to Wye, I hope that they will wholeheartedly enter into negotiations with the Swale borough council, take no immediate decisions that in any way prejudice the viability of either the national fruit collection or the national fruit trials, and give us time to assemble the resources to create something that is of tremendous importance to us and to the future of this vital part of our national heritage.

I do not intend to go over the many arguments that can be deployed. I have made the point that really matters. What I really want from my hon. Friend tonight is an assurance of his support in the future for the establishment of this new trust in Kent. It will need his help. If we can have that assurance tonight we shall have achieved a great deal.

I am not on my own. There are many throughout the country who feel passionately, as I do, that we could be making a dreadful mistake if we continue along the path that we appear to be taking at present. But we still have

time to change. This is a matter of immense importance and the attitude of my hon. Friend and his colleagues tonight could determine whether we still have on this superb site, which climatically, geologically and in every other sense is the right site, a fruit centre that is an essential part of our national heritage in the garden of England where it rightly belongs. We have tremendous support for this and we depend a great deal upon my hon. Friend to make sure that we can achieve that.

10.48 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As I am an hon. Member from Scotland at the other end of the country, it may seem strange that I should so passionately support the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). My interest started some 25 years ago when I was taken by Sir Gordon Fox to East Malling.

This is a national issue. Ghillean Prance, the director of Kew, told me that it was the most important horticultural issue of the moment, and so it is.

I am told by the former fruit trials director, John Ingram, that it would be disaster to move to Wye. I know that Wye college is upset about the criticisms that have been made of the move to Wye. None the less, this is a basic national issue of considerable interest to those in the field and I hope that the hon. Gentleman's pleas will be answered.

10.49 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) and the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) have both spoken passionately about their passion for this issue. I have an equal enthusiasm for the importance of the national fruit collection. I am a keen amateur gardener and horticulturist and come to the issue not coldly but with a great deal of determination to ensure that the decisions that we take are in the best interests of the national fruit collection and its associated activities.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will thank me if I seek to be as helpful as I can when I genuinely can. When I have to disappoint him, I am sure that he would prefer it if I said frankly what the position was rather than pretended to offer openings which I was unable to provide. If the debate is a frank exchange of views it will be helpful to my hon. Friend, his constituency and me.

We must close Brogdale. The largest part of the work at Brogdale is fruit variety trialling. Trialling, as my hon. Friend will know, is rather like *Which?* testing: it provides guidance to growers on the best varieties for the future. It is valuable work, and Brogdale has deservedly earned a high reputation for it. Those trials are clearly near-market in nature. We sought industry funding for them but it has not been forthcoming to support the scale of the variety trialling at Brogdale. Therefore, we have concluded that the station will have to close at the end of March this year.

The national fruit collection is situated at Brogdale station, together with the associated plant variety rights testing. The Government have made it clear all along that the national fruit collection will not be disposed of but will be preserved for the future. That is a firm commitment which I intend to honour in its entirety. Once we had decided on the closure of Brogdale, we had to consider where the collection should be located and how it should be managed.

Three options emerged: first, to stay at Brogdale under the management of Swale borough council; secondly, to move to East Malling; and, thirdly, to move to Wye college. Each of the options had strong attractions and disadvantages. We discussed the proposals with each party and considered all their suggestions carefully. I shall try to explain why we reached the final decision.

Why not leave the collection at Brogdale? I realise that that is the central question in my hon. Friend's mind. We would have liked to do so. We did not doubt that Swale borough council would care for it properly and develop its potential as much as it could. However, once Brogdale had closed as a research station, the collection would be isolated from other scientific and horticultural expertise. We had to consider what was in the best interests of the collection. In our view, its long-term position would be best secured if it were adjacent to a centre of scientific and horticultural research. In the end, that factor outweighed the advantages of leaving the collection at Brogdale.

My hon. Friend raised the matter of costs. I shall write to him with the detailed breakdown for which he has asked. We examined the comparative costs of leaving the collection at Brogdale and moving it, but cost was not by any means the most important factor. However, we believe that over a period the costs of moving will be counterbalanced by the savings resulting from the economies of scale.

Mr. Dalyell: Lady Trumpington did me the courtesy of ringing me about the matter during the recess after my hostile questions. I understood her to say that she had to find money in order to make the £30 million savings required by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I thought that money was the determinant factor.

Mr. Curry: The decision to close Brogdale was taken because of the policy to terminate Government involvement in near-market research. When we came to estimating the costs of the relative advantages of moving to one place or another, money was not the determining factor. If I have time, I shall talk about the costs later in my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham suggested that Swale had not completed its proposals before the decison was taken. Swale had submitted estimates of costs, which it knew would be compared with other options. It had close contact with my officials, who made the position clear. It also knew that my noble Friend the Minister of State was anxious not to delay the decision in the interests of securing the collection's future and ending uncertainty for the staff. We understand that Swale subsequently continued to develop plans to adopt the collection as a heritage feature and, perhaps, provide trialling facilities. There has been a certain lack of precision about the proposals up to now.

I am more than happy to continue discussions on Swale. The borough council is to have a meeting with my officials tomorrow to discuss ideas for a site at Brogdale after the collection has moved. I am open to suggestions and will explore plans for a future museum that would entail acquisition of the site. However, any proposals must be substantive, comprehensive, and made quickly. The time scale for alternative suggestions is short.

[Mr. Curry]

I stress that none of the trees and bushes in the national fruit collection will be grubbed up until new plants are properly established and correctly labelled at their new home. The move will be made with great care. My hon. Friend will know that trees are regularly repropagated in the normal course of events. The collection itself has been moved before, from Wisley to Brogdale, so the proposed move will be the second in its history. The root stock has already been planted in a nursery area at Brogdale, and the grafts will be budded in August and the young trees moved to Wye when they are about two years old. The whole process will take about three years.

What about the other work at Brogdale? Plant variety rights testing will be moved with the collection. The Government-funded fruit variety trialling will come to a close for the reasons I gave, and it is now up to the industry to decide on the work that it wants to support and where. We shall be interested to learn of Swale's plans for the trials, and we have suspended the removal of the trees until after discussion with Swale. I emphasise that only trees that have completed trialling have been removed so far. None of the trees currently the subject of trialling has been grubbed up. While substantive negotiations continue, and until we are sure that Swale has had a fair hearing for whatever case it wishes to put, no grubbing up will occur.

We could not leave the trial trees on the site, because they belong not to us but to the owners, whose authorisation must be sought before the trees can pass into other hands.

If not Brogdale, where? We could have established a collection at East Malling or at Wye, and we recognised that each location had drawbacks. The disadvantage of East Malling relates to plant variety rights testing transferred with the collection. Much of that work is undertaken for international fruit breeders, who would have been concerned if valuable new materials were to be tested on the same station at which our own breeders work. There was a risk that the United Kingdom would lose the confidence of international breeders in fruit variety rights testing, however strictly the two varieties were segregated.

Another problem is that the collection is not entirely free from disease, which would have posed a health risk to research and development by scientists at East Malling. I accept that Wye is not without disadvantages. First, we wanted assurances that the standard of husbandry there was capable of meeting the required level, to give us confidence that the collection would be well looked after.

Mr. Dalyell: As to the question of disease, I have a handwritten note from the former director of national fruit trials in which he states that the health status of the collection does not seem relevant. He details the apples, pears and plums situation.

Mr. Curry: If the collection is moved to a site where international testing is to be undertaken, our fear is that international clients will be concerned about any potential health risk. That is why we felt that a risk might be posed to the United Kingdom's international reputation in fruit variety rights testing.

Wye has taken steps to meet the requirement for very high husbandry standards, and we believe that the changes made will prove successful. We plan to establish an expert advisory committee—a light, not heavy, committee—to supervise the care of the collection and to ensure that all requirements are met.

Mr. Moate: If we are successful, as I believe we will be, in establishing a trust to take over Brogdale and make it a national heritage centre for fruit, would it not make more sense for Wye college to leave the collection where it is and instead continue its scientific administration of the collection in situ?

Mr. Curry: I appreciate the question of distance, because I was a governor of the centre for international and European studies at Wye for a number of years. An association between the collection and the centre where research is currently undertaken would be an important plus. However, if the Swale bid succeeds, the fruit collection would continue to exist. We would have a national fruit collection established at Wye, and the parent stock would continue to exist at Brogdale and would be developed for the slightly different purposes that my hon. Friend outlined tonight.

It has been said that there is a frost risk at Wye. The site is certainly not a frost hole; it is part way up a slope, and it is largely protected by an established shelter belt, which could be supplemented by further wind breaks before the collection was moved.

People who have experience of growing fruit on the site at Wye do not recall any evidence of frost damage there. Obviously there must be some risk in exceptionally severe winters, as there is at all three sites. We have decided that the risk is slight, and it should be emphasised that the trees are kept primarily not for fruiting but as a gene stock. Therefore, frost is less of a problem than it would be for a commercial grower who wants fruit which is affected by frost damage to blossom.

I know that frost damage is important, because of my own fruit trees, which grow on an exposed slope in Essex. They tend to get damaged by frost rather more frequently than I should like.

Balancing all these factors, Wye college offers, in our view, the best prospects for developing the scientific and educational potential of the collection.

That is the background to our decision. It was reached after much careful consideration, and I emphasise that the Government are committed to the national fruit collection as part of the national heritage, and as a genetic resource for the future. Any sale of land at Brogdale will be conditional on a rent-back arrangement, so that land will contain the existing national fruit collection until we are absolutely certain of establishing the new collection.

We are committed to providing financial support for the management of the collection, and to ensuring that it is properly cared for, not just as a museum piece, but as a living, growing collection.

The move to the new home, at a cost of approximately £300,000, which will be borne entirely by the Government and includes the estimated loss in full value of the land, will be carried out with the greatest care under my Department's expert supervision. The parent trees at Brogdale will be retained until the new collection is established, or until they have a new future under any plans that my hon. Friend and his colleagues on Swale borough council will explain to us.

I am confident that the collection will have a stable and successful future at Wye college.

Mr. Meale: My hon. Friend has mentioned the importance of time. He has put pressure on local interests to come up with something urgently, yet that could be unreasonable. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that unreasonable pressure will not be put upon local interests and others who are concerned to create this exciting new trust? We must have Government help and understanding that it will take a little time to evolve.

Mr. Curry: If Swale council proposes a substantive plan, and we have a clear indication that it can be followed through, I will certainly listen most carefully to what it has to say.

Time is rather short. We gave an indication to Swale about our intentions a long time ago, and we have been in constant discussion with it on the subject. Therefore, I shall leave the door open, but I cannot say that I will hold the door open permanently, because that would be misleading.

If Swale can come up with a substantive proposal that can be developed within the time scale envisaged, I shall ensure that it has a fair and full hearing.

Mr. Dalyell: I am told by Dr. Ingram that the collection is not virus-free. Infection has been acquired from past propagation, but it is not progressive. The only means of spread is by propogation. In time, varieties could be heat-treated——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 January 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Mr. Sabil Akhtar

9.33 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I wish to present a petition on behalf of a constituent, Mr. Sabil Akhtar, a Muslim, in Armley prison in Leeds, to the honourable Commons of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

In his petition Mr. Akhtar says that he has been refused the right to his correct religious diet. He has been told by the Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office that he can eat meat in lieu of pork or bacon. He says that in practice, that is impossible. Mr. Akhtar's petition says:

"At present I have no choice but to accept a vegetarian diet, which does not include any meat, except fish once a week. Should anyone on a vegetarian diet try to take meat, their vegetarian diet is cancelled immediately. As I am not a vegetarian I find this unacceptable. I find myself missing out on my diet at Leeds Prison due to the regulations in this establishment."

Another constituent, Mr. Intizar Shah, a Muslim, recently protested at the non-availability of halal meat at the prison by refusing food for five days. There are about 60 Muslims in Armley prison.

Mr. Akhtar prays:

"that your Honourable House will ask the Home Secretary to take action, so that I may have the correct food for my meals, that being halal meat.

And your Petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray."

To lie upon the Table.

National Health Service

9.35 am

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I beg to leave to present a petition on behalf of more than 1,500 of my constituents who express strong opposition to the Government's proposals on the National Health Service.

This follows the first ever full parish survey in Britain. It was conducted by the town councils of Yeovil and Yeovil Without on the issue of the local hospitals opting out, which is one of the main proposals in the Government's so-called NHS reforms. The poll was held to give local people a chance to express their views, which was specifically denied them under the provisions of the Bill. In the parish poll, 98 per cent. of those who took part voted against the local hospital opting out.

The poll and this large petition express clearly the opposition and anxiety of many, if not the vast majority, of my constituents over the Government's proposals on the NHS. They are worried, as am I, that the proposals are the first stage of what will become a part privatised Health Service, which will be divided to serve a divided nation. My constituents express their clear opposition to the proposals.

To lie upon the Table.

COOPERS AND LYBRAND SURVEY

Address for Return

of the Coopers and Lybrand Survey of Offshore Finance Sectors in the Caribbean Dependent Territories.—*[Mr. Hurd.]*

CONTINGENCIES FUND 1988-89

Account ordered:

of the Contingencies Fund, 1988-89, showing the receipts and payments in connection with the Fund in the year ended 31st March 1989, and the distribution of the capital of the Fund at the commencement and close of the year; with the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General thereon.—*[Mr. Lilley.]*

Opposition Policies

9.37 am

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the policies of Her Majesty's Opposition merit scrutiny.

This is a non-controversial motion which is designed to secure support from all parts of the House, and I am sure that it will do so. At one stage, I thought of moving a motion in rather different terms, but I realised that it would be somewhat controversial. The alternative motion was that this House believes that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition should each hold office for life.

In preparing this speech, I have been assisted greatly by the highly entertaining autobiography of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). It assisted me because I want to examine the development of Labour party policy as recorded in three momentous documents: the manifesto of 1983, the manifesto of 1987 and the policy statement of 1989 entitled "Meet the challenge Make the change". For the sake of accuracy I have copies of each of those historic contributions to contemporary history with me.

I said that I had been assisted by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East because on page 497 of his autobiography, which is available either in hardback or paperback, he writes:

"Labour started the election with enormous handicaps."

He went on to describe the then Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), as:

"A kindly and cultured man, but he simply did not look like a potential Prime Minister."

No one could accuse the present Leader of the Opposition as being cultured, but, kindly, yes. He is also someone who simply does not look like a potential Prime Minister.

On the following page of his memoirs the right hon. Member for Leeds, East writes:

Our second handicap was an election manifesto, which Gerald Kaufman"—

that is the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton——

"rightly described as the longest suicide note in history. Though it was stuffed with detailed proposals in every conceivable field of policy, the section on defence was deliberately ambiguous."

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gow: I will certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman. I do not want to injure his glittering political career, but I almost called him my hon. Friend. I shall certainly give way to him now and on any future occasion during my speech when he would like to intervene.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the greatest active suicide on the part of the Government is their introduction of the poll tax? Surely that is suicidal.

Mr. Gow: I was quoting the right hon. Member for Gorton, who had been quoted with approval by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East. We are not talking about the suicide of the Conservative party as today's debate is about the Opposition's policies. I was quoting a comment made upon the policies of the Opposition by a man who is a former deputy leader of the party, a former Labour Chancellor and a former Labour Secretary of State for Defence. The hon. Gentleman should not rebuke me when I quote his right hon. Friends who used the word suicide not about the Tory party, but about his party.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): My hon. Friend was right to say that previous Labour party defence policy was ambiguous. Present Labour party policy on local government tax is non-existent. Which is better, to be ambiguous or to have no policy?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically excellent point and I shall return to it later. I hope that my hon. Friend will catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, later so that he can make a telling contribution to our proceedings.

I do not want to repeat myself too much, but the last words that I used that prompted the intervention from the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) were part of a quote from the right hon. Member for Leeds, East who wrote:

"The section on defence was deliberately ambiguous. It was intended to accommodate both the unilateralists and the majority of the Shadow Cabinet who thought like me"—

you may think, Mr. Speaker, that that is not very good English—

"that it would be politically wrong and electorally disastrous to give up our existing Polaris force for nothing."

On page 498 of his autobiography the right hon. Gentleman concludes:

"It was impossible to continue our deep divisions on defence any longer."

That was not the judgment of my right hon. or hon. Friends; that was the judgment of the man who was then deputy leader of the Labour party and who we must assume had assented with the manifesto upon which the Labour party fought and lost the general election in 1983.

The hon. Member for Workington picked up the point about suicide, and the phrase:

"the longest suicide note in history"

is relevant because it is important to remember the length of that suicide note. It was 39 pages of large print, but that is as nothing compared to the 1989 Labour party document. I shall place a copy of it in your office, Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of this debate in case you want to study it. That document contains 65 pages of small print, so the suicide notes get longer.

My hon. Friends and I have initiated this debate because we want to draw the attention not only of you, Mr. Speaker, but of others outside the House to Labour party policies. I shall consider the Labour party's defence policy because that policy was singled out by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, for whom every hon. Member has a profound respect. He believed, in my opinion rightly, that it was the defence policy which did particular injury to his party, which he had served for so long.

I thought that it would be for the convenience of some of my hon. Friends who may not be as keen students as I am of Labour party policies if I were to mark the development of policy in respect of the three areas I have chosen this morning. We do not want to go back too far. There is no point in doing that as this is a short debate. It is perfectly legitimate, however, to look at three areas of policy and to study the development of that policy between 1983, 1987 and 1989. Mercifully—it is for the great convenience of the House—the Labour party has documented its policy. We do not need to make a guess about it, it is all here in print.

We are delighted to see so many Labour Members present. I also note that the hon. Member for Southwark

and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), the solitary representative of the Liberal party, is here to make his contribution. I always listen to him with great interest, but whether he will be here in the next Parliament is a different matter. He might be gobbled up by one of the Labour party's candidates.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *indicated assent.*

Mr. Gow: I note that the hon. Gentleman and I are in agreement about that prospect.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a shame that that representative of the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars), is not here to give us the benefit of his superb forensic skills by dissecting Labour party policy?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend is right to refer to Scottish people. Mercifully my hon. Friends the Members for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) have come here from the northern kingdom of Scotland. The person addressing the House is also a Scot, so Scotland is represented by the Conservative party, but not, of course, by the Scottish National party.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Or the Scottish Labour party.

Mr. Gow: Yes, I agree.

Let us remind ourselves and the country of the Labour party's defence policy in 1983, not a trifling matter.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: This is extremely boring.

Mr. Gow: I can well understand why; the hon. Gentleman had the impossible task of defending that nonsense before the electorate. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Front Bench may be bored because they are familiar with this as they had to defend this nonsense. Let us take them through that policy to see how it developed. We shall not allow hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench to divert the attention of the House and of the country away from this important examination. Hon. Members who are bored are free to depart and it would be very agreeable if the debate were to take place and I were surrounded simply by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mercifully, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury has arrived. I shall be referring to him with approval later in my speech, so it is timely that he should have torn himself away from fashioning the Budget to come to listen to what we hope will be an enjoyable and stimulating debate. It is a matter of deep regret to me that my hon. Friend the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household is not here, as he is normally. No doubt he has to go to his constituency, but he will be able to study our proceedings in the *Official Report*, which is, no doubt, delivered to him tomorrow morning, so he will not have to wait until Monday.

I welcome you to the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is grievous for you that you have missed some of it, but you will be able to read it in the *Official Report*.

In 1983, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent was leader of the Labour party. Even hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench cannot disagree with that proposition. The Labour party manifesto for 1983 said:

"We will therefore not permit the siting of Cruise missiles in this country and will remove any that are already in place. The next Labour Government will cancel the Trident programme."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hope that people outside have noticed that interruption. I was coming on to say that it was not Labour Party policy any more. I see that the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) has torn himself away from his constituency. He still believes in cancelling the whole Trident programme.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Don't leave me out.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman should not worry because I am coming to him. That is why today's debate will be so hilarious.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gow: I shall give way each time if the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene three or four times, or even more. We have until 2.30 pm.

Mr. Livingstone: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the real problem facing the Government is that the Americans are likely to cancel Trident before we have a chance to do so?

Mr. Gow: I am not sure that that intervention carries the debate much further. The debate today is not about the United States. As you will confirm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you care to glance at the Order Paper, this morning's debate is about the policies of Her Majesty's Opposition. As the debate proceeds, it may be perceived that it was not a bad choice.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): It is possible that the motion may be put to the vote today. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that if it were to be carried, our policies and the policies of his party could then be put to the people, who should have the opportunity of judging the policies of both parties? I am sure that the representation in this House would be very different if the electorate, rather than just the House, were allowed to judge the merits of the policies of the two parties. Yesterday, Ministers repeatedly talked about accountability. Why do we not have the opportunity for accountability now? Why are we not given the opportunity for an election now? The merits of the policies can then be judged truly.

Mr. Gow: We welcome growing numbers of Labour Members to the Opposition Benches. The hon. Gentleman may not have read this short motion carefully. I do not know whether we shall vote at the end of the debate. I should have thought that the full House, including the solitary representative of the once mighty Liberal party, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, could join me in agreeing the motion. However, I cannot help the hon. Gentleman, as I do not know whether there will be a vote.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Come on.

Mr. Gow: If the hon. Gentleman intervenes and asks a question, I shall answer him. I have already said that I shall give way to every Opposition Member who wants to intervene.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We want some jokes.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman must be patient. Patience is a virtue.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understood that the Box to your right was to be occupied only by civil servants on Government business. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) has said, this debate is about the policy of the Labour Party. Why is there a civil servant in the Box?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I am sure that that has nothing to do with me.

Mr. Dobson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker ruled on one occasion that it was a matter for him as he sought to intervene in the matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to put myself in conflict with any ruling of Mr. Speaker. I shall have inquiries made.

Mr. Gow: I was reading out the text of the Labour party's manifesto dealing with defence. The final paragraph that I want to read out—we shall see whether it still commands the support of Opposition Members—says:

"We will, after consultation, carry through in the lifetime of the next parliament our non-nuclear defence policy."

That was in 1983 and we mercifully have with us the next evidence that we have to consider. In 1987, four years after the 1983 defeat, the Labour party said on defence:

"We say that it is time to end the nuclear pretence".

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Enoch Powell said that.

Mr. Gow: We are talking about the policy of the Labour party, not the policy of our right hon. Friend, the former Member for Down South.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Friend?

Mr. Gow: He is certainly still my right hon. Friend. The manifesto said:

"We say that it is time to end the nuclear pretence and to ensure a rational conventional defence policy for Britain . . . We will cancel Trident."

We now come to 1989.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Dennis has arrived.

Mr. Gow: We welcome the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I shall be happy to give way to him every time that he wishes to speak.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Has the hon. Gentleman recently seen the test for Trident, that so-called defence weapon? I saw a shot on television recently of the latest testing. The missile was spinning around like a Catherine-wheel on bonfire night. If that is the effectiveness of Trident, the Labour party would be well advised in the run-up to the next election to say that we shall get rid of Trident and use the £11 billion for the benefit of the National Health Service, to provide proper pay for the nurses, ambulance workers and all the others who work in the NHS, to provide sufficient money for old-age pensioners, to abolish standing charges for pensioners and for the disabled and to allocate free television licences for the old-age pensioners. There might be a little bit left over, but I should not provide any for those moonlighting Tory Members.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman's arrival is most timely. I can understand his growing interest in the subject of pensions as he will be 58 on 11 February. The hon. Gentleman is five years nearer retirement than I am. We share a birthday but he was born five years earlier than I was——

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is fiddling the figures, like the rest of them.

Mr. Couchman: Is my hon. Friend aware that he, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and I share a birthday on 11 February, but that I am five years further from retirement than my hon. Friend?

Mr. Gow: I am anxious to make progress. The arrival of the hon. Member for Bolsover was timely, because he is saying that we should scrap Trident——

Mr. Skinner: Yes.

Mr. Gow: —and he has the support of many of his hon. Friends, and possibly even that of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey who, I notice, nods in assent.

I do not think that the 1989 policy review was fashioned while the hon. Member for Bolsover was the comrade chairman of the Labour party. In any case, instead of undertaking to scrap all four Trident submarines, the Labour party now wants to scrap one.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No.

Mr. Gow: I fully appreciate that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with the policy in the 1989 document. Part of the reason for this debate is to underline the continuing disagreement among the Opposition on the crucial subject of defence.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Perhaps my hon. Friend has left the subject of the retirement of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) prematurely. He said that the hon. Gentleman was five years nearer retirement than himself, but has he thought of what will happen at the next general election, which will be fought on the policies that my hon. Friend is describing?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the hon. Gentleman thought about the next election?

Mr. Harry Greenway: I remind the hon. Gentleman that I have a majority of 15,000, which is more than he has, and that I gained the seat from Labour 10 years ago.

The Labour party will be forced to fight the election on the disastrous, stupid and loony policies that my hon. Friend is describing. He has not yet mentioned local government, but we must remember the lunatic and wicked policies of councils such as Ealing. The hon. Member for Bolsover is due for retirement at the next election.

Mr. Skinner: Get back to reality.

Mr. Gow: That is not so easy when we are considering this document. I do not know how familiar the hon. Gentleman is with it, but I shall lend him a copy, which will show him how far from reality it is.

Mr. Skinner: That was last year.

Mr. Gow: The change between 1987 and 1989 was that the Labour party decided to cancel only one—not four—of the Trident submarines. However, the cancellation of

that one would deprive the Royal Navy of the minimum number of submarines that is necessary if we are to guarantee that one is on station all the time.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) asked earlier about a person who was sitting in the civil servants Box; for some inexplicable reason he has now left that Box and is sitting in the Under Gallery. We can only deduce from that that he is not a civil servant. Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, find out who is paying his salary; from that we might be able to establish who he is——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This has gone far enough. I understand that the Box referred to is one that is usually available for the officials advising ministers responsible for the business before the House. No doubt the earlier point of order has been heard and responded to and if the person to whom we are referring has been made to sit in some other part of our premises beyond the Bar of the House, that is not a matter for me.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Kenneth Baker): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall be happy to clear this up. The gentleman to whom the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) referred is not a civil servant—I would not have one with me for a debate such as this—but a member of the Conservative research department. I quite agree that it would be inappropriate for him to sit in the civil servants Box, so he is sitting in part of the Under Gallery.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) who first raised the matter is the only member of the Shadow Cabinet to attend the debate——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not see how that arises out of the point of order——

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not rise while I am on my feet. The Minister's response to the point of order was not very helpful.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an important matter. Conservative Members have been making great play in recent months of the conflict between party and state in Eastern Europe. We know very well that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is in an ambivalent position: is he in the Cabinet as a representative of the Government in Parliament, or is he there as a party apparatchik? That conflict is reflected in what we have seen today. Was the person in the civil servants Box there as a representative of the party or the state? Who is paying his salary——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot give a ruling on these matters.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What has happened today is of constitutional importance. A member of the Conservative party who works in Conservative party headquarters in Smith square has been given access to the Box in which civil servants sit. That is a major development with implications for other debates. In debates on the poll tax or the NHS reforms a Conservative party member might be given access to that Box in preference to a civil servant who, in our view, was more entitled to sit there.

I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ask Mr. Speaker to rule on whether it is in order for a member of the Conservative party to sit in the civil servants Box.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I should point out on behalf of the official in question that he went to the wrong Box, and I apologise for that. There is no question but that only civil servants should sit there.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that you would agree with me that those who enter the civil servants Box must do so by a route through which only a few are allowed to pass, because that is a high security area. We hear a great deal of talk from the Government about terrorism and the need for security, yet it seems clear that a person whose convictions border on those of the National Front—he works in Conservative Central Office, which has spawned some Conservative Members of the goose-stepping tendency in the last few years—has been cleared to go into the Box by the Minister. There should be an inquiry into this affair.

I well remember the full-scale debate in the House on the research assistant of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn); yet someone who could be a member of the Conservative party Securitate has been allowed into the civil servants Box. I demand a full inquiry and a full debate. If such things can happen to Opposition Members the same thing should happen on the Tory side.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you are minded to order such an inquiry, may I draw to your attention the fact that some Members who arrived in the House for the first time in 1987 were regularly directed by a member of the House of Commons staff to a broom cupboard? Is that member of staff still in the House? If he is perhaps he inadvertently gave wrong advice to the gentleman concerned.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some hon. Members are trying to treat this matter lightheartedly, but it is a serious matter. It exposes yet again the difficulties of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about his capacity when he speaks in the House. Clearly——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That does not arise because it is a separate and quite different matter.

Mr. Madden: I think that it does arise because we should know, for instance, how the Chancellor, who clearly intends to intervene in the debate, will be described in *Hansard*. Will he be called the chairman of the Conservative party, which is clearly his primary responsibility? He has admitted that he is aided today by an official from Conservative Central Office who seems to have been sitting in the wrong place without authority. Serious questions are being asked about the access to sensitive areas that that official might have had. Many of us are cited by the Economic League, the blacklisting organisation, as being subversive——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Madden: and there is much evidence that Conservative Central Office is up to its neck——

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must resume their seats when the occupant of the Chair is on his feet. We have taken this matter far enough. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is clearly here as a Member of the House and a designated Minister in the Government, will presumably address the House if he seeks to catch my eye later in the debate. The Minister has explained to the House that the person whose presence gave rise to this exchange was in the officials Box by error because he had been misdirected. That error has been corrected by his withdrawal. That ought to be sufficient explanation and we must get on.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If that is true—and no one wishes to doubt what the Minister said about this chap gaining access by error—he must have shown a pass to a person at the door. I should like to know the form and classification of that pass. Is it a Civil Service pass? How was he able to convince our very effective custodians of the House, who are responsible for security in all sorts of matters, that he had a right of access? When the inquiry takes place and Mr. Speaker inevitably rules next week—as he will now have to do—perhaps he could address himself to that matter in his statement to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The inevitability of a statement is a matter for Mr. Speaker to decide in the light of what he reads about our exchanges.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you tell us the name of the chairman of the Labour party?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Let us be serious for a moment. We have taken matters as far as we can for the moment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman raised a point of order and now seeks to disregard my comments on it. No doubt Mr. Speaker will read with care the exchanges that have taken place. If he feels that further inquiries are necessary, no doubt he will initiate them. Perhaps we could get back to the debate.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Member for Bolsover told the House that Labour's defence policy had moved on since the 1989 statement "Meet the challenge Make the change" which was no longer the official policy of the party, or at least was not able to secure his support. We know that many of his right hon. and hon. Friends share his view about that matter. Like the two previous attempts, the latest attempt to define Labour's defence policy is designed more to provide a formula with which some of the divided factions of the party can live than to provide proper defence for the British people.

The Leader of the Opposition should consult the Socialist President of France. Mr. Mitterrand has made it clear that he and his Socialist Government will retain France's nuclear capability. That is hardly surprising because there are no unilateralists in the French Socialist party or even in the French Communist party. However, the British Labour party is still riddled with one-sided nuclear disarmers.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): About 20 minutes ago when my hon. Friend first mentioned defence, Opposition Members said that the subject was boring. The number of Opposition interventions since then suggests that the subject is anything but boring. In my constituency the Labour party was in a respectable second place until 1983 and held the seat in 1945-50. However, I found that the haemorrhaging of Labour votes at the 1987 election was principally caused by Labour's policy on defence. I am sure that that is still the case in my constituency and in many others.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend's view is shared by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East who, to his deep regret and to mine, will not seek re-election at the end of this Parliament.

I shall now turn to another subject that is dear to the heart of the hon. Member for Bolsover. I want to examine Labour policy on nationalisation, a cause of which the hon. Gentleman is still a faithful and principled champion. The 1983 Labour party manifesto said that Labour would:

"Return to public ownership the public assets . . . hived off by the Tories, with compensation of no more than that received when the assets were denationalised. We will establish a significant public stake in electronics, pharmaceuticals, health equipment and building materials, and also in other important sectors, as required in the national interest."

The 1983 manifesto was a blank cheque for nationalisation. In 1987 the language had changed and the manifesto said:

"We shall extend social ownership by a variety of means . . . we will set up British Enterprise, to take a socially owned stake in high-tech industries and other concerns where public funds are used to strengthen investment. Private shares in BT and British Gas will be converted into special new securities."

The 1989 statement "Meet the challenge Make the change" says:

"We shall . . . take BT back into public ownership. The speed with which we can act on our commitment to return privatised enterprises to the community will necessarily depend . . . on the situation we inherit in each case and on the constraints of finance and legislative time."

Running through each of those documents of 1983, 1987 and 1989 is a reminder that, certainly for many Opposition Members, clause 4 is still alive. It seeks

"to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof . . . upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange".

On Wednesday in answer to a written question by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee), the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment gave some startling figures about shareholders.

Mr. Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): As my hon. Friend has been making his characteristically witty and able speech, he has not had the opportunity that I have had to hear the sedentary interventions of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). According to the rules of order, sedentary interventions are not normally published in the *Official Report*, but those of the hon. Member for Bolsover reveal the true face of the Labour party. When my hon. Friend was speaking about Trident, the hon. Member for Bolsover remarked that it was only a rolling programme. My hon. Friend then moved on to speak about Labour party policy on clause 4. Perhaps my hon. Friend can ensure that when his speech is printed in the *Official Report*, the sedentary interventions of the hon. Member for Bolsover appear in the margins, so that all right hon. and hon. Members and the public——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief. Sedentary comments are not part of our proceedings.

Mr. Gow: In a written answer this week, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment presented startling figures about shareholders in the newly privatised water companies. That matter is relevant because the Labour party's 1985 policy statement made a specific undertaking to take water companies back into public ownership. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary stated:

"A total of 37,488 employees, representing 85·57 per cent. of the eligible work force of the 10 companies, have successfully applied for shares in the companies under free and matching offers."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 250.]

He lists each of the 10 companies—nine of them in England and one in Wales—and reveals that in every case, more than 80 per cent. of employees applied for and received shares. I select for particular attention North West Water, not least because my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household, is in his place, and he represents a north-west constituency. Eighty-nine per cent. of North West Water's workers bought shares in that company, and many of them thus became shareholders for the first time in their lives. What will they say when they learn that it is Labour party policy specifically to deprive them of their shares?

One must consider not only the 37,488 water authority workers, because over the past 10 years and more, hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens have become shareholders in industry for the first time. The Government have applied a dramatic policy of extending opportunities for share ownership to people who have never been offered them before. There is a roll call of honour of industries that were previously in the hands of a small group of fallible men sitting in Whitehall, and which in many cases have now passed from the control of the state and that small group of people into the hands of the workers themselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury is among those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have consistently advocated the concept of worker shareholders and the extension of ownership. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who is also in his place, taught me much about privatisation and other issues. I was a keen pupil, and I sat at the feet of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary.

I remind the hon. Members for Bolsover and for Brent, East, each of whom is strongly opposed to worker shareholders, and I remind even you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the full roll call of honour: Amersham International, Associated British Ports, British Aerospace, British Airports Authority, and British Airways under the inspired leadership of my noble Friend Lord King of Wartnaby, who has further service to render in British Airways' continuing improvement. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary told me that it is called the world's favourite airline. My hon. Friend makes many journeys to Europe, probably in an aircraft owned by my noble Friend Lord King. I could make a long speech about British Airways and even about my noble Friend, but I shall not delay the House.

The roll call of honour continues with British Gas, British Petroleum, British Railways Board, British Shipbuilders, British Steel Corporation, British Sugar Corporation, British Technology Group—my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is smiling, and I am only halfway down the list. It includes also British Telecom, Britoil, and Cable and Wireless.

The hon. Member for Bolsover may want me to pause at this point, because he will recall that when Cable and Wireless was nationalised, the Labour party appointed as its chairman Lord Glenamara, who did not know one end of a cable from another. We have put a stop to such practices. No longer do my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench have the power to make appointments to the boards of such companies. On the contrary, the people themselves have the right to elect their chairmen and board members. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy is in his place, I may add that until we privatised the water authorities, the Secretary of State for the Environment, assisted by the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, made those appointments. Who could believe that my right hon. Friend and I served together in that same Department? When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy was Secretary of State for the Environment, he appointed every chairman and director for the nine water authorities in England, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales made the appointments in respect of the Welsh authority.

I mean no discourtesy to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy, but in my opinion the water authorities are better managed now that they do not have to refer to the Secretary of State for the Environment every time that they want to spend some capital. Before privatisation, they could not without the consent of my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, spend a penny piece on improving the quality of services. The authorities can now go to the marketplace, which is a great improvement. That is a major advantage of privatisation, apart from ensuring the wider ownership of wealth.

Mr. Madden: The hon. Gentleman referred to the appointment of water authority chairmen and board members. Earlier, he expressed regret at the absence from the Chamber of certain right hon. and hon. Members. We all regret the absence of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who serves on a number of boards of directors. Can the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) say by what method his right hon. Friend was elected to those boards?

Mr. Gow: I give the hon. Gentleman two assurances. A new director may be appointed by the existing board, but he will be subject to election to the board at the next annual general meeting, of which every shareholder—and sometimes there are hundreds of thousands of shareholders—is given notice. That is the procedure followed under company law.

I was contrasting the way in which Lord Glenmara was appointed with the way in which the chairman and directors are now appointed by the shareholders of Cable and Wireless. A large proportion of the workers in that company are now shareholders and they have the opportunity to have a say in appointing directors. Worker shareholders can and do turn up at the annual general meeting and ask questions of the board and, at the end of the day, they have the right to appoint it.

[Mr. Gow]

The Crown Suppliers and the electricity supply industry are two more examples. We have passed the legislation and before this Session comes to a close those who work in the electricity supply industry will have the opportunity to become worker shareholders.

Enterprise Oil, Girobank, the Horserace Totalisator Board, Jaguar, the National Bus Company, the National Engineering Laboratory, the National Freight Corporation—I shall pause there. The Opposition seem to have the view, which is borne out by the commitment that I have just read out, that the National Freight Corporation should be renationalised and run by politicians and civil servants. I have never believed that. It is one of the lessons that I learned from my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary. He used to say to me, "What business is it of the State to own lorries? Why can't private bodies own lorries?" My hon. Friend was perceptive, because when National Freight was owned by the state, and Ministers appointed the chairman and directors, it made a loss. When we were able to restore it to the private sector, on the advice of my hon. Friend, the workers took over ownership of the company. One might have thought that that would have been welcomed by the hon. Members for Brent, East and for Bolsover, but in the Labour policy document there is a commitment to renationalise it. I draw that to the attention of the House because I wonder whether the workers and the worker shareholders of the National Freight Corporation, realise that if there should ever be another Labour Government there is a real prospect that their shares will be taken away from them.

I wonder whether the Economic Secretary remembers that we privatised the plant breeding institute?

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Yes, we did.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend says that I am right. Apparently, we also privatised the National Seed Development Organisation. I do not know whether any hon. Members bought shares in those companies. I did not know that they had been privatised.

Two more examples are Professional and Executive Recruitment and Rolls-Royce—that is a marvellous company to have restored to democratic ownership. Rolls-Royce is one of the most famous names in the world, and it is a matter of particular satisfaction to me, following the involvement of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who had a hand in bringing the company into the public sector, that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was able to undo the damage that he did.

Mr. Pike: Is it not a fact that if Rolls-Royce had not been taken into public ownership at the time, and if what is now the Rover Group—it has changed its name so many times—had not been taken into public ownership, Britain would not now have an aerospace engine industry with a great worldwide reputation? When the hon. Gentleman goes on about public ownership, will he recognise that many publicly owned industries have served the country well for many years?

Mr. Gow: It is true that many of the industries that were in the public sector, and some of those industries that still are, have served the country well. I mean no criticism of those who work in the industries, but I am critical of the whole concept of public ownership. There have been losses in public sector industries, and that was due not to any lack of commitment by the workers but to the intervention and influence of the Government, which had such a harmful effect.

I have no confidence in the presumed superior wisdom of Ministers, or even of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to run an industry. Nor do I have any confidence in the presumed superior wisdom of the Opposition to run an industry. I prefer to leave it to those people who understand the industry.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Before my hon. Friend leaves the principle of moving companies from the public sector to the private sector, will he acknowledge that some 2 million individuals or families have purchased their houses, which were formerly publicly owned, to their enormous advantage, and against great opposition from hon. Members of the official Opposition, who voted against the right to buy, day-in and day-out for weeks on end, when the Government put the matter to the House? Most people who have been able to buy their homes have made palaces of them.

Mr. Gow: Of course, in the 1983 manifesto the Labour party promised to repeal the right-to-buy legislation which was contained in the Housing Act 1980. However, I wish to be fair to the Labour party; there was no commitment to repeal the right to buy in the 1987 manifesto, or the 1989 policy statement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) is right to say that the extension of individual choice has characterised the 11-year administration of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Before the Housing Act 1980 tenants did not have a choice, but had to remain tenants for the whole of their lives. We gave tenants the opportunity to convert their tenure and to become owners.

We welcome most warmly, do we not, the shadow Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who has just walked into the Chamber, because he is deeply interested in housing? The weekend seems to have begun for him already.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was wise, because she believed that most local authority tenants would prefer to become owners if they had the choice. Therefore, the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), who was Housing Minister at the time, gave tenants the choice.

We gave tenants the choice, and we have given workers in the long list of companies that I have mentioned—33; I have not quite got to the end yet—the choice and the opportunity to become shareholders.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Blackburn is here so that I can tell him about our astonishing discovery that nearly 90 per cent. of North West water authority workers applied for shares. That is the highest percentage in the country, although some might have expected the highest percentage to be in the south. I see that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster also finds that interesting. Southern water authority, which serves my constituency, had the lowest.

Because my right hon. Friend is so interested, and because he may not have had a chance to study the *Official Report* of 17 January, let me give him the exact figure:

89·46 per cent. of North West water authority's employees are shareholders. I think that that is thrilling, and so does the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household. The Southern water authority figure is 80·56 per cent. Hon. Members may think that that is not too bad, but my point is that the North West figure is even better. Before he heard those figures, my right hon. Friend was inclined to agree with what would have been my guess—that the opposite was the case. Mercifully, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is also here, and will be able to retail all this to the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he goes off to report our proceedings at the end of the debate.

I had got as far as Rolls-Royce, but there are more companies on the great roll of honour: Rover Group, for instance, and the royal dockyards. That must have given particular satisfaction to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, who used to represent Plymouth, Devonport, and who must have been excited by the prospect of his former constituents being able to buy shares in the newly privatised dockyards.

Next on the list come the royal ordnance factories and Sealink. I believe that the hon. Member for Bolsover does not make journeys overseas, so he will not have travelled on Sealink ferries.

Mr. Skinner: I have been to the Isle of Man.

Mr. Gow: I have never been to the Isle of Man.

Mr. Skinner: It is all right.

Mr. Gow: Are there any Socialists there? I think not.

May I say how marvellous it is to see the hon. Member for Blackburn seated on the Opposition Front Bench? I hope that he listened carefully to the information that the percentage of workers who bought shares was highest in the North West water authority. He will have travelled on one of the Sealink ferries at some time in his life. I am making a journey myself this evening. I am not going to the Isle of Man; believe it or not, I am going to make a speech in the Isle of Wight. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) is here today: I am going to his constituency. I shall travel on a nationalised railway train from London to Southampton, and then on a privatised Sealink boat from Southampton to Cowes. If I ever manage to catch your eye again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall give an account of my journey to you and the hon. Member for Bolsover, who may have travelled on a Sealink boat.

Mr. Skinner: No.

Mr. Gow: Perhaps he went on a fishing boat.

Mr. Skinner: I walked on the water.

Mr. Gow: I believe that I am going on a Sealink boat; it is certainly privatised.

There are only two more names on the list of companies whose workers have become shareholders, and which are under threat from the Labour party.

Mr. Barry Field: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gow: I will give way to my hon. Friend, as I am going to be his guest. Will he be looking after me at some stage?

Mr. Field: As the largest family of crematorium operators in the country, I am sure that we can promise my hon. Friend a warm welcome—but not that warm.

I hope that my hon. Friend shares my concern that, although the privatisation of Sealink has been such a success in my constituency and on many other islands, the nationalised board of British Rail sadly did not allow employees to buy shares when Sealink was privatised. Does he agree that there could not be a greater indictment of the board that refused to give that right to the employees who had served so faithfully for so many years? Sealink is the only company on the glorious roll of honour read to us by my hon. Friend not to do so.

Mr. Gow: It will come as no surprise to the House that there is an identity of view between my hon. Friend and me. That identity of view presages a happy and agreeable evening, which we shall spend in the presence of new shareholders in formerly nationalised industries. My hon. Friend won his seat from the Liberal party. There is no representative of that party present today, but we welcome the arrival of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary.

Mr. Skinner: He had a big job to do last night.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made a model speech of outstanding quality last night.

The last two names on the list are the Training Agency and the water industry. Let me put a direct question to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott). Who knows how he came to be put up to reply to the debate, but that task has been allocated to him—by whom I do not know. There he is, however: the official spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition. Let me ask him which of those 33 companies will be taken back into public ownership in the event of a Labour Government's returning to power? I shall pause for the hon. Gentleman's reply.

Mr. Grocott: I am encouraged by the hon. Gentleman's implication that he is drawing his remarks to a close. The sooner that he does so, the sooner that we can get on with the rest of the speeches, and the sooner I can deal with his points at the appropriate time.

Mr. Gow: And answer came there none. It is not only the House of Commons that will note that answer; so will hundreds and thousands of new shareholders.

Mr. Barry Field: Before my hon. Friend draws his speech to a close, may I prevail on him to question the Opposition regarding their policy towards the security of frontiers in Europe? During the debate on the Aviation and Maritime Security Bill, I asked the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) about his party's policies on retaining frontiers within Europe to prevent terrorism and drug smuggling. He informed me and the House that, broadly speaking, the Labour party supported that policy. However, time prevented me from asking him how his party reconciled that with its continual call for a vote to be taken in this House on the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974. There is a complete contradiction between the Labour party's view on the retention of frontier posts in Europe and its continual calling into question of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Mr. Gow: Again, it is so fortunate that this evening I am to make a journey to the Isle of Wight. My hon. Friend and I, who are in such happy agreement, will be able to continue our discussion about the Labour party's policies.

I shall be unable in my brief speech—I have been on my feet for only one hour and 20 minutes—to cover every aspect of the Opposition's policy document "Meet the Challenge: Make the Change." It is four times the length of the previous document that has been described as the longest suicide note in history. It consists of 88 pages of closely typed script in two columns of very small print. Perhaps that was deliberate. It is sometimes said that if one wants to conceal things, they ought to be put into very small print.

It is a matter of great satisfaction to the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is in his place. He has to leave shortly to make the journey to his Sussex constituency. He is a keen student of these matters and he has given me valuable assistance in preparing my speech. I thank my hon. Friend for the great help that he has given me. I hope that he will continue to assist me on future occasions.

I want to say, in the presence of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary, since we have been considering the extension of ownership and choice during the last 10 years and more, that nowhere is that extension of choice illustrated more vividly than in an answer that was given yesterday in this place by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, although all of us know that the answer was prepared by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) asked the question, about share ownership.

We welcome most warmly, directly back from Hong Kong, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) who has just come into the Chamber. I know that he will wish to contribute to our proceedings.

In his answer, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary said:

"The latest Treasury and stock exchange survey in February 1989"—"

I pause there. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley will agree that we are now in January 1990 and that next month there will be another survey, which means that I am about to give a figure that is 11 months out of date. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South follows these matters closely. The figures given yesterday in this place by my hon. Friend at Question Time are not so good because they relate to February 1989. He continued:

"showed that approximately 9 million people"—

I shall repeat that figure for the benefit of the hon. Member for Bolsover—

"showed that approximately 9 million people—that is 20 per cent. of the adult population—owned shares directly."

In the last sentence of his answer—I want the Comptroller to listen very carefully to it—my hon. Friend said:

"This represents a threefold increase in the number of shareholders since 1979."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 392-93.]

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South has taken that on board. Next month, we shall have the updated figures. According to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, 20 per cent. of the adult population now own shares, but the figures do not take account of the successful privatisation of the water industry. That point was made to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): The figures that my hon. Friend will be able to give to the House when a similar debate is held this time next year will incorporate not only the staggeringly successful response to the privatisation of the water authorities, but the privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Gow: It would be correct to describe my hon. Friend as one of the architects of the privatisation of the Property Services Agency. During the critical time when policy was being fashioned, my hon. Friend was the Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), who was then the Secretary of State for the Environment but is now the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It was a brilliant appointment by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to send the former Secretary of State for the Environment to the Department of Trade and Industry. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury and I hold identical views about the extent to which the Government ought to intervene and interfere in industry: the Government ought not to interfere at all. We look forward to continuing our privatisation policy. However, there is not much left to privatise. The privatisation of British Coal will please the hon. Member for Bolsover. He will be able to buy shares in British Coal. He is a miner. If he is still in this place, his hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East will also be able to buy shares in coal mines.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is travelling a little further than he ought to go. He probably knows that Tory Ministers at party conferences have said, before giving the Prime Minister her 40-minute standing ovation, that British Coal will not be privatised until after the next election. That depends on the Tories winning. Such is the nature of the Opposition's policies, to which the hon. Gentleman is not referring today—he is concentrating instead on Tory party policies—that we shall win the next election. Therefore, British Coal will not be privatised.

Moreover, I shall put in a bid to repeal some of the measures that have already been enacted. We may reopen a few of the pits that the Tory Government have assisted in closing. We shall also repeal the legislation that is now going through the House that will lead to a massive increase in opencast mining. We are interested in saving the environment. We shall almost certainly repeal the new legislation to increase the number of men employed in private mines from 30 to 150. We shall have a pretty good programme for the coal industry. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) need not worry his head about that. He will have plenty of time to sail up and down Eastbourne marina.

Mr. Gow: It is always a great pleasure to follow an intervention from the hon. Member for Bolsover because his intervention illustrated so clearly the deep divisions that characterise the Labour party and the unity that characterises the Conservative party. I say that even after a little matter where apparently some of my right hon. and hon. Friends were not very enthusiastic about the community charge. However, I shall come to the point. The hon. Gentleman's intervention related to the coal

industry. Although it is very unlike him, the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. I can inform him—and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy will confirm it—that it is the official policy of Her Majesty's Government to privatise the coal industry. That has been made perfectly clear.

Mr. Skinner: Not during this Parliament.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. It is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to privatise the coal industry in the next Parliament.

Mr. Skinner: Only if they win the election.

Mr. Gow: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that only if the Conservative party wins the election will we be able to give the miners of Bolsover that choice and opportunity —which they do not have now—to become owners. It is thrilling and exciting news for us and appalling news for the hon. Member for Bolsover and his right hon. and hon. Friends that, given the chance, the miners of Bolsover and the entrepreneurs of Brent, East would prefer to be owners. And that is what will happen. *[Interruption.]* We welcome back the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, the absentee representative of the Liberal party.

Mr. Skinner: He has been digging up the Mary Rose.

Mr. Gow: The solitary representative of the Liberal party has now retired. We did not want to drive him away.

The really thrilling point which will cause such happiness in the hearts and minds of the hon. Members for Bolsover, for Brent, East and for The Wrekin, whose position is at some risk at the next general election, is that we have discovered from those 33 newly privatised companies that when people are given the choice of being tenants or owners they prefer to be owners and when they are given the opportunity to become shareholders they say, "Yes, we would like some shares."

This is only a short debate and we have to conclude our proceedings no later than 2.30 pm. The Economic Secretary has to report to the Chancellor on the momentous nature of the debate, and when he does so —*[Interruption.]* I remind the House of the gulf between the Opposition's suicide note which contains five or six times more words than the one that the shadow Foreign Secretary described as the longest suicide note in history, which has been superseded. I want to remind the House of the gulf between the policies set out in it and some of the policies of the Communist countries in eastern Europe. It was described yesterday in the House in a picturesque way by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary. Again, although the words were spoken by the Financial Secretary, the hand that drafted the words was that of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary who is seated on the Treasury Bench. I ask the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) not to engage in conversation with the hon. Member for Bolsover at this critical moment of my speech.

The words that fell from the lips of my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary—I commend, them to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you were not in your place when that answer was given, although you will have studied it in the *Official Report*—were:

"the former Socialist countries of eastern Europe are appointing Ministers responsible for privatisation."

That is what they are doing, yet the Labour party says in its suicide note that it will nationalise companies in the United Kingdom when in eastern Europe they are privatising. The British people will be rather bewildered by that. My hon. Friend continued:

"In Poland my opposite number has the splendid title of the plenipotentiary in charge of ownership changes."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 393.]

But the ownership changes that are taking place in Poland are moving ownership out of the hands of the state and into the hands of the people, whereas the Labour party in England wants to take ownership out of the hands of the people and back into the hands of the state. The debate is about whether we believe that we should concentrate ownership in the hands of the few—such as the hon. Members for Brent, East and for Bolsover, although to be fair to them, if there were a future Labour Government neither of them would agree to serve in it. Nevertheless, under a Labour Government ownership would be concentrated in the hands of the few.

You are a keen student of these matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in the years that have elapsed since June 1987 there has been some attempt by the official leadership of the Labour party to distance itself from previous policies. There has been some recognition that the policies on which the Labour party fought in 1979, 1983 and 1987 were not popular with the electorate. That was a correct judgment. However, I single out the hon. Member for Bolsover for particular praise as he does not care whether the policies which he is expanding are popular. I salute him for that. The hon. Gentleman is one of those relatively few people who preach the message that they believe to be true, whether it is popular or unpopular with the audience. That shows him to be a man of principle. What is not principle is to continue to believe in the truth of the message but to try to adapt or adjust it to conceal that belief from those who are listening to the message.

The doctrine that I am expounding was put most vividly in a speech on the last Sunday of November 1959 at the Winter Garden in Blackpool. I expect that the hon. Member for Bolsover was there, and so was I. It was the last speech of Mr. Aneurin Bevan's life. I was so impressed by his words that I committed them to memory. The then deputy leader of the Labour party said, "You really cannot go before the country with a programme and tell the country that you thought the programme was good for the country, and immediately the country rejected it say you would like to alter it. It will not work. It is not right. It is almost like saying that you put before the country a false prospectus."

Aneurin Bevan was a man of principle. Today's Labour party has not altered its beliefs, but because it has found that they are not popular with the British people it has sought to conceal its true beliefs. As my last words, I quote the last sentences of Aneurin Bevan: "It will not work. It is not right."

11.10 am

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): There was one flaw in the basis of the speech by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). He confused two documents—the election manifesto that we put before the people in 1983, which was rejected, and the Labour party's policy review. The 1983 manifesto was flawed because it tried to square too many circles. Rather than being clear, it blurred the commitment to unilateralism to hold all the strands of the party together, and too many compromises were struck on

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

the economic policy that it put forward. To compare that five-year programme for government with the present policy review is a mistake.

The policy review is not a manifesto but a long shopping list of all the things that we would try to do, the majority of which are not controvesial and would be supported by members of the Green party, bits and pieces of the old alliance and many moderate Conservatives. The commitments to better training, to better research and development and to a more positive stance on the environment would be shared by the majority of British people. The only place in Britain where one would not find majority support for those objectives is the Cabinet, and some of its members may secretly harbour those views. The policy review is not a manifesto for five years of government and therefore is not costed. No one would deny that that has there has been a shift to the Right between 1983 and the present Labour party policy review.

This debate is not appropriate just to the present time. The Opposition—who 100 years ago were led predominantly by the Liberals but are now led predominantly by the Labour party—face one difficult and unpleasant fact. For a century, no party in opposition to the Conservatives has won a second term with a working majority. The Liberal Government of 1906 to 1910 failed to gain a majority and had to form a working arrangement with the Irish Nationalists, who held the balance of power. The 1945 Government and the Wilson Governments of 1966 and 1974 failed to win a second term. During the two years when I was a member of the policy review I concentrated on trying to understand the reason for that. It is not that we have not been sufficiently accommodating to the centre or to the status quo. The reason is that the the Labour party and the Liberals of the past failed to be sufficiently radical in transforming Britain when they held power. They made so many compromises and lost so many opportunities that they failed to consolidate their hold on power. Unlike Conservative Governments, they failed to hold their natural interests together as a governing block in order to win re-election.

The problem currently facing the Labour party faced the Opposition at the beginning of the century—how to pay for a legislative programme. Throughout the century, non-Tory Governments have faced that problem and have often alienated key groups of their supporters by imposing wage controls, higher taxation and policies that led to higher inflation. If Labour is to govern Britain in the 1990s and thereafter to win a second term in office it must resolve those problems. That means making difficult choices.

I have tremendous respect for the present leadership of the Tory party. I do not agree with almost anything that they do, but I recognise that, following the oil crisis in 1973, and faced with the shift in the world economy that that brought about, the end of the 25-year world boom and a much more rigorous future, the Tory party acted swiftly. It removed its old one-nation Tory leader, shifted its policies to the Right and decided which policies to defend, which it has done effectively over the past 10 years. The policies that the Prime Minister and those around her have chosen to defend are defence spending and the freedom of capital to invest abroad rather than in Britain. That is not a recent decision, because those problems faced the British economy at the beginning of the century.

Mr. David Nicholson: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the Labour party's policies and the Conservative party leadership. Will he expand on a statement that he made on his party's leadership, which says:

"You can have all the best policies in the world but if you have a Ramsay MacDonald in front there isn't a cat in hell's chance of getting them implemented."

Will he expand on that interesting theme?

Mr. Livingstone: It is obvious that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was not one of the most successful Labour party leaders. He opened the way to almost a generation of Conservative Government. We have no desire to have another Ramsay MacDonald. We must avoid the mistakes of compromise, waffle and indecision, which opened the way to the disaster of 1931. The decade of the 1930s was wasted by Britain.

Two basic flaws that undermined our economic progress in the first decade of the century are still with us today. The British economy allowed too many of its resources to be drained away on defence spending and the Government of the day allowed a vast flow of capital out of Britain and neglected the reconstruction of our industrial base. The figures for the 15 years that led up to the first world war are stunning. In Germany, which was committed to a strong modern and prosperous industrial base, investment abroad was 5 per cent. of its gross domestic product per annum. Throughout that 15-year period, 54 per cent. of capital in Britain was invested abroad. If an economy invests abroad, a skilled work force is not necessary to the same extent as in an economy that is building a modern, strong domestic economic base.

The problems that we have experienced under the Prime Minister, which sometimes many of my colleagues believe are solely her satanic creation, have been at the core of the problems that Labour, Conservative and Liberal Governments have faced throughout the century. The Conservative Government are quite happy to see those policies continue.

In the past 10 years we have seen £120 billion sail out of this country to be invested abroad. It does not go into the Third world where it might help to restore the balance of poverty between the first and third worlds. Almost all of that wealth has gone into the economies of our major competitors—£60 billion during the past 10 years has flowed into America. The Americans have seen our money building factories. Our money has been invested in America and has created jobs there. We end up importing the finished goods that they create and have the burden of a trade deficit. That has been an endemic problem throughout the century.

No party opposing the Tories can win an election and govern sufficiently to win re-election unless it addresses these problems. Unlimited wealth is not available to any nation. If we want to increase spending on pensions, housing, health and all the matters to which we are committed in our policy review, we shall have to create new wealth somewhere else or switch resources.

Even if we could generate growth in the British economy of about 5 or 6 per cent. a year—no one sees that as immediately possible—it would still be far too long to wait to ease the burden that our pensioners have carried and increase the meagre resources which the nation gives them so that they can spend the end of their lives in reasonable comfort. It would be too long to wait to see the

extra £3 billion that we need to invest in the Health Service to bring it up to the level of that in France or West Germany.

A Government taking office in the early 1990s who want to rebuild the welfare state and create the investment we need in expanding our industrial base, cannot wait for growth. It would be asking too much of people in Britain. Therefore, we are faced with a difficult choice: should we increase taxes on ordinary people as well as the rich to find those resources, or should we divert resources from elsewhere in the British economy? If the Labour party can come up with a convincing answer to that question, it could govern through the 1990s and beyond. If we fail, we face repeating the experiences of the Wilson and Callaghan Governments.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend referred to defence expenditure and to the fact that Britain now runs a massive balance of payments deficit of about £20 billion. Does he agree that that is easily confirmed by the statistics of the balance of payments for the two major nations in the world: West Germany, with the equivalent of a $40 billion balance of payments surplus, and Japan, with the equivalent of an $80 billion balance of payments surplus? Those two countries have not had the massive defence burden around their necks which we in Britain have had since the end of the second world war.

Mr. Livingstone: I confirm what my hon. Friend says. It is interesting to look at the period during which Britain rose to global dominance at the beginning of the last century. Our defence spending then was less than 2 per cent. of GDP. America's defence spending in its rise to global dominance in the period up to the second world war was less than 2 per cent. of GDP. Throughout the post-war period Japan's defence spending was often less than 1 per cent. and never more than 2 per cent.; and the same applies to West Germany. There is no doubt that a dynamic economy cannot sustain, year after year, an armaments burden of much more than 2 per cent. of GDP.

The next stage forward for the Labour party and its policies is to create the financial framework and make it clear how we intend to pay for what we seek to do. No one in the Labour party, from Front Bench spokesman to the newest member, is prepared to say that we should wait for five to 10 years to create the growth that we need to take such action. We do not have the time. We are still slipping behind the rest of the world in terms of investment and our welfare provisions. It becomes a sick joke when we compare the level of pensions in Britain to the level of those available in other member states of the Common Market.

We must do what the Prime Minister has done—decide where our priorities lie and pursue them with the same vigour as she has done. But we must reverse her priorities. We wish to reverse the society she has created, which is one of greed and lack of fulfilment of individual potential. To do so we must consider those sectors of the economy which she has preserved and protected.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said, we start with defence. Let us forget the latest changes in global politics wrought by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies. Let us consider the basic flaw between us and the rest of the major European nations. Throughout the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s Britain, on balance, has spent 2 per cent. more of its gross domestic product on defence than the average west European nation. We now spend an incredible £9 billion more of our wealth on defence than France or West Germany.

Why on earth should Britain spend 2 per cent. more of its GDP on defence than does West Germany or France? It is nonsense. Does anybody seriously believe that we are about to be invaded by the Soviet Union? That question has only to be asked to reveal its stupidity. We see from the opinion polls that Mikhail Gorbachev is the most popular politician in the history of polling in Britain. He has a support rate among the British people of 89 per cent.—only 8 per cent. of people in Britain oppose Mikhail Gorbachev. He does not need to invade Britain; he is so popular that he could come here and win the general election. He is three times more popular than the Prime Minister.

Mr. Skinner: That is not difficult.

Mr. Livingstone: As my hon. Friend says, that is not difficult. Perhaps an inverse law is operating here so that the further away a politician is, the more popular he or she appears to be.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Gentleman has been questioning why Britain's defence budget is larger than that of West Germany or France. We have responsibilities not only in Europe but across the world. In addition, our other big responsibility is fighting a war against terrorism in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman is well known as an apologist for the IRA. In his book, "Livingstone's Labour: A Programme for the Nineties", when talking about the killing of people in Northern Ireland, he said that it

"would leave the IRA with no choice but to break the ceasefire".

That is the signature tune of black propaganda issued by the IRA. The quote was taken from Conor Cruise O'Brien's review of the hon. Gentleman's book which appeared on 9 September 1989. If the hon. Gentleman came off the fence and supported the Government in attacking terrorism instead of being an apologist for that organisation we would listen to him with more care.

Mr. Livingstone: The people of Ireland as well as the people of Britain would much rather see the £700 million which is spent on security in Northern Ireland go to creating a modern Irish economy. Some of us might think that, after 20 years of stalemate, we should consider some form of negotiated settlement. A Government have a simple duty to their people. If they are involved in conflict, that duty is either to win the war or to negotiate a peace, not to drag on, generation after generation, with no prospect of any end in sight.

However, this is a diversion. The reality of defence spending is that we spend a vastly greater proportion of our income on it, more than do other west European nations. Our research and development potential as a modern nation is a joke. Our investment in R and D is completely out of line with other modern European economies. Half of the scientists in western Europe working on defence spending are British. More than half of our entire research and development potential is consumed by defence.

When we ask why we buy good quality finished goods from Japan and West Germany rather than here, the answer is often because they are not produced here. It is not that the manufactured goods that we produce are

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inferior to those of West Germany or Japan, but that often we do not produce them. Therefore, we have no option but to buy them from our major competitors. That is because their scientists and technicians have had the time to develop those products, whereas ours are working on bigger and better ways of killing people. Therefore, we lost that potential for growth and trade.

Decade after decade, the British economy has been dragged down by defence spending. Even without the latest changes in the global political position, any British Government of the past 20 or 30 years should have had the target of reducing defence spending to the average level for west Europe and releasing that £9 billion.

Think what we could do with that £9 billion. We talk about needing £3 billion to restore our National Health Service so that it is at the forefront of those of modern nations. Think how much of that could be used to expand and re-equip our schools, and to give teachers and lecturers the remuneration that they require so that we have an education-led economy—a dynamic, growing economy based on the talents of the people. Think how much of that money we could use to build a modern infrastructure, with a modern transport system and modern housing provision. Anybody in Britain who considers all that we could do with the money would say that it was madness to continue to spend £9 billion a year more on defence than our major competitors. Are we more at risk of war than France or West Germany? What nonsense. That is one area from which we could shift resources to pay for decent pensions and the reconstruction of our welfare state.

The second area concerns capital. The wealth generated in Britain and invested abroad is not simply the wealth of the financiers who take the decisions to invest it abroad. Every penny of it has been created by the extraction of resources from the North sea or the productive labours of millions of British people day by day at their workplaces. The generation of new capital goes on every day.

Britain is unique in investing that wealth abroad rather than at home on a scale out of all proportion to any other major nation. Britain now owns more of the rest of the world's productive resources as a proportion of its national wealth than any country other than Japan. The Government may say, "That's fine; we can live off the profits", but it is clear from the trade deficit that we cannot. I am not opposed to some investment abroad, but I am opposed to it being so out of line with that of our major competitors that it starves and undermines our productive economy.

We are investing about £7 billion a year in our industrial manufacturing sector. To achieve West German levels of investment we need to double the figure to £14 billion, and to reach Japanese levels we need to multiply it to £55 billion. Those are stunning figures. We are falling behind, and the gap is getting worse. It translates into the trade deficit. It is not just the product of the 1979-81 recession, but has gone on since then year by year. We need to say to the British people, "You cannot have an economy that rests solely on a profitable financial sector in the City of London and a great service economy, where many of the jobs require minimal skills and are completely unrewarding." As the CBI said, we cannot export a haircut.

Our economy is out of kilter on a major scale. We can create the society that our people have a right to expect only if we see a massive expansion of investment in and the modernisation of our industrial base. No one can say honestly that that can be left to the market. It has been left to the market for a century or more. In the past 10 years the market has been allowed complete freedom and the financiers, probably no more than 3,000 of whom can take key decisions, have chosen to invest abroad the wealth created by British people.

Now we face an even more monstrous distortion. We are for ever debating the trade deficit. It is deeply embarrassing to the Government. It is the worse trade deficit of any of the G7 nations, the seven key industrial Western powers, at any time in the past 30 years. If we were to plot the deficits of the G7 nations on a graph, one after another and one year after another since 1960, it would show that Britain's present deficit of trade and capital outflow is three times worse than that of any of the other nations at any time in the past 30 years. That is frightening. We are worried about our £20 billion trade deficit. It amounts to 4 per cent. of our national wealth each year. That would put any company into receivership.

That is not even half the story. Hidden away and not getting the same attention is the deficit on capital flows. In addition to the £20 billion trade deficit, we have a £30 billion capital deficit. That is the money that our financial institutions invest abroad in long-term projects as opposed to money from abroad invested here. Add the two together —the 4 per cent. GDP deficit on trade and the now close on 7 per cent GDP deficit on capital—and the country is running an 11 per cent. GDP deficit. We are living beyond our means to the tune of £10 billion a year with no prospect of change.

The only way that the Government can avoid international receivership is to organise a flow of short-term hot money into Britain, often on a 24-hour basis.

Mr. Skinner: Is there not another ingredient? In order to balance the £20 billion trade deficit, which is likely to remain for a considerable time, the Government have decided that we must have high interest rates. In order to finance the gap created by the consequential payments to finance the £20 billion deficit at high interest rates and the hot money, we face costs of about £26 billion. The bigger the trade deficit and the higher the interest rates, the more hot money we need to balance the books and pay out the interest rate instalments. That means £25 billion on our deficit.

Mr. Livingstone: My hon. Friend is right. That is the problem that we face; and it is more of a problem for the Labour party than it is for the Tory party. International finance knows full well that the Prime Minister will defend it, but that would not necessarily be its presumption if there was a change of Government. The British economy is running a 4 per cent. GDP deficit on trade and a more than 6 per cent. GDP deficit on finance capital. We are surviving that only by keeping interest rates high and attracting hot money.

The money that we have invested abroad has bought factories and shares, and cannot be liquidated easily. Yet the short-term hot money, which the Government use to balance that, can go in 24 hours. The Government survive only so long as they hold the confidence of international

capital. So long as the Government keep interest rates high and pay profits, international capital will remain. When people complain about mortgage rates we should tell them that interest rates are high, so that we can continue to attract hot money from abroad, so that British financial institutions can continue to invest a total deficit of £30 billion in shares and building factories all over the rest of the world. They would think that we were mad. People are being bankrupted day after day and suffering pain to allow British bankers to invest money abroad.

The Government get away with that because international finance knows that when the crunch comes it can rely on this Government to put the burden of the crisis on ordinary British people and to preserve and protect it. International capital knows that it cannot rely on a Labour Government. Therefore, when the Labour party comes to power, we shall face a financial rack on a scale that makes anything that has gone before look like a tea party.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Gentleman's exposition of the problems that would be faced by a Labour Government, should one ever come to power, are most interesting, as is his description of the economic policies to be followed. I must remind him of what his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said when he suggested that the Labour Government would persuade banks to limit credit. He explained that the banks would do so:

"Out of a sense of reasonableness and of national duty and a desire to co-operate with the elected Government".—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1989; Vol. 158, c. 688.]

That policy is not the same as that suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Livingstone: I am about to discuss the interesting problem of how one imposes a sense of loyalty to the nation on our financial institutions given that we shall inherit an economy that is running massive deficits and that will be dependent upon international finance to continue to prop it up.

Under President Reagan a similar budget and trade deficit developed. If a Democrat had been in the White House and had run similar deficits, the economy would have collapsed. As Reagan and the Republicans were in charge, Wall street and the Japanese banks were prepared to prop up that Government. They knew that they could rely on that Government to defend their interests.

If the Labour party took office tomorrow—if by some wonderful chance that glory should come to be—the financial institutions that have propped up the Government would end their system of support immediately. They would not be prepared to allow a Labour Government to run a £20 billion trade deficit, nor would they be prepared to witness that deficit's impact on our economy.

We must come to power in the full knowledge of the problems we shall face and we must be firm about how we shall deal with them. I do not believe that we can simply allow the flow of capital from Britain to continue. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is right. The incoming Labour Government must tell our financial institutions that they should invest less abroad and more here. We shall expect them to honour that request because the people will have voted for precisely that.

If the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) is suggesting that the British banking system and the City of London will not accept the result of the ballot box and the election of a Labour Government committed to increasing investment in British industry, that amounts to an act of economic sabotage. I believe that a Labour Government would enjoy massive popular support for imposing a level of restriction on the financial system to guarantee compliance with the result of that general election.

If the Labour party can construct an economic structure that shows ordinary people in Britain that we can rebuild our welfare state and increase investment in British manufacturing without increasing taxation on ordinary families and without fuelling inflation, we shall win the next election, and we shall govern for a generation. If we fail to be rigorous in our thinking, and if we fail to spell out the bottom line, we shall leave it to the Conservative party to exploit the fear that the election of a Labour Government may lead to inflation, increased taxation and wage restraint. Those policies were tried in the past and they failed.

The debate about the economy is still continuing within the Labour movement. Occasionally my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover and I have been criticised by some of our colleagues for being sound money men. I am not interested in fuelling inflation. It is our people who carry the burden of the economic crisis created by inflation. A Labour party economic policy based on production requires stable exchange rates and low rates of inflation, and it must be serious about the money supply. If Milton Friedman had any self-respect he would sue the Conservative party for claiming to be monetarist—it has been profligate on a grand scale.

Our rate of inflation is a disgrace. I am not interested in Conservative Members telling me that inflation is not as bad as it was 10 years ago. There is no point in comparing the two rates. The important consideration is how we stand in relation to Germany, Japan and our major competitors. As long as their inflation rates are lower, their economies will grow stronger and ours weaker. We are committed to sound money. I do not want money to be printed just to fuel inflation.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's fascinating economic analysis. If I am right, I believe that he is suggesting that, unless the banks and the financial institutions are prepared to co-operate willingly—that is fairly unlikely, given that the vast majority are not British—the Labour party would be forced to reintroduce exchange controls. Presumably the hon. Gentleman believes that that is the only coercive measure available to a Government to repatriate capital from overseas. What would that do to our relationship with the European Community as such exchange control goes against the policies currently pursued by the Community? Those controls would be in direct contravention of European Commission regulations. Is the logical conclusion of the hon. Gentleman's argument that we would withdraw from the European Community?

Mr. Livingstone: I am arguing for exchange controls, but not necessarily in the form that existed up to 1979. Despite those controls, we still did not receive the necessary investment in our economy. The money stayed in Britain, but it fuelled a major boom in advertising, property speculation and fringe banking. Those were the

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main growth areas in the economy in the 1950s and 1960s. We do not want to go back to that. We want to keep more investment in Britain and we want to direct it into rebuilding a solid manufacturing base. I am talking about a different form of exchange control, but one which will broadly produce the right results.

It is not possible for me, as one Back-Bench Member, with one economic researcher who works one day a week, to construct the exact mechanism of government necessary to achieve the desired result, but a range of options is available.

Mr. Couchman: What would happen to all the inward investment into this country from the United States, Japan and the continent, which has been so beneficial in recent years to our manufacturing industry, should the hon. Gentleman's policies be pursued?

Mr. Livingstone: I welcome all inward investment. My complaint is that it does not match the outward investment from Britain. If one considers the inflow of investment capital against the outflow, it is clear that this year we are running a deficit of £30 billion. We cannot sustain that year after year.

The hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) spoke about the problems associated with the Common Market. There is not the slightest doubt that what I am advocating would cause a major trauma within the Community, but it must face that. By the time we have got through 1992, and the French have witnessed the impact of removing their exchange controls, we may find that we have many allies within the Community. They will realise that we cannot leave it to the European financial capital centres to decide where investment is made. That is already happening. Many financial capitalists in Europe are saying that perhaps they should not invest any further in France or West Germany as they could invest in Poland or Czechoslovakia, which have much cheaper labour costs because they are emerging from Stalinist dictatorships.

When a Labour Government come to office we may find that there is a tide of opinion across Europe arguing for the wealth created in our countries to be used to create a basic decent standard of living that rests on a sound industrial base. That will, as the hon. Member for Fulham suggests, involve changes to the Common Market.

I give credit to the deputy leader of the Labour party who, in the run-up to the election, proposed that we should operate differential levels of taxation. Those companies that chose to invest abroad on a scale considered unacceptable by the Government would be subject to a higher level of taxation. That concept was hardly revolutionary, but it would be effective. One could increase the level of taxation to the point where it became more painful to resist the elected Government than to comply with their demands. Or one could go to the other end of the spectrum and adopt the methods used by the old Bolsheviks who took power in 1917. I say this as a joke in case someone rushes up and puts it on the Press Association tapes. When the Bolsheviks took power, the banks would not co-operate. Lenin sent a detachment of Red Guards to the bank and they said to the manager that they needed the money in the state bank. The manager would not open the bank, so they put a gun to his head and said that he had a choice: either he could open the vault, or they would pull the trigger. New realism was obviously alive and well as long ago as 1917 and the bank manager co-operated. Now I am not advocating that we shoot the bankers, but surely somewhere between Roy Hattersley and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin we can find the method that we need for Britain in the 1990s.

It is the principle that matters. Finance capital must serve the people of Britain rather than subordinate the whole country to its own needs. The tragedy of the past 10 years is that when we had the wealth of North sea oil, which could have been used so easily, it was allowed to flow abroad. Our major competitors have had so much of the benefit from it. That is the dilemma that we face.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I appreciate my hon. Friend's excellent speech. Does he agree that excessive defence spending and the flow of capital abroad are dangerously linked for us in the medium and long-term future? If there were a world recession, many of the countries where British money has been invested would seek to appropriate it to get themselves out of that recession. All that would be left to us would be the threat of force and our defence budget, which could lead us into war—possibly not with the most powerful countries, such as the United States, but with other countries. We could find ourselves on a war footing because of the silly policy of excessive investment abroad. That is the link with defence spending.

Mr. Livingstone: My hon. Friend is right. Over the past 150 years, the British economy invested abroad on a large scale and felt that it needed a huge arms budget to defend itself from the growing power of Germany and America. That is the problem. However, there is also a link with our education institutions. We should compare ourselves with Germany. In 1870, already more scientists were employed in the German chemical industry than were employed in every public and private institution throughout the British empire. Germany was committed to building a strong industry, and it recognised the consequent need for a skilled and well-educated work force.

We had an economy that was investing abroad and that wanted, therefore, a huge defence establishment to protect those investments. It did not need to train its own work force because investment was going abroad. In the debates about the creation of a proper universal education system, Lord Salisbury, before he became leader of the Conservative party, opposed expanding the education system because he said that Britain did not need it.

He said that it would mean "pouring learning into louts." That philosophy has run through our education system. Our system is still skewed towards the old imperial objective of investment abroad, for which we need a colonial structure, rather than creating the skills among our own people that we need to provide a modern economy.

Mr. Madden: Will my hon. Friend confirm that even today in Germany there are more students studying engineering than the entire student population of Britain? Will he also confirm that we now have the most marvellous opportunity because of developments in eastern Europe? We could switch all the talent and ability here from production for war to production for need. That is the marvellous opportunity that faces this country and the Labour movement.

Mr. Livingstone: I shall close on that point. The world has been changed by Gorbachev. I said earlier that we needed to cut defence spending irrespective of the recent changes. We now see the chance emerging for a massive switch of resources—not just in western Europe, but in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union—away from arms and into a genuine modernisation of the economy right across Europe. We should look to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union where a market of 400 million people wants to trade with us, and to see the expansion and development of a closer and more integrated European home.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne should not judge the Labour party by comparing the 1983 manifesto with our policy review. He should judge us by the manifesto that we shall post before the British people in a year or two. He should ask us then whether we have costed our proposals, where the money will come from, how much we shall cut defence, an how much we shall control capital. We must ensure that when we go into the next election we can say to the people, "This is our programme and that is what it will cost." Our programme will be paid for not by increasing the money supply and fuelling inflation, by increasing taxes on ordinary middle-income families or by a structure of wage controls, but by redirecting our existing wealth, which is being consumed by excessive arms spending, and by ensuring that Britain's financial institutions first serve the reconstruction of our own economy before considering investment abroad.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have had two speeches in about as many hours. Unless speeches and interventions are briefer, most hon. Members will be disappointed.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When we were involved in the exchanges earlier about how an official of Conservative Central Office obtained permission to enter the civil servants Box, you were good enough to say that inquiries would be made. Would those inquiries include whether there was an official request from the Government, including the Cabinet Office, for that official to be given permission to enter the Box? Before the chairman of the Conservative party speaks, may we ask him whether he will make it clear whether his intervention is being made in his capacity as chairman of the Conservative party or on behalf of the Government, as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: To the extent that the hon. Gentleman's points are matters for me, I assume that what he has said will be taken into account in the inquiries.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Discussions have been taking place behind the Speaker's Chair, of which you will not be aware, about the deep concern about how this person managed to evade the security people and how it was that a day pass was allocated. It was done perhaps on the basis that it was thought to be OK because the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the chairman of the Tory party—non-elected and given his job by patronage from the Prime Minister—had induced the officials and almost intimidated them into thinking that they would be doing the right thing if they allowed this person into this high security place. In view of that deep concern, the fact that the Patronage Secretary came here some time ago, with a worried look on his face and the fact that these inquiries are developing, we should have a statement before the House rises so that we may know what has happened. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, should pass that message on as soon as possible to the relevant authorities.

11.58 am

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I have already said that I apologise to the House if there was a mistake. There should not have been an official from central office in the civil servants Box and he has withdrawn from that position.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on having had the good fortune to win the ballot in this matter and on directing the House to this subject. We do not often have an opportunity to discuss Labour party policy. Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends try to direct questions to the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time about Labour party policy, but they are ruled out of order, as the Prime Minister is not responsible for that policy.

We have had two such opportunities in the past few weeks; the first was the debate before Christmas on a motion about the future of Socialism; the second is today.

I have no disrespect for the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) but I must tell him that I am surprised that on these two occasions, which have presented an opportunity for shadow Cabinet members to speak about Labour's policy, they have not tried to intervene. I remember the hon. Member for The Wrekin as the hon. Member for Lichfield and Tamworth, a seat which he lost; no doubt he will lose his present seat in the fullness of time, too.

The person chosen to reply to the debate must have been discussed collectively by the shadow Cabinet. No doubt Mr. Mandelson strongly advised the shadow Cabinet not to debate against me in the House because I might have to spell out what its members believe in, which would be wholly unacceptable—to Mr. Mandelson, who is very determined on these matters, and to the shadow Cabinet.

Mr. Bill Walker: My right hon. Friend will probably also have noticed that not a single Scottish Opposition Member is present. They are holding a sham convention in Scotland today at which they will debate the future government of Scotland, instead of coming here to explain the Labour party's flawed, fraudulent and unworkable proposals on devolution.

Mr. Baker: So yet another opportunity has been missed by the Opposition——

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I can shed a little light on the absence of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen. The Labour Whip said that the hon Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) would be in attendance, but a last-minute intervention removed the shadow Leader of the House, perhaps because he is more vulnerable than many others.

Mr. Baker: We need a parliamentary inquiry into that, too. Why has the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) been removed from the Front Bench today? After all, he was in the Lobby last night to vote, and he is not only the shadow Leader of the House but the Labour campaign co-ordinator. I frequently find myself debating

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with him. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) for reminding the House of these circumstances. But why?

Mr. Grocott: I am sorry to hear that the Chancellor does not think me a worthy opponent, but we shall have to judge that when the debate is over. I can give him an absolute assurance that I have been well aware for some time that I would take part in the debate, and I look forward to doing so, although I doubted at one stage whether I would be able to, as the first speech lasted for one and a half hours. I hope that I shall at least be a match for the hon. Member for Eastborne (Mr. Gow)——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already said that unless speeches and interventions are shorter many hon. Members will be disappointed.

Mr. Baker: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman is an unworthy Member, but he does not speak with the authority of the shadow Cabinet. It is clear that two names appeared on the Whip; the hon. Member for The Wrekin was going to wind up, but the hon. Member for Copeland was going to open the debate. Where is he? It is all very extraordinary.

I have several shadows. Sometimes I am shadowed by the deputy leader of the Labour party, sometimes by the chairman of the Labour party—it is hard to remember who he is these days—but I must point out that these debates deserve the attention of, and attendance in the House by, a member of the shadow Cabinet. The absence of such a member shows the Opposition's reluctance to debate these matters and the contempt in which they hold the House.

I want to touch on the speech made by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). I have some regard for the hon. Gentleman; we crossed swords in the past on the GLC in the days of Red Ken and Blue Ken. Since he joined the House it has become fashionable to write him off and to say that he has disappeared without trace. I do not happen to agree with that view. I think that the hon. Gentleman represents a consistent strand in Labour party thinking and in Socialism; he has stuck to that, as have the hon. Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

It was clear from the speech made by the hon. Member for Brent, East that he has little sympathy with the so-called Labour policy review. He said at the end of his speech that we should judge the Opposition not on the review but on the manifesto to be published in one or two years' time. But that manifesto will draw on the review. It has been approved by such bodies as pass for representative organisations in the Labour party.

The hon. Gentleman said in an interesting aside that he had been involved for two years in the policy review. He was obviously dropped thereafter, rather like the hon. Member for Copeland was dropped from the Front Bench today. I am not surprised, given what the hon. Member for Brent, East was saying. He spoke bluntly, frankly and openly as we would expect of him, and he clearly said that the economic policy that any Labour Government must follow must be based upon massive intervention in the markets. He openly said that there must be exchange controls; that is not the view of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen. No wonder the hon. Member for Copeland is not here today. He would have had to defend the non-return of exchange controls; Labour Front Bench spokesmen do not believe in their reimposition.

The hon. Member for Brent, East also admitted, when answering the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington), that these controls would lead to major trauma in the EEC but that he was prepared for that. That is not the view of the Labour shadow Cabinet or of the policy review document. The hon. Gentleman pictured the wonderful possibility of sabotage by the City and of Lenin's red guard marching down to the bank. If it ever came to that there would be no better person to command the march on the Bank of England than the hon. Member for Brent, East. We would relish it. It would be his personal Bastille and the flag of Socialism would be planted on the Bank of England. It is pointless to disguise these differences between strands of opinion in the Labour party.

The policies in the review document merit examination and discussion. Entitled "Meet the Challenge Make the Change", it gives rise to two questions of great interest: first, whether Labour policies have changed; and, secondly, whether a big idea lies behind them.

Thousands of column inches in the press have been used up discussing whether there is a big idea, and various people have tried to find one. The last article on the subject that I read suggested that the big idea was to have no big idea. Certainly, there is no guiding vision in the document, no overriding view of the future. The only big idea that one can detect behind the document is a desire for power and office at any cost. That is what has overtaken the Labour party.

Have Labour policies changed? We should recognise that there have been some changes—for instance, the language of the Labour party has changed. Throughout the document we find words such as "market", "choice", and even "the homeowner". Occasionally even shareholders are mentioned—a benighted group they would be under Labour. And sometimes, the document even mentions taxpayers.

Is there a new agenda? Let us examine the subject of choice. The document rightly says that quality is important in education. That means support for the national curriculum, which the Opposition are trying to change and modify. The document also says that Labour is committed to preserving diversity in schools so that there can be choice for parents. What does diversity mean in terms of Labour policy? The Opposition want to abolish the remaining grammar schools. That is not increasing diversity, it is reducing choice. They are on record as wanting to destroy the city technology colleges that we shall set up. By destroying those colleges, Labour will not be increasing diversity but reducing it. It wants to destroy the grant-maintained schools, the many schools that have already opted out and the many more that will want to opt out. That is not increasing diversity. The rhetoric has changed, but the underlying reality has not, because Labour basically believes that all our children should go to one type of school that is owned, controlled, dominated and run by the local education authority. So much for the page 46 statement that:

"Labour is committed to preserving . . . diversity."

Mr. Madden: I am grateful to either the chairman of the Conservative party or the Chancellor of the Duchy—I am not sure how I should address the right hon. Gentleman.

He rightly talks about the importance of choice and diversity. May I refer him to one small but important aspect of choice and diversity? Does he think that schoolchildren should have the opportunity to dress according to religious belief? If he does believe that, will the Government reinforce that important aspect of choice and diversity?

Mr. Baker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the matter of dress for children is determined by the governing bodies of schools. It would not be appropriate for the Government and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), if he were in the Chamber, would not suggest that the Government should impose a particular pattern or solution for school dress. That is a matter for the respective governing bodies.

Mr. Madden: I understand what the right hon. Gentleman says, but I should like to press him further. Would he advise governors wherever possible to ensure——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are departing from the motion before the House. Perhaps we should return to it.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman's comment shows that Opposition Members are always trying to find ways in which Ministers can tell other people what to do. We believe in true diversity and that parents should have a much greater say in the running of schools. Grant-maintained schools have a democratic process for deciding whether they wish to become part-maintained schools. Labour would set that aside. How does that tie in with Labour's statement that

"Parents are a cornerstone of a school's success and a pupil's progress."

Labour pays lip service to such matters, but its underlying policies have not changed, and Labour continues its vendetta against private schools.

Labour makes it clear that it will withdraw charitable status and will abolish the assisted places scheme. The party wants to destroy private education and that is restricting choice, not diversifying it. We get little insights into the vindictiveness of the Labour party. It is not in the document that we see the true Socialist venom on public schools. Ten days ago, in a speech by the deputy leader of the Labour party on constitutional matters, he put forward the reasons why he did not believe in a Bill of Rights. He also put forward other proposals about the House of Lords and such matters with which hon. Members are familiar. He said:

"One of the reasons why we are against a bill of rights is that it would almost certainly protect the public schools."

That is another indication of how Labour is prepared to trim its principles. It talks about people's rights, but when it comes to a Bill of Rights that would enshrine choice and protect the individual, it says, "We do not want that, because the individual might want to exercise his choice by spending money on the education of his children." It is unparliamentary to say that that is hypocritical so I shall say that it is very devious.

The hon. Member for Brent, East talked about industrial policy as it is sketched in the policy review document. One of the early passages of the document talks about a "productive and competitive economy". We know from reports in *The Guardian* that the article had to be redrafted. Its author, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), is not on the Opposition Front Bench today. The hon. Gentleman is one of the thinkers in the Labour party. I am not saying that the hon. Member for The Wrekin is not a thinker or is incapable of thinking, but the hon. Member for Dagenham has set himself up as one of the revisionary thinkers. At the last general election, he held the fort when the Leader of the Opposition went round the country. He was the bright new guy whom we did not know much about before, and he was doing all the thinking. Never has a reputation plummeted so abruptly, completely and precipitously than that of the hon. Member for Dagenham. Yesterday, he made one of the most inept and disastrous speeches that we have heard for a long time.

I shall now turn to the parts of the document that deal with industry and markets. We know that Labour's adherence to markets is only skin deep. It talks of the importance of recognising market forces, but the whole document is based upon the analysis that the market and market forces have failed and that we need massive instruments of intervention. Labour has plans for introducing quangos, national banks and public enterprise agencies, and that bears witness to Socialism's cold embrace for modern economics. Under Labour, we would have a "British industrial bank" and "British technology enterprise". Those bodies will pump money into projects which, basically, the planners in Whitehall think are viable.

That takes us right back to the policies of the 1960s and 1970s. In a lecture to the Tribune Group, which was subsequently shortened and printed in *The Guardian*, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) looked forward to a local high street version of the national investment bank. All sorts of people will be encouraged to part with their savings to back winners. As I and my hon. Friends know only too well, we have been here before in the 1960s and 1970s.

The hon. Member for Brent, East knows only too well about the Greater London Enterprise Board. That body was to pump money into projects which would not otherwise be funded by people who were too short-sighted to invest in projects on the frontiers of science. The hon. Gentleman knows that we had meetings about that when he was running the GLC. In 1984, of 18 companies in which the GLEB held 10 per cent. or more of the share capital, four were in liquidation, one was in receivership, and nine had failed to provide proper audited financial statements.

Mr. Livingstone: Will the right hon. Gentleman compare those statistics about the minority of failures that we had with the record of his Government under whom 80 per cent. of all new firms created in the last 10 years failed within two years? If the private sector had achieved the success rate of GLEB, many jobs and firms would still be going.

Mr. Baker: The GLEB failed in virtually every one of its investments, and the hon. Gentleman knows that. He talks about the creation of businesses. As a result of the changes that we have made in Britain's general economic framework, we are creating about 1,200 net new businesses a week. That is because we have provided opportunities and rewards through reduced taxation and have not tried to tell businesses where to invest and what products and projects to develop. We have left those matters to the spontaneity, inventiveness and originality of individuals.

[Mr. Baker]

That is why we have had eight continuous years of the highest growth since the war. That is also why we have created more jobs than any country in Europe. The unemployment rate in Britain yesterday was 5·8 per cent. and in Europe it is about 9·1 per cent. This has been a decade of economic success.

The Labour party policy document talks about forcing investment to state ownership. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne eloquently set out all the different companies and nationalised industries that we have privatised. That policy has been one of the greatest successes of the last 10 years and has not only increased the number of shareholders but has allowed industry to expand. Cable and Wireless was transformed from a sort of post-imperial telegraph company into a major telecommunications business. We have seen such transformations one after the other. What will the Labour party do about such matters? According to page 12 of its policy document, it will renationalise British Telecom. Page 15 says that Labour will restore water to public ownership and buy back shares in gas and electricity. The language has changed. Nationalisation, the old cry of the Labour party—clause 4 and all that—has been transformed into social ownership. Those words have been replaced by another weasel phrase—"public interest companies". What is a "public interest company"? I would have thought that Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's, or British Airways—to whose transformation after being a state airline my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne also referred—are all public interest companies, because they put the interests of the public first. That is what the market does, but Labour cannot resist the temptation to meddle, to own, and to take public companies back into state control.

It is little wonder that the hon. Member for Copeland is not present to defend his party. It is extraordinary that no member of the shadow Cabinet is here to reply to the comments that have been made.

In his recent infamous interview, the hon. Member for Dagenham spoke about the way in which a Labour Government will treat shareholders and dividends. I believe not that that interview was an aberration but that it revealed the true nature of Labour's thinking. That is another example of Labour changing the rhetoric but not the reality.

The Labour party does not want to debate trade union reform, either. It declines to answer straight questions on that topic because its relationship with trade unions is one of the closest in political life. The Labour party grew out of the bowels of the trade union movement, which is why 90 per cent. of the voting power at Labour party conferences is in the hands of trade unions, why 40 per cent. of the members of the electoral college that selects Labour's leader are trade unionists, and why 40 per cent. of the votes for Labour party parliamentary candidates throughout the country are controlled by trade unions. There are rumours that those percentages might be changed, but I guarantee that they will not be eliminated, because Labour cannot cut its residual links with the trade union movement.

Mr. Couchman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) gave such a frank insight into the actions that Labour would take for trade unions if elected that he was removed from his post as shadow Cabinet spokesman for employment, because his remarks did not sit well with the new policy of glitzy packaging and not too much truth?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) meant what he said, and that is no way to hold on to a place in the shadow Cabinet.

The "People at Work" section of Labour's policy document reveals a party looking over its shoulder at its paymasters and not a party concerned with the industrial realities of the 1990s. It states that under Labour, not all sympathy strikes would be unlawful—which means that Labour will reverse our legislation and legalise secondary action. We wait for further clarification on that aspect of the Opposition's policy. The document adds that under Labour, walk-outs and strikes would go ahead before ballots have been taken. In other words, strike first and vote Labour.—*[Laughter.]* I mean, vote later. My slip of the tongue revealed absolutely the true nature of that policy—strike first, vote later, and vote Labour all at the same time. Under Labour, individuals would have the right to strike without their union's funds being seized by the courts, which would put unions above the law.

Since the publication of Labour's policy review, we have witnessed a blinding flash of light, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) observed. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who is Labour's new spokesman on such matters, could have come to the House today to clarify Labour policy. One might well ask where he is. One can be sure that he is not present to answer questions about Labour policies. The hon. Member for Sedgefield has said that the Opposition will not defend the closed shop when the Government move to outlaw it in the Employment Bill. That is quite a change on the road to Damascus. When did Labour decide not to support the closed shop? It was when it realised that we intended to take action. Labour realised that it would be totally indefensible to defend the closed shop in debates in the House and throughout the country. That is another example of Labour trimming its previous views.

The Employment Bill contains many other new measures. It will be interesting to see whether Labour supports our proposals to abolish wildcat strikes, which will mean extending the responsibilities not only of trade union officials but their members. It will be interesting also to discover whether Labour supports our action to eliminate secondary action. Again, it is hardly surprising that there is no official Labour spokesman present to clarify Labour's policy on those matters.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Closed shops will be debated when the Employment Bill begins its progress through the House in a couple of weeks. Labour's thinking is that such matters fall within the scope of the European social charter. That part of the charter outlawing closed shops is something that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends do not like, but members of our Front Bench are prepared to accept it because they want to see introduced all the good elements in the social charter—including the banning of blacklists, such as those produced by the Economic League, and rights at work provisions, such as parental and family leave. The Government are anxious to implement the social charter's move against closed shops but none of the other provisions that it contains. How does the chairman of the Conservative party justify that?

Mr. Baker: I can justify it because we believe that many of the matters dealt with in the social charter should be dealt with within the relationship between the employer and the employee. We have already received from the hon. Member for Brent, East a clear indication that he wants to dismantle the EEC as it is now organised—to traumatise the EEC.

Mr. Livingstone: No, to reform it.

Mr. Baker: To see the hon. Member for Brent, East as a reformer requires a imaginative jump of a kind that I am not prepared to make.

Labour's policy on defence is also obscure. It would have been useful if there had been present for this debate Labour's shadow Cabinet spokesman for defence or even one of his three hon. Friends who serve as defence spokesmen. I dare say that there is hardly one right hon. or hon. Member who can name them, so well known are they. They must be somewhere in the country today, putting over Labour's defence policy. Not only is it impossible to name them, but one never hears from them. I am not surprised, because defence policy is another policy that Labour has given the appearance of changing but has not changed.

Labour has given the appearance of abandoning unilateralism and adopting a multilateralist policy. When the matter was debated at the last Labour party conference, *The Times* ran a leader commenting that Labour had at last rid itself of what had probably been its most consistent decisive and consistent handicap. If there has been a change, we must recognise it, but Labour are unhappy, unwilling and hesitant to debate it.

If Labour's policy is new why do they hide it under a bushel? Why is it so vague and why do we have to piece it together from speeches and interviews? Why does the leadership refuse to give straight answers to straight questions?

I shall pray in aid Mr. Bruce Kent, of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, who has summed up Labour's problems when he spoke at the Labour conference last year. He said:

> "It doesn't make any sense today. Read the papers. Baker—quite correctly—and the Conservatives say that the real issue is, are we going to have nuclear weapons as long as anybody else? That's the question they won't answer here in the NEC."

I have put that question to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) in Question Time, and on many other occasions to Labour Front-Bench spokesmen.

In the disarmament process it is not the weapons that one starts with that are important but the weapons that one ends up with at the end of the process.

I have to ask that question again, and perhaps the hon. Member for The Wrekin could have a stab at answering it. I know that it can only be a stab at it, because he is not a member of the shadow Cabinet. It would know the answer to the question, which is quite straightforward—should we give up our nuclear weapons while other countries have nuclear weapons targeted upon us? We shall ask that question again and again until polling day.

In a recent interview, Mr. David Frost put that question to the Leader of the Opposition and I put it again. The reason why he did not give a clear answer is again given by Bruce Kent, who says:

> "The policy review is an electoral strategy, not a set of disarmament proposals."

A genuine and well-thought-out policy designed to defend Britain in the 1990s could withstand scrutiny and provide answers to these questions, but Labour's policy is a fudged formula, multilateral in language and unilateral in essence. It cannot survive any thorough going examination.

Mr. Hugo Young, the well-known political journalist and commentator, whom no one could describe as a closet Conservative—

Mr. Gow: He writes for *The Guardian*.

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend confirms me in my belief that he is not a closet Conservative if he writes for *The Guardian*. This is Mr. Young's comment on the Leader of the Opposition's appearance on the David Frost interview the other morning—the hon. Member for Brent, East will enjoy this:

> "His discourse on defence policy, and Labour's attitude to nuclear disarmament, contained so many seamless obscurities, delivered in such ungrammatical verbiage yet with an air of sententious candour, as momentarily to convince you that this man is not fit to be put in charge of a pea-shooter."

That is the considered view of one of our leading political journalists upon the Leader of the Opposition when he is pressed on defence policy.

Yesterday, the House debated local government and the community charge. Questions have been asked this morning about how Labour would propose to pay for local government and the questions have not been answered, because Labour has no proposals. It has agreed to half of our proposals for the business rate. It is in favour of revaluation, but against the uniform rate. Therefore, it wants revaluation, but it wants the councils to be left to decide what the local rate will be. Labour would leave it to the Socialist brothers and sisters in the town halls to make up their minds. Where would that leave people in Haringey, where business rates increased by 56 per cent. last year? Is that democracy for the business men of Haringey? What about Islington, where the business rate went up by one fifth last year?

Under the Government's proposals, individuals will pay the community charge, but there will be comprehensive rebates for special categories of child care and for the less-well-off. Labour have opposed that tooth and nail. Many members of the modern Labour party, including 18 hon. Members, have openly encouraged law breaking and declared that they will not pay the charge.

Why have Labour opposed our policy? They know that it will sound the death knell for extremist Labour councils up and down the country because Labour is not interested in restoring sound financial discipline to local government. Next year, in Ealing, the council will find it more difficult to impose a 31 per cent. rates increase and to offer free self-defence classes to lesbians. Next year, Liverpool city council will find it harder to justify spending £250,000 on the council media room, when some classrooms are closed because of dry rot.

Labour's opposition to the community charge is meaningless until they come up with an alternative. Hon. Members in the House yesterday——

Mr. Grocott: Leave things as they are.

Mr. Baker: We have had another alternative. The hon. Member for Lichfield and Tamworth has added his twopenn'orth——

Mr. Grocott: I am the Member for The Wrekin.

Mr. Baker: Well he will not be the member for The Wrekin for very long. He has said, let us leave thing as they are. Is that official Labour party policy? Of course it is not.

Mr. Grocott: No.

Mr. Baker: That is encouraging.

Mr. Grocott: I am quite sure that if there had been a free vote in the House last night instead of a coerced vote, many Conservative Members would have shown that they wished that we had left things as they were.

Mr. Baker: The only striking speeches in the debate yesterday were those by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities when he wound up. The hon. Member for Dagenham gave a disastrous and inept performance. He has made two bad speeches this week, one on Monday and one on Thursday. He had to admit that Labour do not know what to do.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins): The keeper of the Grail.

Mr. Baker: Yes, he is the keeper of the Grail. I was describing the intellectual distinctions of the hon. Member for Dagenham. Yesterday he admitted that Labour does not know what to do. It has had four or five years. A year ago it knew what to do, and produced a document. The hon. Member for Copeland spoke about it. It is no wonder that he is not here today.

The document said that Labour would

"introduce a modern property tax based on the capital value of a property, combined with an element of income tax dedicated to local government".

That would mean two new taxes. *The Independent* reported, however, that an Opposition Member had discovered while canvassing that a system of two taxes was not popular on the doorstep. The Opposition have therefore abandoned that idea. What are we to have instead? Will a small chink of Labour's policies be revealed to us today? After all, a member of the shadow Cabinet is now here: he must know what his party is going to say. He has gained a distinguished record on profligate Labour councils over the years, and he should use this opportunity to tell us what form of local government finance the Opposition favour. I suspect that they incline towards a tax on the capital value of homes, related somehow to the wealth or income of the families or individuals living in those homes. But I shall give way, because I think that we are about to hear the answer to my question.

Mr. Dobson: What Labour will put to the people at the next general election is a system of local government finance, funded by central Government, that will find enough money to build and provide homes for London's 30,000 homeless families and the 8,000 families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We shall find adequate funds, including funds from central Government, to ensure that central Government can perform the functions that the country wants it to perform. We will not put up with any ragbag nonesense from the right hon. Gentleman, who was so concerned about homelessness in the inner cities that when the boundaries were reorganised in 1983 he did a bunk from Marylebone and went off to Mole Valley. He knew that that was the only place where he would be safe.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman has added to Labour's spending plans in the past few minutes. We noted what he said very carefully, and I dare say that the shadow Chancellor will do so as well, but where will the hon. Gentleman find the money? His hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East has spent all the money that he has found on other matters.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we have found money with which to deal with homelessness: just before Christmas we announced a £250 million package. Governments can provide funds only if they run a sensible economy, and Labour will not do that if it ever returns to office. All the Labour Governments that we have had have left the country with higher taxes and bigger debts.

Mr. Dobson: If the right hon. Gentleman was not so ignorant about homelessness, he would know that to keep a family in bed-and-breakfast accommodation costs £12,000 a year, whereas finding a home for that family would cost less than £7,000. The policy to which I am referring would both find families homes and save money.

Mr. Baker: It would certainly not do that initially, and it is unlikely that it would do so even in the long term. If the hon. Gentleman is advocating a massive house building programme, he should cost it. If that proposal is to form part and parcel of Labour's policy review document, let us have the sums that are involved. I am surprised that the Opposition spokesman on these matters, who knows rather more about them than the hon. Gentleman, is not in his place to answer all my questions.

I have demonstrated the complete absence of local government policy on the Opposition Benches. Let me now deal with the continual evasion by Labour spokesmen, particularly the leader of the party. There is duplicity here. On 5 January I sent to the Leader of the Opposition a list of 52 questions relating to uncertainties in the policy document. Each was itemised. The list also included uncertainties surrounding what has been said by shadow spokesmen—for instance, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I asked him to answer questions not about education, housing, defence or constitutional matters but about economic policy. I have not received a reply to my letter.

I wrote again on 12 January. I have still received no reply. I have written again today and reduced the number of questions to the Leader of the Opposition. I have asked him to answer just one question, if he cannot cope with 52: to say how the Labour party intends to find the money for all its exciting and imaginative policies on housing and everything else.

I can understand the Leader of the Opposition's reticence. All the other Front-Bench spokesmen make enormous gaffs when they speak. The hon. Member for Dagenham has made gaffs about shares, dividends and restrictions on mortgages. The hon. Member for Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) made a gaff about banning second homes. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made a gaff about repealing all the Government's employment legislation. The Leader of the Opposition can neither answer questions nor speak with authority on policy matters because his approach to modernising his party is deeply flawed.

In an interview a few months ago in *The Sunday Correspondent* the Leader of the Opposition was asked whether there was anything that he could possibly learn

from the last 10 years of Thatcher Government. His answer was short. There were no qualifications; there was no hedging; there was no "maybe"; there were no baker's dozens, with adjectives fighting for supremacy in long-winded sentences. He just said, "No." He had nothing to learn from the last 10 years; the creation of over 2·5 million jobs, the drastic cut in the number of strikes —last year the lowest since the war—eight years of steady economic growth and stable finances that have led to debt repayment, tax cuts and additional spending on priority programmes. He had nothing to learn from a Prime Minister, a Government and a party who have won three elections in a row.

What hope is there for an Opposition party and a Leader of the Opposition who are supposedly reviewing policy when they have nothing to learn? His inability to learn and his lack of qualifications for high office have not gone unnoticed, not just on this side of the House but even, I regret to say, among his own supporters. In an opinion poll published last Saturday in *The Daily Telegraph*, 35 per cent. of Labour voters thought that he was a windbag. I do not object to that. It also showed that 25 per cent. of Labour voters have the impression that he does not know what he is talking about. Moreover, according to the opinion poll, 42 per cent. of Labour voters—not Conservative, Liberal or SDP voters—said that he was a lightweight politician.

Lightweight politicians cannot change their parties. The hon. Member for Brent, East knows that. We have seen a brave attempt to change the rhetoric, but this document is a scissors and paste job. The Labour party remains essentially a corporatist, dirigiste party, that wants to extend state ownership, increase taxes and direct people into doing what the party wants them to do.

The Labour party's policies would be a departure from all the successes of the last 10 years. We have transformed people's attitudes during that time. All that would be thrown away. We should return to the failures of the 1960s and the 1970s. That is why we should lose no opportunity to debate and discuss the Labour party's policies. The more that they are debated and discussed, the quicker they fall apart. Those policies show that the Labour party has not changed fundamentally. They also show that we cannot draw out of the policy document a manifesto that will win the Labour party the next election.

12.43 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The gag, if that is the right word, that ran through the speech of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was, who should or should not have been on the Opposition Front Bench this morning. I think that he asked for the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, the shadow Leader of the House, the shadow Secretary of State for the Environment and a few others. We can be forgiven some confusion, because we do not know what job the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) is supposed to be doing. We do not know, therefore, who ought to be here to reply to his speech. That confusion has become noticeably worse during the debate. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can spell out precisely whether he is here as chairman of the Conservative party —the only chairman who is not subject to election— whether his advisers are paid for by the Conservative party or by the state, and whether the people who turn up in the Box reserved for civil servants and who are now playing musical chairs are here on the basis of a state allowance or a Conservative party payment. If the right hon. Gentleman clarifies exactly what role he is performing for the Government, we shall provide our opposite number. However, we in the Labour party have a strange system whereby our chairmen are elected. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will consider that at some stage. Let us be clear that we will provide whoever is required when the right hon. Gentleman clarifies his own job.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Will the hon. Gentleman say who is the chairman of the Labour party?

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson).

Mr. Baker: Then she should be here today.

Mr. Grocott: No doubt the Chancellor of the Duchy would like to give us instructions as to exactly who should perform on the Labour Front Bench, but for the time being we shall make up our own minds.

The debate was initiated by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who spoke for about one and three quarter hours. I fully understand the dilemma and the concern that led him to choose the subject for today's debate. He had the priceless opportunity of winning a ballot that we all should love to have won. He has had more parliamentary time today than most of us get in a year. He could have used that time to raise the numerous problems and complaints of his constituents—the doctors who no doubt are complaining about what his party is doing to the Health Service, his constituents' worries about the poll tax, the business rate and the problems of schools and transport. But, quite rightly—and I totally sympathise with him—he feels the same sense of weariness that is felt by the Opposition, that it is a complete waste of time to go to the present Government with those worries and anxieties. So, quite rightly, he decided that we should cast our eyes forward and think about what could happen in future instead of doing what so many hon. Members on both sides of the House have done to so little effect to try to make the Government see sense and change their policies. He had ample opportunity to do that, but, rightly, he decided against it.

What we would most like is not simply to look forward to the next election but to have the opportunity to have it. The sooner we have it, the better. Then we shall be able to test whether seats such as The Wrekin are marginal. I have a lifelong interest in the activities of voters in marginal constituencies, having spent a lifetime contesting marginal seats, and I sense, as I am sure the hon. Member for Eastbourne does, that there is a groundswell of change among people in Britain who are sick and tired of the Government.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne and the Chancellor of the Duchy will be disappointed that I am not able to announce today the Labour party manifesto for the next election. I am sorry to disappoint them, but we shall announce that at our own pace and in our own time. Shadow Ministers will make speeches in the House and in other parts of the country at times of their choosing and at their convenience and not at the convenience of the hon. Member for Eastbourne or the Chancellor of the Duchy, whatever his job happens to be. The right hon. Gentleman could bring forward the process rapidly by advising his right hon. Friend at Downing street to call an election. We

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would then deliver our manifesto very rapidly indeed. As he has more influence on choice of election days than I have, I would be happy for him to do that.

I entirely reject Conservative Members criticisms that the Labour party has been reticent about spelling out the issues to which we think the country should be addressing itself and the policies appropriate to the 1990s. We have undertaken the most extensive policy review—I have the real document here, not the cyclostyle one that Conservative Members have; they can have the glossy brochure if they wish—that any democratic party has ever undertaken. It consists of 88 tightly typed pages and gives details on all the issues that will face Britain over the next 10 years.

I have looked in vain for any comparable exercise that was conducted by the Tory party when it was in opposition. I have been able to find only its 1979 manifesto. I always carry a copy of that very useful document. It contains a mere 32 pages and bears little resemblance to anything that has happened to Britain since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman does not do his research a little better, because I think that that document was called "The Way Ahead". It was published in 1976, and the author was the present Leader of the House.

Mr. Grocott: No doubt the author of that document came under the chairmanship of the then chairman of the Conservative party, who was appointed by its leader. We do not regard that as a very democratic process. Ours is a thoroughly democratic document. It was spelt out in front of a hostile press and was analysed in detail by the considerable brain of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who did not make a very effective speech on it.

I shall not embarrass Conservative Members by reading the sections of the 1979 manifesto on the fight against crime. The one issue that that small document, which cost 15p, addressed itself to was the priority of the fight against inflation.

The Conservative party manifesto of 1983 was smaller than the 1979 one. The only difference was that its price had increased from 15p to 25p. That 66 per cent. increase characterised the extent to which Conservatives managed to fulfil their electoral promises.

It is flattering that Conservative Members are so interested in what the Labour party proposes to do while in opposition. What the Conservative party says it will do when it is in opposition bears no relationship to what it does when it is elected to office. Conservative Members will no doubt ask what we shall do when we are elected to office. We shall have to undo those policies that Conservatives have carried out in government to which they were resolutely opposed when they were in opposition. I shall give one classic example of that—the way in which they have cheated pensioners.

I was the hon. Member for Lichfield and Tamworth when the Labour Government rightly decided that pensioners should enjoy any increases in prosperity by increasing their pensions in line either with inflation or with earnings, whichever was the higher. There was not a flicker of opposition from the Conservative party, but as soon as it was elected to power it destroyed that link. I searched in its manifesto for the explanation of how it intended to cheat pensioners, but of course there was no reference to it whatsoever. Conservative Members at least do us the credit of knowing that when we establish our manifesto in opposition it will be our programme for government, which we shall implement when we are elected. Exactly the same is true of the Health Service. We are in the throes of a great reform Bill on the Health Service, but there is no reference to that in Conservative party manifestos. The Conservative party was wise enough not to mention it when it went to the electorate last time.

There was no reference to the constant rundown of key sectors of the Health Service since the Government came to power. In my constituency, beds are unused simply because there are not enough nursing staff to look after the patients. Hospitals are being closed and 10 per cent. fewer beds are available in the West Midlands health authority than there were in 1979. There was no statement in the Conservative party manifesto to show that it had any intention of making those cuts when first elected to power long ago in 1979.

There are many aspects to our policy review. It states our commitment to defend and extend the Health Service and to ensure that it is free at the point of delivery. Many aspects of our review are designed simply to repair the damage of 10 years—maybe it will be 12 years—of Thatcherism in office. Naturally each Member will concentrate on the particular parts of the review that interest him or her. Not surprisingly, the Chancellor of the Duchy wanted to say a fair bit about education.

I can describe one nice piece of Labour party education policy which the electorate of The Wrekin will be pleased to see implemented: the scrapping of the absurd policy on city technology colleges. The right hon. Gentleman will remember approving for The Wrekin a system of secondary education schools for 11 to 16-year-olds. If I had gone to him two years ago and asked him to build an additional school, he would have fallen about clutching his sides at the absurdity of the proposition. Now £8 million of public money is to be spent on a totally unwanted city technology college in The Wrekin.

The Chancellor of the Duchy talks about parental choice. Every conceivable form of opposition and expression of public opinion in The Wrekin—local authority, parents, teachers and pupils—is opposed to the establishment of a city technology college, which would be deeply to the detriment of existing schools. Everyone finds it preposterous that a Government who will spend only £4·9 million on all the schools in the country think it right to spend £8 million on one school. I recommend that more prudent expenditure to the Chancellor of the Duchy.

Mr. Madden: My colleagues in Bradford and I feel the same sense of concern about the proposed Bradford CTC as my hon. Friend has expressed about the CTC in The Wrekin. The Conservative party chairman has talked a great deal this morning about choice, including parents' rights to choose their children's education. Would my hon. Friend be as surprised as I am to hear, in reply to a parliamentary question today, the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science telling me:

"CTCs are independent schools and parents will have no automatic right of appeal if their children fail to achieve one of the limited number of places available. However, my right hon. Friend will expect colleges to look at individual cases on their merits."

Surely that does not reflect the sort of sentiments which the Conservative party chairman was stressing so much today.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. On 19 December I had a reply from one of the right hon. Gentleman's former junior Ministers. I asked an innocuous question to find out whether the Minister would list the number of representations that had been received on the Telford city technology college, both in favour and against. I discovered from the reply—Ministers do not like answering such questions—that of all the replies received not one was in favour of the proposal. I wish that the Conservative Government would occasionally apply the consumerism about which they talk so much to some of their own policies and scrap the whole silly scheme.

I come to the dreaded question of the poll tax. The right hon. Gentleman is a skilled political operator. He knows when to quit. This morning I heard him quoted on the radio as saying, "Last night in the vote we won the vote and we won the argument." He does not seem to have won the argument with the treasurer of his local authority. I was intrigued to read in "Local Council Review Winter 1989" an article by Mr. Roger Scott IPFA, FRVA, treasurer of Mole Valley district council, Surrey, on the cost implications of the poll tax. It states:

"Although we pride ourselves on being a very efficient authority, to handle the community charge we need to employ an extra 18 people; in other words, to double our staff. In salary bills alone, this will increase our costs substantially.

To house the extra staff and equipment, a new extension to our existing building has been erected, at a cost of threequarters of a million pounds.

We expect our postage costs to rise four-fold. Reminders, notices of entry, the community charge bills and amended bills will push up our annual total from £10,000 to around £40,000.

Our bank charges will more than double.

A bigger, more expensive computer is needed to handle the extra work."

What can we say other than, "We told you so."? The proposal to introduce the poll tax was ludicrous from the start, as many Tory Members who opposed it in Cabinet know well. Yet it has been installed against the will of the British people.

Mr. David Nicholson: As we are debating Opposition policies, will the hon. Gentleman tell us how it is that the constituency Labour party of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who was responsible for the two-tax policy of the Labour party, has denounced that as unacceptable electorally and administratively?

Mr. Grocott: That is a helpful intervention. The issue of how to finance local government has been debated since the second world war. The only consistency throughout the debate has been the constant rejection of the poll tax as absurd, even by many Tory Members and members of the Cabinet.

I look forward to seeing one or two aspects of our policies developed and extended. I commend them to the House. There is a section on working practices and arrangements. I look forward to life in the 1990s and I am strongly in favour of seeing the development of our policies on the reduction of the working week and new patterns of working arrangements whereby the working week can be four rather than five days. Tory Members will undoubtedly throw up their hands in horror at the cost implications of that. I have negotiated shorter working weeks, so I know that the cost implications are always grossly exaggerated by employers.

When Tory Members cost the various aspects of Labour party policy, as doubtless they will, I hope that they will use better economists than those they used for their own economic forecasting on the balance of payments, the rate of inflation, and other key economic indicators. They have been about 50 per cent. out, so perhaps we shall not have to take their considerations seriously.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the best way forward is to support every inflationary wage demand and strike? That seems to be the Labour party's way of reducing the working week.

Mr. Grocott: I shall come to the public sector shortly, and the hon. Gentleman will find my comments interesting.

Tory Members respond consistently to our policies with, "You must dot all the i's and cross all the t's. You must be absolutely precise about exactly what you will do in office." Again, I must disappoint them. They never did that when they were the Opposition, but they expect it from us. There is no way, however, that we will know exactly what we can deliver when in office because we do not know what kind of mess we shall inherit when the day comes. We have a fair idea, however, and the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) spelt that out. I know that Conservative Members do not like listening to him, but he summed up the mess we shall inherit when he said:

"We've blown North Sea oil; we have sold the assets. We are a society too anxious to consume, and an economy too reluctant to invest."

That could well be the epitaph of the Government. Despite the priceless and unspeakable advantages of the oil revenues, the Government have wasted them. In the 1970s we all knew that those revenues were coming and we knew that, whichever party won in 1979, it would enjoy massive economic advantages during the 1980s. In 1977 a prophetic document, "The Right Approach to the Economy" was published by a group of Conservative Members, including the present Leader of the House, which said:

"It would be comforting to believe that North Sea oil will transform our situation; but an improvident government could all too easily allow these resources to be frittered away."

How true. I wish that the Leader of the House would appreciate the implications of his prophecy.

Although the Labour Government will face a grave economic inheritance, the social inheritance is far more serious. We shall inherit a deeply divided society. We shall inherit an attitude that, last year, faced with equanimity company directors being awarded pay increases of 72 per cent. This year the Government have told the ambulance crews that they should be pleased with a 6·5 per cent. pay offer. Such are their double standards.

The Government have raised self-interest to the level of idolatry. They are now living with the consequences of their actions. The problem could not have been better described than it was described a couple of weeks ago in an article by Robert Harris, who said:

"The message pumped out from Westminster since 1979 has been that there is nothing wrong with personal greed. Indeed the acquisitive instinct was supposed to be the motor of national recovery . . . the reality is that to have been employed in a non-profit making job in the past ten years is to have been a second class citizen. There has not been even

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the traditional compensation of pride in working for the public services. Instead, the Government has routinely implied that health service workers, civil servants and teachers are Left-wing, lazy and inefficient. The message, not always unspoken, has been: 'If you don't like what you are paid, clear off, do something more productive.' It is a record which it will take a long time to live down."

I can only say amen to that.

One of the key functions of the next Labour Government will be to restore confidence in the public sector. Contrary to the Conservative party, we believe in collective provision and we believe in the welfare state. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has said that there is no theme running through our policy review, but there is a common theme in that review and a common theme shared by my hon. Friends. Unlike the Government, we do not believe that the welfare state is one group of people paying, rather against their will, for other people to be looked after. The welfare state is all of us looking after one another at different stages in our lives. We do not know when we might be unemployed or sick. We do not know what our needs will be when we reach old age. We regard the principle of the welfare state as being a fundamental and irrevocable difference between the two parties. We reject with contempt the Prime Minister's view that there is no such thing as society. We reject with derision her view that people who disagree with her are enemies. She even uses that language when talking about some of her former hon. Friends. I am sure that in private conversation she sees the ambulance workers as the enemy within, just as she does any other group of people who try to improve their living standards.

The bunker mentality at Downing street, where the Prime Minister sits behind fortress gates, is alien to the instincts and values of the British people. What is going on in the Cabinet Office? The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster must know far more than I do about that. Just occasionally we have had glimpses of what life must be like around the Cabinet table with this Prime Minister. Two senior Ministers have resigned: the Secretary of State for Defence and, more recently, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Neither resigned over matters of principle or policy; they resigned because they found the behaviour and style of government of the Prime Minister wholly intolerable. Increasingly we have government by tantrum. We heard yesterday the Prime Minister——

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The motion concerns the policies of Her Majesty's Opposition, so should we be given a lengthy speech which does not refer to and gives no revelations about the policies of the Opposition?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Such motions lend themselves to wide debate, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will refer to the motion.

Mr. Grocott: We have seen the style of government of the Prime Minister, and her personality has been referred to in opinion poll after opinion poll. People see her as being arrogant, unsympathetic and oblivious to their needs. There is more than a touch of megalomania about her. I have here a document which is part of the Conservative thought apparatus. It is, of course, blue.

Mr. Leigh: Is this about Labour's policies?

Mr. Grocott: I am talking about this Government and how matters would change under a Labour Government.

Despite instructions from the Cabinet Office that Government documents should not be personalised—an instruction that came from the Prime Minister herself at some milder period in history—this document has pictures of the Prime Minister throughout. Incidentally, it also describes Britain as a "force for peaceful change" in Southern Africa—a real piece of double-speak. There is a picture of a smiling Prime Minister on the front, a close-up together with a quotation from her, on page 5, another picture on page 14, another on page 17 and one on page 22, with another extended quotation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Conservative Members may cheer. Would they do that if, in 18 months' time, documents came out regularly—at public expense—with red covers and with repeated pictures of members of the present shadow Cabinet inside? Regrettably, we shall not have the opportunity to test that because we shall stop such absurd practices and abuses of public money.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman also stop Labour authorities abusing their position by distributing party political propaganda at the expense of ratepayers and community charge payers?

Mr. Grocott: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention if he is suggesting that the same standards of conduct should apply to central Government as to local government. That would be a tremendous step forward. As he knows, the controls are far stricter for local government than for central Government. Governments involve not only policies but the people who implement those policies.

During the debate on the Queen's Speech the Prime Minister was good enough to allow me to intervene to ask her when, after her 10 years' management of the NHS, she expected to be so pleased with it that she would start to use it herself. There was no answer. The Government are full of Ministers who manage our state education and health services but would not dream of using them. The Prime Minister is like the proprietor of a chip shop who would not be seen dead eating on the premises. That is how the Government view the electorate.

The Prime Minister's view was encapsulated perfectly in the immortal lines she uttered during the last election campaign. Describing why she went private, she said:

"I insure to enable me to go into hospital on the day I want and at the time I want, with the doctor I want. And for me that is absolutely vital."

It is vital for a lot of other people, too, but there is no possibility of it happening under this Government.

It is not surprising that the country is turning against the Government. The Chancellor of the Duchy kindly referred to *The Daily Telegraph* poll of last weekend. I happen to have it with me as well, and not only does it show a 10 per cent. Labour lead—that will do for the time being—but Professor Richard Rose said:

"The size and stability of Labour's lead in all the recent Gallup surveys is impressive. More than 40 per cent. of the electorate has now said for eight months in a row that it would back Labour in an early election."

We want these polls tested at an early election.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Before the hon. Gentleman becomes too overjoyed, may I remind him of the position of the Labour party at precisely the same point in the 1979

and 1983 Parliaments? In January 1982 and January 1986 the Labour party had a substantial lead, yet it lost the subsequent elections by large margins.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman is not right about the last Parliament, into which third party politics intruded. I am glad to say that the electorate will make a straight choice between two parties at the next election.

It is not opinion polls that interest us; we are interested in real elections. The news on that front is excellent as well. Across the country last year, from the Vale of Glamorgan to the county council elections and, most importantly, the European elections, Labour did very well. *The Guardian* called the Conservative vote in the last elections the worst this century—not bad for the worst Conservative Government of the century. It said:

"The Conservatives have 34·7 per cent., which is their worst result this century. To find a lower share of the vote one has to look back to Lord Palmerston's victory in 1859, when the Tories, under the Earl of Derby, received just 34·3 per cent."

I welcome this debate on the choice facing the country; the sooner it is made, the better. The debate has enabled us to look back to the 1980s and forward to the 1990s. During the 1980s we had a Government rich in oil but mean in spirit, led by a Prime Minister who is arrogant with power. The sooner she allows the British public to make their choice, the better.

1.18 pm

Mr. Alan Stewart (Eastwood): The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) launched a typical personal attack on the Prime Minister. In view of the time I shall not answer all his points; I merely mention in passing that the Labour party received 31 per cent. of the vote at the last general election.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin did not touch on the Labour party's policy for the constitution. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) rightly pointed out in an intervention that no Scottish Opposition Member is here, not because of constituency business——

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend may also have noticed that no Opposition Back-Bench Member is here to defend Labour policies either.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right, although one or two Back-Bench Opposition Members were here earlier.

Scottish Labour Members are absent not because they are in their constituencies, but because they are participating in a meeting of the self-styled Scottish constitutional convention, a self-appointed and self-annointed body considering proposals that have fundamental consequences for the House and for the United Kingdom. Those proposals are based on a document called "The claim of right" which asserts that:

"Parliamentary Government under the present British constitution has failed"

However, not one scintilla of evidence is provided to support that statement.

The Labour party is now considering the detail of its proposals for a Scottish assembly, for unilateral devolution. We have been down this road before. I draw to the attention of the House some words of great wisdom. They are:

"The irony of devolution is that it will smash beyond healing the unity of Britain. People who light fires must expect explosions. These devolution proposals offer a maximum of risk with a minimum of gain to the Scots people."

Those words are from the *South Wales Echo* of 25 February 1978 and they were uttered by the right hon. Gentleman who is now the Leader of the Labour party.

As always, the devolutionists are in considerable disarray. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is seeking to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and if he does I hope that he will spend a minute or two on that point. I draw to his attention a recent article in *Scotland on Sunday* which says:

"This week's meeting of the constitutional convention is heading for a confrontation over the Labour party's refusal to accept the right of a Scottish Parliament to decide for itself which powers it would retain."

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) said about Labour's proposals:

"It is contrary to the claim of right which says it is the right of the Parliament to decide on matters including taxation. This will be hotly contested."

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said:

"I am sure many in the party will be as dismayed, as I am, that a more radical approach has not been adopted. It is centralism with a Scottish face."

I hope that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will have an opportunity to confirm that that is the position of his party.

In practice, Labour's position on devolution is completely confused. I shall give two examples of that. This week we gave a Second Reading to the Environmental Protection Bill. It provides for a new conservation agency for Scotland to take on the functions of the Nature Conservancy Council. It is opposed by the Labour party. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said:

"For a party that wants a Parliament for Scotland it is extraordinary that it argues that the Scottish people cannot be trusted to protect their own environment.—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 43.]

Labour also voted against a Bill to provide for the transfer of responsibility for training from Sheffield to Scotland.

What are Labour's answers to the key questions that are raised by devolution? What does it say about the number of Members in the House? Labour asserts that Scotland should still have 72 Members of Parliament when none of them will have any responsibility for Scottish affairs. That is absurd. What about the Secretary of State for Scotland? The convention says:

"There is a consensus that there should be a Secretary of State for Scotland but it must be admitted that he would serve no useful purpose."

That means that the Secretary of State for Scotland will have nothing to do.

What about the West Lothian question? Would Scottish Members vote in matters relating to the domestic affairs of other parts of the United Kingdom? Labour says yes, but why should English Members allow Scottish Members to vote, possibly decisively, on legislation affecting English education, housing and local government, when none of them could vote on comparable Scottish matters? Scottish Members of Parliament will find themselves deciding schools policy for Doncaster but not for Dundee; transport policy for Kent, but not for Caithness. Such a situation would be absurd.

As to finance, a recent article by Professor Donald Mackay in the booklet "Scottish Assembly: We're better off without it" analyses the financial implications of devolution. Professor Mackay points out that Scotland

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would be unable to finance the present level of public expenditure without either a substantial and unfair grant from Westminster or substantial increases in taxation.

Devolution would inevitably result in a continuing constitutional crisis. The ambitions of the new legislature would be upwards, but the pressure on its finances would be downwards. Disenchantment would set in as the imperfections of a flawed system became apparent. The beneficiaries of that in Scotland would be the Scottish National party. As the arguments continued, the attraction to England of breaking up the Union would grow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) has done the House a service by his choice of motion and by his comprehensive and entertaining speech. He concluded by quoting Aneurin Bevan. I am sure that the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne will also be quoted in years to come.

The debate has been wide ranging, and gave me an opportunity to emphasise the dangers to the House and to the United Kingdom——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to intervene? If there is any truth in the allegation that Labour's policies would be disastrous for Scotland, can the hon. Gentleman explain the latest opinion poll, published this week, showing that Labour has the support of 50 per cent. of the people of Scotland and the Conservative party only 16 per cent.?

Mr. Stewart: If one asks the people of Scotland whether they want a Scottish assembly, the immediate reaction of many of them is to answer yes. But when hard questions are put, people's opinions swing away from a Scottish assembly—which is precisely what happened in the referendum debate of 1978-79.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne on initiating an important debate and thank him for giving me an opportunity to emphasise the dangers of the current proposals in a sham convention attended by Scotland's 49 Labour Members of Parliament.

1.27 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Opposition Members spend most of their time attacking Government policy, and rightly so. That is their job. However, it is useful and proper occasionally to scrutinise the policies of the official Opposition, who have the largest aspirations to Government. Perhaps I can add a slightly different perspective.

I have some sympathy with Labour's general aspirations. I am anti-establishment and anti-Conservative, and in general terms I believe that it is better to have a Government of the Left or centre Left than of the Right or centre Right. I feel sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends share the same view. However, even a sympathetic reader of Labour's latest policy statement must view it with substantial reservations.

I think about Labour party policy quite often. I live in a Labour-run borough and Labour's national headquarters are only about three yards outside my constituency boundary—which is fortunate for Labour because it would be embarrassing if its headquarters were based in territory held by the Liberal Democrats. I am surprised—as I intervened earlier to point out—that Labour's chief policy co-ordinator is not present to explain what his party's policies are. The name of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) appeared on the Labour Whip to speak today, and it is unfortunate that his party did not consider that it was important to send him to the House for this debate, to explain Labour's policy positions. I think the explanation must be that he is not quite the personification of Labour policy on some key subjects that the Labour party would wish.

When Labour says, "These are our policies." I would love to know how many of the members of the Labour party support them. Many Labour Members in the House do not support them. That is certainly true of defence policy where 50 Labour Members have signed a letter saying that they do not agree with it. One of the Labour party's problems is that it is not democratic, although it is more democratic than the Tory party. Until it is democratic and until its policy-making bodies are elected on the basis of one person, one vote, and decide policy on that basis, and until the Labour party chooses its candidates for Parliament on that basis, its credibility when it argues for policy reform, particularly when it speaks of democracy, is severely impaired.

In the constituency of Birkenhead, for example, the Member of Parliament was deselected because of the block vote of the trade unions, as has happened in other Labour deselections.

In the constituency of Vauxhall last year, for example, the local Labour party chose one candidate but found that it had another candidate imposed on them.

Indeed, some constituencies have no local Labour party at all. I am fortunate. In my constituency the local Labour party has long been suspended, and the same has also happened in Peckham. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) is not accountable to any local Labour party. In that constituency as in mine it is even less democratic—there is no person, no vote.

The Labour party must therefore first sort itself out. Only when it has done that credibly can it lay any claim to governing the country. That is why we must be interested to know whose are the policies that Labour is putting forward.

The Labour party takes a possessive view of its electors. The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) gave that away when he described policies on inflation and the economy as bearing down on "our" people. It is about time that the Labour party realised that the British people do not like to be possessed by any party, and many of them not infrequently change their political allegance. The age of class politics has gone and the sooner that the Labour party realise that too, the sooner it will make progress.

But the Labour party is trying to get its act together. I commend it for this exercise and for producing the document "Meet the challenge: Make the change". If we have to look anywhere for Labour party policy we must look at that document. I think that the hon. Gentleman the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) would agree that this is where we must now look to see how Labour have decided to overhaul their policy since the last election. This is the latest collective work.

What we discover is that the Labour party is slow to make change. It says that it is pro-European but Members are reluctant Europeans. Members of the party say that they are internationalists, but they are inadequate internationalists where the civil liberties of the people of

Hong Kong are concerned. The Labour party says it is for constitutional reform, but the speech by the deputy leader of the Labour party to the Fabian Society in Oxford shows that they are very hesitant constitutional reformers indeed. The Labour party says that it is environmentalist, but one only has to consider the views of the hon. Member for Copeland, for example, to realise that they are only at best inadequate and belated environmentalists after all.

The Labour party is not a radical Opposition party, although it is trying hard to become an acceptable Opposition party. Its policy is not radical, and its practice is not radical either.

I know a little about the practice of the Labour party when it is in government. I shall not do what hon. Members often do here and look back to the last time that Labour was in Government. I live in a local authority that has been run by Labour ever since the boundaries were reconstituted. And having studied local Labour government in practice has given me little consolation that a national Labour Government would be desirable. I became a Liberal party supporter at a time when Labour was in government because among other reasons I found Labour practice undesirable. I do not think that anyone who lives in Southwark, with the experience that they have of a Labour local government there, would think that a national Labour Government in practice had much to recommend it now, either.

We could take any issue, but let us take education. I happen to be on the distribution list of Walworth road or the local Labour party, which is very convenient. In January last year I received a letter which read:

"Dear Comrade/s,

33 ILEA and 7 Southwark School Governors vacancies

We urgently need to fill the above vacancies as they will otherwise be given to the SLD/Liberals. I am also asking Peckham and Dulwich CLPs if they have any members who can fill the vacancies as we have a matter of days to do it. Both School Governor and Charity places are an important role for local Labour Party members to represent us and to get socialist views across in the local community."

That was the purpose of appointing the governors.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It was not to run the schools.

Mr. Hughes: No, it was to put Socialist views across. The letter continued:

"The SLD/Liberals are pressuring both Southwark and ILEA to get these places and claiming that it's illegal for them to be unable to fill them so please respond quickly."

In fact, the letter did not obtain that quick response, but my main point is that, after years of not appointing sufficient people to governing bodies, the local Labour party then decided that all the nominations must come from Labour in any event. Labour could not fill the vacancies, but would not allow any other party to fill them either. That is hardly democracy.

Next, let us take public works and environmentalism. I honestly believe that Southwark must be among the five dirtiest boroughs in Britain. Until last year the local council apparently provided no rubbish bins at all, although the area has a large urban population and many visitors. It is a regular complaint that Labour environmentalism in theory means filthy streets and rubbish-strewn areas in practice.

As for the caring services, Southwark has not a happy record. Scandal after scandal has featured in many of the institutions that look after vulnerable people. In the Nye Bevan old people's home, old people were left unattended, on occasions lying in their own urine. Some actually died following neglect, which occurred in a home where members of the management would meet to enjoy themselves downstairs, although I do not suggest that the neglect was the only cause. The Opposition spokesman —who happens to be the local Labour Member—has never condemned that publicly in the House.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I will not, because there is little time.

In children's homes, children have been allowed to run riot. When the parents of a baby, at risk from birth, were eventually held responsible for her death, the local Labour party turned down the request for a public inquiry.

The housing department is a shambles; we have empty properties galore, and people can never obtain a transfer when they want one. Until very recently, the Labour party did not even let anyone else take over any of the management of any of its housing, with rent arrears of some £40 million as one of the results. The local authority's debts have increased from £627 million in March 1988 to £820 million in March 1989, and are likely to exceed £1,000 million by March 1990. Interest payable on local authority debt now amounts to over £100 million a year—£1 per week for every adult resident.

With the approach of the local elections in May, Labour is again announcing its intention of devolving services to a local level for the purpose of local constitutional reform. It promised that in 1982 and nothing happened; it promised the same in 1986, and again nothing happened. Now it is about to make the same promise in 1990: so far, nothing has happened. Labour in practice is not like Labour policy in theory, and my local area is living proof of that.

I could also give many national examples, but I must be selective, as others wish to speak. I do not intend to speak for as long as many of the hon. Members who have spoken. I apologise to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who is not here at present, for leaving the Chamber for a while during his speech, but it did go on for an hour and a half, and the best bits were clearly over; I am told that I did not miss much.

The Labour party has claimed a belated conversion to environmentalism, but the last Labour conference rejected a motion to phase out nuclear power within 15 years. Although environmental in principle, in practice the Labour party has decided to keep nuclear power. It pays lip service to energy conservation but it envisages a large nuclear power output for the forseeable future.

The Labour party said that it would not build any more nuclear power stations, but it has not said what it intends to do about those that are already under construction or that are the subject of a public inquiry. It has done worse than that. It intends to press ahead with the Thorp reprocessing plant at Sellafield, which would result in a large volume of waste imports, yet it is sort of calling, in general terms, for an international ban on the trade in toxic waste except, according to the hon. Member for Copeland, where it is proved to be in the wider international interest to do otherwise. That must take the biscuit when it comes to a fudged environmental policy.

Reference has been made to the Labour party's local government finance policy. That is not surprising. May I interpose that a good review is available to all hon. Members of the Labour party's new policies. It is a

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non-party review, published by Public Policy Consultants at £30. It is entitled "Labour's New Policies: The Complete Guide" and it was ordered to be printed only this month, in January 1990. It reviews the Labour party's policies and says that some are good, that some are less good and that it cannot be clear about others. It makes a preliminary point that it is worth putting on record, that

"The Policy Review completely satisfied no one, but then a public relations exercise never does."

It makes the more important point that

"Current Labour policy is effectively what Neil Kinnock and communications chief Peter Mandelson want it to be."

That is a worrying thought. But, returning to local government finance, the Labour party's local government financial proposals are still all over the place. It has not yet decided, although it has had 10 years in which to do so, what it would do if it were to replace the rates. Would it introduce capital revaluations of property? Would it introduce a local income tax. The Labour party was going to have both. Now it might have neither.

I could make an entire speech on the Labour party's economic policy. It is certainly nationalistic and it is also very inconsistent. I could give many examples. The Labour party intends to introduce credit controls, with the objective of controlling inflation. Credit controls have been tried before, but have not succeeded. Credit seekers can always go abroad.

The Labour party has a national minimum wage policy. If that were to lead to an increase in the wages of those at the bottom end, that would be good. I would support any proposal that remedied low pay. However, research suggests that the Labour party's economic policy, as set out in its policy document, would increase unemployment by 500,000 and that the resultant inflationary pressure could reduce the value of social security benefits, thus making those who are not in work, who are the poorest of all, even poorer.

Mr. Grocott: Does the hon. Gentleman not concede that whenever any suggestion is made about improving working conditions the response is always that it would result in unemployment and lead to a fall in manufactured products?

Mr. Hughes: I accept that point. We need to do something about the widening gap between the rich and the poor. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. However, there are other ways of doing it. I ask him to examine carefully the integration of tax and benefits, which we suggest is a better way to deal with this sort of problem.

We understand that the Labour party would reform taxation policy in order to outdo the Tories. It would introduce a basic income tax of 18p in the pound, just to be lower than the Tory's 20p in the pound. That would lead, however, to middle-ranking earners having to pay more. That message may not yet have been widely and clearly received.

I have a wonderful selection of quotations concerning the Labour party's views on the European monetary system. Extraordinary inconsistency is revealed if one looks at quotations from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), about what the Labour party would do about European monetary union. In reality they are not converted to the idea. The policy review makes it clear that although the Labour party likes the idea of economic monetary union in principle, it would impose many pre-conditions. It has, in fact, very much the same views as the Government. Labour is wedded to the theory, but in practice it will not deliver.

I also know from serving with the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on the Committee considering the Education and Student Loans Bill that everything Labour intends to do is qualified by the Monklands, East appendage, "When resources allow". It is important for everyone to understand that, too.

I have strong views on defence. I believe that the views and principles of Labour Members render much of what they say incredible. If they do not believe in nuclear weapons, a commitment to having them but not using them—no first strike—is completely illogical. Either we should have nuclear weapons in the belief that they deter or we should not have them because we do not believe they deter. If Labour does not believe that we should have them, then it should not cancel one Trident, it must get rid of the lot. The Labour party has so far presented an incredible middle way.

Labour Members try to pretend that they are great Europeans, but when we discuss imports, exports and problems for domestic industries, they show much support for tariff barriers and protectionism. They say that they are great internationalists, but their record on Hong Kong shows them to be as prejudiced and nationalistic as the Government, if not worse, as they try to catch the votes of those who fear any non-white immigration from anywhere.

Perhaps the most fundamental concern goes to the heart of what any party would do in office—what it would do to the structure of government. I briefly follow on from the theme of the speech by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) about Scottish constitutional reform. I endorse my colleagues' quoted views on that subject. We are greatly concerned that, as on many other aspects of its constitutional package, the Labour party is not committed to fundamental reform.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook clearly does not understand the difference between civil and political rights and economic and social rights, and therefore reaches the conclusion that under Labour there will not be a Bill of Rights because it might be open to the judges to interpret it, but there will be a charter of rights as defined by Labour. I have to say that I should rather have my rights defined and agreed by international jurists throughout my continent than by the Labour party. I do not think that constitutional reform of a partisan nature would be acceptable to anyone in Britain.

We are meant to presume that the safeguard would be an elected second House. I believe in that, but Labour proposes that the second House should have proportional representation, so that it would become more democratic than this House while this House would retain the primacy for legislation.

Finally, Labour's constitutional programme would take at least 10 years. Section after section of the policy review reveals that the details have not been worked out on constitutional matters such as Welsh representative government, Scotland, the regions and local government.

The reality is that the Labour party will never deliver. The only way in which they could do that is through a Bill of Rights, guarantees of people's rights, real devolution and proper electoral representation.

The Labour party should be thankful that there is not yet an election because its policies are certainly not yet ready to be put to the electorate. Whether it will get them ready remains to be seen. The Labour party is not yet a democratic party and it does not yet have a policy for a democratic country; it does not yet accept that we are a pluralist political system and Labour Members keep talking about "our people"; it is not now a principled party and it does not now have principled policy. The Labour party is not consistently internationalist as is evident from its record on Hong Kong; it is not consistently environmentalist, as is evidenced by its position on nuclear power; and it is not consistently pro-disarmament, which is evidenced by its policies on defence; it does not have sufficiently clear policies, for many of them as the hon. Member for The Wrekin conceded, have yet to be resolved and questions answered. Above all, it is not even clear whether it will be a Socialist party. The dilemma facing the Labour party is whether it is a Socialist party which will implement Socialist policies or whether it is a different non-Socialist party that implements different non-Socialist policies.

The Labour party has undergone a policy review. Perhaps next, like all the Left-wing parties in eastern Europe, it should have a name and philosophy review. It will then be in a position to decide whether it needs a principles review as well.

I do not often make predictions, but I predict—and I may be wrong—that Labour packaging and presentation will improve its performance at the next election. But it is not certain that its lack of principle will be outweighed by Mr. Mandelson and the presentation and packaging. Without principle, a party cannot have good policies, and without good policy all the packaging in the world will not deliver the goods. The Labour party will make progress, but whether it will be sufficient to give it a majority in the House is very doubtful; articles written every week by psephologists make that clear. For the fourth time in a row, its policies will not deliver political success. I hope that they do not deliver the Tories political success either. We shall have to wait to the next election to discover whether my prediction is correct.

1.51 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): Like other hon. Members, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) for giving us the opportunity to speak in this debate. I listened with great and growing regret as the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) failed to give the Opposition's policies but devoted his speech entirely to other matters.

I found myself in considerable agreement with the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). The essence of the message from the Leader of the Opposition is, "Comrades, we will not be elected on the policies in which we believe. Therefore, we shall search for others that may be more acceptable to the voters. We still believe in the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange and in concentrating power, wealth and decision making in the hands of the state, but that will not get us elected. Therefore, let us consider a range of alternatives with a view to getting elected." As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey made clear, the difficulty is that that conveys no conviction and offers no encouragement to the troops on the ground who believe in their original faith in Socialism in which they were led for so long by their leaders.

Plausible policies are beginning to be fed out from time to time as offerings to encourage the electorate to believe that the Labour party has some credibility. Rather like the girl going to a party for the first time and being told that her slip is showing, every now and again the Labour party slips up and lets out some information which we should consider.

I do not want to detain the House for long, but I should like to consider two points. First, the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer has intimated that he would impose a top rate of income tax of 50 per cent. However, to that must be added 9 per cent. for national insurance contributions. The figure therefore is not 50 per cent. but almost 60 per cent. I am waiting to hear a denial that the Labour party is secretly planning to introduce a local income tax to finance local government expenditure. It is clear that that is on the short list of recommendations on the subject. With national income tax, national insurance contributions and local income tax, the tax rate may amount to about 75 per cent. I wish to draw the attention of the House to the demotivating effect of such a tax.

In the 1970s, a number of hon. Members—and not just Conservatives—were concerned about the low number of small businesses in this country and the fact that there were about 40 per cent. more small firms on the continent than here. They realised that the small firm of today was the middle-sized and larger business of the future and that, if a large number of new businesses did not start up or small firms grow, the prospects for prosperity would be severely diminished.

The reason that we had such a low number of small firms and start-ups in this country in the 1970s was first that the people who might have started them or made their career in them were demotivated by the high level of income tax, the top rate of which was 83 per cent. Those starting a business do not aim to stay on the standard rate of income tax. They aim for the stars and their purpose, hopes and ambitions were so blunted and demotivated that there were few businesses starting up or growing.

The prospect, under a potential Labour policy, of returning to about 75 per cent. income tax—when all the factors are added together—is a major demotivator for small businesses. Such a policy would kill the motivation which has brought about so dramatic a change in our affairs. Between the 1970s and 1980s there was a huge change in this country's prosperity. There was a huge increase in the gross domestic product and massive increases in jobs. So many of those successes can be related to the turnround in the number of businesses starting up and expanding. We were unsuccessful in the 1970s and successful in the 1980s, because we now have a lower income tax and do not suffer the damage which would have resulted from Opposition policies.

The second major cause for the change round was that small and growing businesses were formerly starved of the resources that they needed to grow. The Government have reduced the rate of corporation tax for small firms from 42 per cent. to 25 per cent., leaving them with much more of their profits to plough back into the business. Today there

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have been no revelations about Opposition views. I had hoped that the debate would enable us to discover the Opposition's views on the level of corporation tax and the amount of internal resources that would be made available to small businesses to enable them to grow. That is a separate issue from that of income tax and motivation.

We must consider the issue against the background of the third cause for the greatest damage done to the small business community in the 1970s: the soaring levels of inflation, which made every business cash hungry. Money which should have been spent on research, development and investment and improving the efficiency of the business for the future had to be diverted purely and simply into the extra cost of the same volume of stock or work in progress. The damage which inflation does to the small business community cannot be measured, but curbing it is one of the three major ways in which the Government have brought about a dramatic change which is to the benefit of the small business community.

Some 10 days ago, in an interview in *The Daily Telegraph*, the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he

"sees no great merit in a balanced budget".

Hon. Members may want to ponder those words because they are the clearest possible signal that, if we were to have the misfortune of a Labour Government, it would mean the restoration of inflation at the same or even higher levels as those when we last had the disaster to suffer under a Labour Government. At that time we had a top level of inflation of 26 per cent. which destroyed dramatically the savings of elderly people and those on fixed incomes, and the investment, resource and growth base of small businesses.

I said that I would not detain the House for long, and I have been on my feet for nine minutes. I shall close by saying that so far as we have been able to extract the Opposition's policies, they reveal that the base on which the prosperity and the change around of the past decade under a Conservative Government have been brought about, and the heart of the way in which business has been motivated, inflation brought under control and resources made available within industry for it to grow, will have the supports pulled away from underneath it with disastrous consequences for our prosperity.

2.1 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) for providing an opportunity for this debate. We in Northern Ireland consider him to be of such high principles that we shall always hold him in high regard.

I, too, have noted references in the Labour policy review document of the 1990s, "Meet the Challenge: Make the Change". The Opposition make a commitment to a modern and wider democracy for the individual and community. That reads well and sounds good. We as Ulster Unionists represent the vast majority of the electorate in Northern Ireland. I say on their behalf that we wholly oppose and reject the solution to our problems advocated in that document, which is to establish a united Ireland.

I welcome, however, the document's firm rejection of the use of violence from whatever quarter it comes. That reaffirms the position of the vast majority of people, whether they are Protestant or Roman Catholic, Unionist or Nationalist. For the Opposition to give hope to those who seek to achieve a united Ireland through terrorism is not to help to bring the IRA terrorism campaign to an end. They fail to recognise that, unless IRA terrorists murder and maim, and intimidate massive numbers of Unionists to leave Northern Ireland, there is not the slightest hope of a united Ireland through consensual, peaceful and democratic means.

It is a matter of fact that the Roman Catholic birth rate is falling dramatically. Most intelligent Roman Catholics realise that their future prosperity, opportunities for their children and improved standards of living will be best secured within the United Kingdom. Therefore, not in the next 100 years and perhaps never will there be enough Roman Catholics—and within that group—Irish Nationalists—in Northern Ireland for them even to consider exercising their democratic right to vote themselves out of the United Kingdom and into a united Ireland. Even then, Ulster Unionists will have no intention of following them. I appeal to the Opposition to abandon their belief that the solution to the problems of Northern Ireland is a united Ireland.

Many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have acknowledged the futility of the Order-in-Council procedure. They recognise the unfairness of presenting an unamendable draft Order-in-Council for consideration by hon. Members. In the early stages of this Session elected representatives of all constitutional parties have joined together to oppose that iniquitous procedure.

The Opposition want to achieve a wider democracy and they should recognise how much we detest and abhor the Order-in-Council procedure. They should join hon. Members representing Northern Ireland in pressing the Government to consider further legislative changes in procedures in respect of Northern Ireland. Politics is about achieving consensus and about meaningful participation in decision-making. The Order-in-Council procedure does not encourage meaningful participation in governmental matters. Those hon. Members who want to contribute in a positive and principled manner have no opportunity to do so when they are faced with an unamendable Order-in-Council.

The Opposition should endeavour to persuade the Government to ensure that the same democratic and parliamentary rights enjoyed by their fellow citizens elsewhere in the United Kingdom are enjoyed by British citizens in Northern Ireland. The Government should, therefore, cease to introduce primary legislation for Northern Ireland through the Order-in-Council procedure.

I trust that my brief remarks will find support and will bring about some changes in the policies proposed by the Opposition.

2.7 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): May I add my thanks and congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on introducing this debate. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has said, we rarely get such a good opportunity in the House to examine the policies of the Opposition.

I am sure that the House will have noticed that the second motion on the Order Paper is in my name and it congratulates the Government on their decision:

"to offer full British citizenship to 50,000 special category households, involving some 225,000 Hong Kong people".

Because of the enormous interest my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne has engendered in the Opposition's policies, I fear that my motion will not be reached today. Therefore I should like to draw the House's attention to the positively disgraceful policy, or lack of policy, adopted by the Opposition towards Hong Kong.

It is vital to maintain the confidence of administrative workers, educational and health service workers, the business community and the disciplined services of the territory in the lead-up to 1997. The Opposition's attitude in this test of the intergrity of British foreign policy seems to me, as a publican of 20 years' standing, to be all froth and no beer.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a formidable statement on Wednesday soon after his return from Hong Kong. He said of the Labour party's policy towards Hong Kong:

"I am in total confusion."

He said that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)

"Sometimes . . . oozes sympathy, and sometimes . . . says that there is nothing to be done. From all his foggy phrases, I get the strong impression that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have no interest whatever in a sensible future for Hong Kong".—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 296.]

My right hon. Friend's confusion had nothing to do with jet lag.

I believe that my right hon. Friend was too generous in his view that the Opposition's policy towards Hong Kong was driven either by fogginess or by confusion. That lack of clarity would be forgivable. My view is less charitable. I view their policy—if it can be called a policy—as mischievous at the best and as a cynical betrayal of our colonial past and the last large population of British colonial citizens at the worst.

On 5 July 1989, during a statement following a visit to Hong Kong by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President of the Council, the right hon. Member for Gorton said:

"The Opposition believe that it would not be right to offer any commitment to Hong Kong British dependent territory passport holders on the right of entry to the United Kingdom or the right of abode here . . . I state clearly that the Opposition are against the creation of special favoured categories based on status or affluence."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 1989; Vol. 156, c. 312-3.]

On 20 December 1989, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced the Government's decision to allow full citizenship to 50,000 households. The right hon. Member for Gorton repeated those remarks and sought to make a virtue of his position. He described my right hon. Friend's package as instituting a system that was

"inherently unworkable, invidious and divisive . . . The Foreign Secretary has come to the worse way of fulfilling what he regards as his commitment"—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. 365.]

It is clear that the right hon. Gentleman who was presumably speaking as the definitive voice of the Labour leadership, believes that Britain should give the right of abode neither to all Hong Kong citizens nor to a few.

During my right hon. Friend's statement on the citizenship package on 20 December 1989, the last question was from the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). He asked a customarily frank question:

"Why does not the Foreign Secretary admit that although there are two tenable logical positions that the Government could have adopted, there is only one tenable principle position? The two tenable logical positions are either that everyone should be given the right to come to Britain or that no one should. The one tenable principle position is that everyone should be given the right to come to Britain.—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. 376.]

It is clear that there is a gulf of confusion between the Labour leadership and the vox populi below the Gangway.

On 17 January 1990, the questioning of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave the House and the nation no glimmer of enlightenment about the real policy of the Labour party for the purpose of reassuring those in Hong Kong whose continued residence there is vital to the colony's continuing prosperity. My right hon. Friend announced a package of measures on 20 December which was intended to anchor those who have vital professional, educational, administrative, managerial and entrepreneurial skills in the colony. He has done so because in 1984, Britain and China signed the solemn and far-sighted joint declaration, which lays the foundation of the one nation-two systems principle for the future of Hong Kong beyond 1997. That joint declaration envisaged Hong Kong in 1997 as the bustling, thriving and successful commercial and trading centre that it was at the time of the signing of the declaration in 1984.

Over the five years since the agreement was signed there has been an erosion of confidence in the territory. That erosion was given a great boost by the brutal repression of the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square in Peking on 5 June 1989 and has led to a haemorrhage of talent, as my right hon. Friend described it on 20 December. Those leaving have been those with the most transferable skills and greatest experience—the very people that Hong Kong can least afford to lose.

I understand that in major enterprises in the private and public sectors in which local management had been installed, companies have been forced to promote people beyond their skill and experience because so many of those better equipped to manage the enterprises have sought to establish residence in Canada, Australia and the United States.

I give my absolute support to the package introduced by my right hon. Friend. It is crucial that Hong Kong's citizens be reassured so that they may continue in their vital tasks until and beyond 1997. My only anxiety is that the number of 50,000 households to be granted citizenship may be insufficient to provide the necessary anchor for all whose support is necessary.

When I asked him the final question on Wednesday, my right hon. Friend was unable to allay my fears, and I urge him to hold further discussions with our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, so that he may establish an option to increase the 50,000, if that proves necessary.

It is clear that my right hon. Friend's package has jolted the Government of the People's Republic of China. The intemperate comments of Lu Ping on Wednesday—that Hong Kong's residents with British passports will not have the right to British consular protection after 1997—prove that my right hon. Friend's package has already begun to have the desired effect of bringing the negotiators of the PRC back to pragmatic good sense——

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has the second motion on the Order Paper, and he is speaking to it, not to this one——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am the judge of that. I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and he is in order.

Mr. Couchman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The gerontocracy that rules China has realised just how great would be the PRC's loss if Hong Kong's economy collapsed and its pre-eminent position as a trading centre were lost. The words of the right hon. Member for Gorton prove to me that he has allied himself and the Labour leadership with China's aged rulers in seeking to intimidate my right hon. Friend and dissuade him from introducing the necessary legislation to implement his package of citizenship.

That a few of my right hon. and hon. Friends take a similar line is a source of sadness to me. They underestimate the need for us to honour our part of the joint declaration and to seek to keep buoyant the economy of Hong Kong. If that economy collapses because the managers and professionals leave to establish residence elsewhere, there will be an exodus from Hong Kong which will make the emigration of Vietnamese boat people pale into insignificance. The world will look to Britain to help those fleeing Hong Kong in those circumstances.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has my support, circumscribed only by my concern that the number of passports may not be enough. My right hon. Friend should have the support of the Opposition, but the Opposition are prepared to abandon Hong Kong and its population to the old men of Peking. They seek to cloak their embarrassment by urging a swifter pace or the democratisation of Hong Kong's Legislative Council. The party of the trade union bloc urges greater democracy for people for whom democracy has never been a natural state and of whom only a tiny vociferous minority have aspired to more democracy. If Hong Kong's economy collapses before 1997 for lack of management and enterprise, and if the population leave in their hundreds of thousands—even millions—it will be irrelevant whether the LegCo is fully democratically elected, partially democratically elected or wholly appointed. In such circumstances, that council would have little or no power to shape events. Unless the House gives my right hon. Friend the power to issue those passports, the debate about increasing the proportion of the Legislative Council that will be elected democratically will be increasingly seen as a meaningless cul de sac.

The policy of the Opposition on Her Majesty's colony of Hong Kong and her subjects there is misguided and mischievous at best and destructive and dishonourable at worst. The people of Hong Kong will judge Labour's attitude towards the colony just as the people of Britain will judge Labour's attitude to Britain on today's debate. The people of Hong Kong and of Britain owe my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne a debt of gratitude for his choice of subject in the debate.

Two years ago, I initiated a debate and chose as my subject the future of the Property Services Agency. Because of his considerable ministerial experience, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne was able to give a dazzling performance in support of my modest opening speech. I like to think that our joint exposure of the inadequacies of the PSA led directly, or made a substantial contribution to, the welcome Bill that is in Committee and which will bring the PSA into the private sector where it will be exposed to the full rigours of the market.

My hon. Friend's intervention in my debate was crucial, and I have no doubt that the great service that he has rendered to the House and the nation in today's debate will be similarly memorable and influential in persuading the electorate of the folly of voting for a party that would wrap up the tawdry and discredited policies of the 1960s and 1970s in a parcel with pretty paper. I hope that my hon. Friend welcomes my brief contribution.

2.21 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I shall be brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on winning the ballot for debate and choosing the subject. I should have liked an amendment to the motion because our policies merit scrutiny "and implementation." Perhaps we will get to that at some stage.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne is such a respectable Member that I would not dream of alluding to mad "Gow" disease. However, the Government are increasingly infected by mad cow disease. They are flailing about and are desperately out of touch. They go around saying, "Bully for me" and beef up their failures to make them look like successes. They should be put out of their misery at the earliest opportunity.

Tory policies are massively unpopular. For example, the poll tax will bankrupt people and it is unjust because a millionaire will pay the same as a midwife. Poverty has reached an outrageous level. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux report illustrates the degree of misery because it shows that 49 per cent. of pensioners and 23 per cent. of sick and disabled clients are refused grants from the social fund. It shows that 81 per cent. of the unemployed and 21 per cent. of single parents are also refused loans, and that 80 per cent. of young people are refused any help at all.

Child benefits have been frozen and the benefit has been cut for 16 to 17-year-olds. There have been cuts in the National Health Service which faces deficits and waiting lists, and there is a shortage of life-saving equipment. There are teacher shortages. In terms of our environment, we have the scandals of unclean drinking water and sewage-ridden bathing beaches. Profits come first and that is why the Government will not do anything about cleaning up the environment and will not put in public money. There is squalor on London Regional Transport.

Money continues to be spent on defence despite world trends in disarmament. The Government will spend an extra £1 billion per annum over the next three years even though the defence budget is already inflated. That money could be used in the National Health Service to help our people. Whole groups of people such as ambulance men have been victimised. The Government have refused to pay them a decent wage and have ruled out arbitration. They cast a slur on them by calling them professional drivers and they ignore the public will, because 85 per cent. or more of the population support the ambulance men. That has been accompanied by Conservative authoritarianism, with attacks on trade unions, local government, the Church, the media, and the BBC. Even Prince Charles has been ridiculed.

The Government have made an absolute mess of the economy, with high interest rates, high unemployment, high inflation, record balance of payments deficits, and a decline in manufacturing. North sea oil revenue has also been wasted. There is a desperate need to get rid of the Government and to implement Labour policies.

I do not agree with everything in my party's policy review—such as the official party view on Trident—but there is much in it that is worth while. It promises investment in education and skills in industry and in our infrastructure—communications, transport and sewers—environmental protection and improvements in welfare, the National Health Service, housing, and pensions. There will be a national minimum wage, and a vast improvement in health and safety at work. There will also be better policies for women and for child care. A clean water Bill will be introduced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) asked the crucial question of where the money will come from to pay for those policies. The answer is that it will come from rearranging Government spending priorities, and in particular by defence cuts—through implementing the Labour party conference resolution to link defence spending with the level of our gross domestic product. We shall also take back all the money that the Tories have given to the rich over the years, and we shall return to this country capital that has been invested abroad. Labour will use the skills of our people by ensuring full employment. We shall create more wealth instead of pursuing a policy of high unemployment as a tool against workers and wages.

Not only policies but values will change under Labour. The Conservative Government are interested in money—money first, second and last. Labour is more interested in caring values that respect the community and encourage co-operation, the development of the family, better education, and improved cultural understanding. Labour will also promote the environment and a better quality of life. We shall improve democracy and decency—another value which has been lost under the Government. I shall return to those points on another occasion. Meanwhile, the Government have fallen a long way short, and we must get rid of them.

2.27 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) spoke of the need to return to decent values, and I echo his sentiments. However, he believes that the Government should instil decency in people and that society is controlled by the state. My belief is that moral systems make people decent and encourage them to treat one another responsibly. The Government have been trying to develop such systems of morality for the past 10 years, and to make people responsible for their actions by giving them a choice in the first place.

One cannot have responsibility unless one has choice as well. Unfortunately, the whole of Labour's policy document is about taking choice away from people and creating an irresponsible society. Labour does not believe that the ordinary individual is capable of making decisions for himself and for his family without the state taking control.

Today, we glimpsed the glitter of the package that the Labour party has carefully promoted over the past 18 months, but which is gradually being unravelled. Inside the packaging, we find that designer-wear Socialism is really the same old tatty underclothes. Labour has not changed. Right hon. and hon. Members who sat through the 10 January debate on the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill saw the real Labour party in action. The Opposition defended monopoly trade unionism, opposed the construction of ports to allow better imports and exports, and demanded a siege economy and import controls.

At one moment Labour says that it wants lower taxes, but whenever the Opposition have an opportunity to vote for them, Labour votes against. The party supports every inflationary wage demand that confronts the economy, and in every strike its supporters can be seen on the picket lines. The reality is that Labour does not believe in its own policy document. A small number of the members of Labour's Front Bench cobbled together a package whose only purpose is to ensure that Labour wins the next general election by abandoning the principles for which it once stood.

The Leader of the Opposition has been contrasted to the Prime Minister. I am glad that that contrast has been made because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has stood for principle during the past 10 years. On occasion the Government have been unpopular because they fight for what they believe in.

For the Leader of the Opposition and the Labour party, no principle is so important that it cannot be abandoned, no policy so sacrosanct that it cannot be overthrown, and no sacred cow so holy that it cannot be slaughtered if it means electoral advantage at the next election. I do not believe that the great British public will be taken in at the next election by a party which is prepared to abandon anything and everything to win a few votes.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) has introduced this debate because it has exposed the tawdry package which represents Labour party policies.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 24th January, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1)(b) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Walker relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, and Mr. Speaker shall at the end of that period put any Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on those Motions.

That, at the sitting on Thursday 25th January,—

(1) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Orders Nos. 14 (Exempted business) and 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c., (negative procedure)), Mr. Speaker shall not later than Seven o'clock put any Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the names of Mr. Secretary Rifkind relating to Housing (Scotland) and Local Government (Scotland) and of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Housing (Scotland); and

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Motions in the names of the Prime Minister relating to Shipping (Dangerous Goods) and of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Merchant Shipping may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon; and, if proceedings thereon have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at the end of that

period put the Question already proposed from the Chair; and no further such Motion shall be made —*[Mr. Chapman.]*

East London Assessment Study

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The east London assessment study is a report commissioned by the Department of Transport from the private consultants Ove Arup to consider traffic and transport issues in an area of north and east London covered roughly by the boroughs of Haringey, Islington and Hackney.

The report was published on 14 December 1989, just before Christmas, and it presents a range of different traffic schemes, among which are a number of favoured options that the Department of Transport has put before the House and before my constituents for their comments.

The favoured package contains a number of public transport options—for roads, rail and Tube—and a major proposal for a large-scale new highway coming from the A1 into the City of London.

I should declare a personal interest, because if that highway goes ahead, during the course of its construction my home, along with several hundred other homes, will be destroyed.

I live in a street of Victorian terrace houses which survived the blitz. However, it looks as though it will not survive Cecil Parkinson. A number of people in the street have lived there for the past 40 years. Their house is their home, but it will disappear because of the broad sweep of a brown line on a map by transport planners. No Government Department should undertake that course lightly. Only the most pressing regional or national requirements should justify such proposals. The proposals put forward by the Government do not meet that test.

We should welcome one or two aspects of the report, which puts forward some extremely good options for public transport—for example, the long-awaited proposal, which was floated some time ago in the central London rail study, for the construction of a Chelsea to Hackney Tube line. That would be of great benefit to the residents of Hackney, and to those of my constituents who live on the eastern side of Islington.

The east-west cross rail link between Liverpool street and Paddington is another proposal whose implementation is desperately needed, as is the upgrading and improving of the Northern line. Anyone who travels on that creaking, inefficient part of the Underground network will know that that is essential.

All those proposals are very welcome, but what the Government do not tell us in their response to the study is how they are to be paid for. They have made no commitment to fund the work; on the contrary, last year's Autumn Statement suggested that money would be available for only one London public transport option, the extension of the Jubilee line to docklands, which the central London rail study regarded as a thoroughly bad option. We fear that the bad option will be constructed and the good option—the one that ordinary people want—will not. We want a commitment from the Government that they will provide the funding for the public transport improvements that we all want. My constituents and I fear that we shall otherwise end up with a road scheme that we do not want and none of the public transport improvements that we do want.

The proposed new road will run from Archway, along Holloway road, across to Caledonian road and thence to York way, down to King's Cross, up Pentonville road, through the Angel, on to Old street and finally to Aldgate. It will be a new highway corridor running from the A1 and M1 into the heart of the City. I can tell the Minister that the vast majority of my constituents do not want it—not just those who will lose their homes, although that is bad enough, and between 300 and 600 will be in that category —but those who will stay put. If a major highway is dumped on their doorstep, they will suffer noise, disturbance, pollution and disruption of their environment.

Thousands will be affected. The new road will run right beside the Caledonian road estate, the Boston estate, the Bemerton estate, York way court, the Weston rise estate, Angel house and Kestrel house. The Government must realise that the proposal is deeply unpopular, and I hope that that will become clear to them during the public consultation exercise that is now under way.

Apart from ruining people's lives, the new road is wrong in principle. By creating a new fast corridor into the centre of London, the Government will end up attracting more traffic into the heart of London when they should be doing precisely the opposite—restraining traffic from coming in in the first place. For what purpose are they doing this? Simply to knock 10 minutes off commuters' car journeys. In my view, that is not worth the destruction that will be caused.

We need a two-pronged policy of real and immediate improvements in London's public transport network, along with traffic restraint to keep unnecessary vehicles out. That option has been put forward by the boroughs concerned—for instance, in the Haringey blueprint.

The consultation period for the East London assessment study is far too short. The report was published on 14 December. Comments have to be received by 28 February. That is a period of two and a half months, with the first half month entirely taken up by the Christmas period. The problem has been made even worse by the fact that the report has not been made available to many of the people who will be affected by the proposals. Quite a number of local residents and local community groups, nominated London Members who will be affected and who ought to receive copies of the report, have not received it. Libraries that were promised public information displays have not received them.

The technical report on the study will not be available until a month after the consultation period ends on 28 February. Departmental representatives will attend only one meeting in each borough, despite an early commitment that they would attend all public meetings. The availability of the information on which comments can be made is grossly inadequate. Surely, therefore, the consultation period ought to be extended beyond 28 February so that people can obtain the information, think about it carefully and then make considered comments to the Department about it. Doubtless the Department will say that that would increase the period of planning blight. Those of us, including myself, who are affected by blight would prefer comments to be made properly and in large numbers to the Department rather than that the consultation period should be drastically curtailed.

I ask the Minister, first, to extend the deadline for consultation; second, to give a firm commitment that money will be made available for the public transport improvements that we all want; and, third, to scrap here and now a new road scheme that no one wants, that will destroy homes and whole neighbourhoods and that will not solve the traffic problems of London as a whole. I urge the Minister, as passionately as I possibly can, on behalf of thousands of my constituents, to think again about what his Department is doing and to scrap, once and for all, this major new road proposal that we neither want nor need.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am obliged, as are many other people in Islington, to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) for what he has said in the debate.

Last night I attended a meeting of the Holloway neighbourhood traffic group, where 250 people were packed into a room that was designed to hold fewer than 100. An overflow room was then filled up, after which we had to turn people away. Such was the interest and concern. No representative from the Department of Transport or the consultants turned up. However, local authority representatives, the Member of Parliament and local residents were there to discuss the issue. It was a sober and serious discussion. Much genuine concern was expressed about why that community should be torn apart by the construction of a huge highway, which could result in the loss of up to 600 homes and as many as 2,000 people being displaced.

The Government's strategy for London calmly predicts a 30 per cent. increase in commuter car journeys during the next decade. The Government calmly say that they will continually underfund London Regional Transport and British Rail. They insist that all new public transport development should be self-financing. Calculations have been made showing that all the public transport options in all the assessment studies will lead to a fare increase of roughly 46 per cent. That is fundamentally wrong.

The Government have failed to address the problem of car-borne commuters. Car-borne commuters moving in and out of central London make up less than 20 per cent. of the total number of people commuting in and out of central London; circular commuter journeys represent slightly more. The Government propose to spend up to £4·2 billion on the construction of major road schemes around London to serve a minority of the population and bring more vehicles into central London. So far there has been a woeful silence about how much money they intend to put into public transport to finance bus services that need improving, the rail schemes that are necessary, new Tube lines and improvements to existing ones.

I hope that the Government recognise that many people are concerned. There is a lack of London-wide debate because we lack a London-wide authority. When the Government abolished the Greater London council they took away the forum in which elected representatives could discuss serious planning matters. I hope that the Government will be prepared at least to engage in public debates with those of us who are concerned about what is happening to London and give some credibility to the fine work that Haringey borough council has done to promote the blueprint for transport in London which shows how resources could be directed to improve the transport needs of the people of London.

The local effect of the road will be the destruction of a large number of houses. At the moment there are plans for a tunnel where the Archway road passes Highgate station and plans are being considered for a bored tunnel down to

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

Finsbury Park, the construction of a new route to King's Cross and the widening of the junction at Highbury corner to send more traffic eastwards to Hackney, Tower Hamlets and docklands. It is a catastrophic scheme, and I urge the Government to extend the consultation period way beyond 28 February, provide details of the schemes so that we know which roads will be closed and which will be kept open and to recognise that the folly of road building in London has now been exposed for what it is. We need a strategy that relies on restraining powers and improving and encouraging public transport.

2.47 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I want to say on behalf of my constituents in Hackney that, although the terrible shadow of new road building in Hackney has been lifted, we are aware that if the road schemes are implemented in east London, in the long term that will increase the pressure for new through roads in Hackney. That is why we are prepared to continue campaigning alongside other people in east London.

Hackney is the only London borough without a Tube station. We cannot emphasise how important it is for us for the Ministry quickly to come forward with agreement and finance for the new Chelsea-Hackney line. If there is one thing that I should like to achieve as a Member of Parliament for the borough, it is a Tube station for Hackney.

2.48 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins): I congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on raising this matter on the Adjournment with the style and ability by which we have come to recognise him. I understand the concerns that he has expressed. He may well already know, and if he does not the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) will tell him, that I know the area very well indeed. I was born and bred there, I was educated there, and I was on Haringey council for about eight years. My family have been connected with Islington and Hornsey for more than 150 years, so I know the area extremely well and, therefore, I appreciate all the points that he made and the geography to which he refers.

I should like to get one thing crystal clear. The proposals that are the subject of the assessment studies have nothing to do with the Government as yet. They are not Government proposals. Let us get that absolutely clear. They are options produced by consultants whose work has been going on since 1984 or 1985—a long time before I took my present job. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have merely issued in the document that we have prepared for consultation purposes our preliminary indications of what might not be subject to further consultations, in addition to those options that have already been dropped.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Minister agree that the Department of Transport gave Ove Arup its remit? The assumptions on which it based its traffic models were given by the Department of Transport. They included a prediction of a 50 per cent. rise in the real cost of public transport, but an increase of only 15 per cent. in the real cost of private car transport. Those assumptions were fed to the consultants by the Department.

Mr. Atkins: It is only reasonable to accept that the Department of Transport commissioned the proposals. Indeed, we shall have to pay for them in due course, which will cost a substantial sum——

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): The taxpayer will pay for them.

Mr. Atkins: Quite right, the taxpayer. We commissioned the documents, but the proposals and discussions on them have been controversial, and doubtless will remain so. The fact remains that those are the consultants' proposals. Since I have been responsible for these matters with the Secretary of State, I have said that we shall listen closely to the consultations before making any decisions on what will be our proposals, which will then be subject to the sort of criticisms that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is mistakenly making of the Department at present.

I understand, not only from my erstwhile knowledge of London but from the concerns that have been expressed from across the political spectrum, that the options originally canvassed for the study that affects not only the constituency of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury but other parts of London were very unpopular. Where I can, I have sought to defuse some of those concerns. The hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) were gracious enough to accept that, as some of the options have been turned down, that has relieved some of the concerns and worries of people in various parts of London. I re-emphasise that these are not our proposals.

The consultation period has been going on for far too long. I have received the impression from consultations with people who know London better than I do that that is so. We must put a stop to that as soon as possible by accepting or rejecting options. That is why I determined —and I make no apology for so doing—that the period of consultation should end on 28 February. Discussion on the studies has been going on for a long time—arguably too long. The date that I have set gives more than enough time.

I draw to the attention of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury the fact that the Department has been criticised—this may not be true of him, but it may be true of the hon. Member for Islington, North—for not making copies of the consultants' report available to groups until recently. We received only days ago a list of groups that the hon. Member for Islington, North wished——

Mr. Corbyn: That is not true. Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Atkins: May I finish the point? We received only the other day a list of groups in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—I presume that there must be groups in other parts of Islington—and we sent them copies of the report as soon as possible. We said throughout that we would send them only to properly constituted groups, and we took the advice of hon. Members about which groups were properly constituted. We were not prepared to send them to individuals.

Mr. Corbyn: I am glad that the list is at last being sent out. The Minister should contact the Secretary of State. My office sent the list to the Secretary of State's office as soon as it was requested. It later transpired that the Minister had not received it, so we sent him a copy. It is not my fault that the Minister of State does not speak to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Atkins: First, I am not the Minister of State. Secondly, I talk to him frequently. The reports were not received by my Department and so I could not send them out. However, we should gloss over this matter because there is no point in delaying the debate. I want to address some of the more fundamental issues. When we have received notification from London Members across the political spectrum we have quickly sent out the reports. If the hon. Gentleman talked to some of his colleagues he would find that they had received them. That is certainly what I have heard from Opposition Members.

I am clearly not in a position—I wish that I was—to make decisions off the cuff at the Dispatch Box about the sort of resources that will, or will not, be made available. If I could do so I would have more power than I am entitled to have. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and his hon. Friends must not, and cannot, assume that we shall not make resources available. Insofar as I can predict such matters, bearing in mind the Cabinet, it is my determination that the public transport and road options—subject to the consultation—should each be as likely to receive a resource allocation and, therefore, have the chance of being constructed.

Let there be no misconception that, automatically, we shall not fund the public transport options any more than the road transport ones. We shall consider the views expressed at the consultation. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is an active and well-respected constituency Member. If he is right, and I am sure that he is, the points he made, which were represented to him by his constituents, will be taken into account. It may be that his representations, and those of his constituents, will be the deciding factor in ensuring that the road will not be built. However, I cannot predict that until we hear people's views at the end of the consultation period.

Mention has been made of the Haringey blueprint. I know a little bit about Haringey and I am automatically suspicious of what its council has to say, particularly these days.

Mr. Corbyn: That is a fine point.

Mr. Atkins: It may be fine, but it is drawn from bitter experience.

Haringey's blueprint is being advanced as a serious contribution to the debate. But it is no more or less than a mixture of old ideas, strung together with no facts to back them up. The figures quoted are fictional—I emphasise that word. For example, they ignore the aspirations of ordinary people to have independent means of transport and put forward the mistaken belief that improvements in public transport alone will solve traffic problems. The financial calculations do not add up. For example, it quotes new road and maintenance costs of £1,000 million a year when, in truth, they are only £350 million a year. It claims that heavy traffic causes road repairs of £500 million a year and that £800 million a year is spent on subsidising company cars. Those figures are simply untrue.

Ms. Abbott: I am not in a position to bandy figures. However, I hope that the Minister will not let a certain party political animus—old rivalries and rancour about Haringey council—affect his view of the blueprint. I cannot answer for every detail of the blueprint, but the Minister must believe me when I say that it represents the feelings of many people in the area. The broad outline of the blueprint genuinely reflects the feelings of many people in Hackney, Islington and Haringey about the answers to the transport problems in London.

Mr. Atkins: I must correct the hon. Lady: I have no rancour about my days in Haringey. I enjoyed myself immensely and had many friends across the political divide. Regrettably, many of those friends on the controlling side in Haringey were thrown out by some of those who now run the council, and I do not have so many friends among the new council members. However, the council needs to get its act together in relation to the blueprint to which many hon. Members have referred. It needs to try to get its facts right.

I am more concerned about what the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, because he speaks with considerable authority in the House and I respect his opinions, although I may often disagree with them. He made some fair points about his constituents' concerns. I have undertaken today—I reinforce this—to ensure that his concerns, and those of his constituents, about the road, or roads, and finance for the public transport options will be carefully considered. I know the area and I appreciate the problems, whether they involve the Archway road at the top—that was a problem when I was on Haringey council and it still is—or the bottom end of the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

I shall listen most carefully to all that the hon. Gentleman and his constituents have to say. At the end of the consultation period, the Department of Transport will decide on its proposals. The hon. Gentleman will then be able to attack me fairly—or unfairly—about what the Government are doing. However, at present they are merely options and not proposals, and I hope that his expressions of concern and those of his hon. Friends, and Conservative Members, will be taken into account.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 22 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

British Rail

1. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent consultations he has had with British Rail; and what matters were discussed.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. Wyn Roberts): My right hon. Friend and I and our officials consult British Rail regularly on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Smith: I thank the Minister for that reply. When he and his colleagues next meet the chairman of British Rail will they discuss the possibility of establishing a passenger rail link to Cardiff Wales airport? I agree with the director of that airport that such a rail link is essential for its future as an international airport. Such an airport is vital to the continued success of the south Wales economy. We must recognise that the cutting edge of business communications is air travel. If we make the mistake of not establishing adequate surface links in Wales we shall fall behind other regions and other countries and we shall not get our fair share of the cake in Europe after 1992.

Mr. Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is, I think, aware that South Glamorgan county council and British Rail are in the lead on this proposal. They examined it last year, but came to the conclusion that there was not an economic case for it. I understand, however, that they are still examining the possibility of running an executive coach from the airport to Cardiff's hotels in addition to the hourly bus service from Cardiff to the airport.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should like to do all that we can to help further the interests of the airport and to meet the economic requirements of south Wales.

Mr. Anderson: Will the Minister ask the chairman of British Rail why it continues to treat Wales as though it were an impoverished cousin, fit only for the hand-me-downs from more wealthy members of the family? Is he aware, for example, that the new high-speed trains that we shall receive in south Wales will come into operation when they are no longer needed, after the electrification of the east coast mainline?

Mr. Roberts: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. We consult British Rail and we are pleased with some of the things it has done. It is, for example, providing a first-class service from Paddington to and from south Wales. We have asked for extra trains to be provided and those trains will be provided from next May. British Rail meets our requirements whenever they are commercially viable.

Rechem

2. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the importation of toxic waste bound for the Rechem incineration plant.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations.

Mr. Howells: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Can he confirm that the Germans are not keen to install a similar plant in their country as they believe that it is not safe? If that is so, what plans does the Minister have to safeguard the interests of the Welsh people?

Mr. Grist: I think that the hon. Gentleman will know of our proposals in the current Environmental Protection Bill whereby we wish to restrict the importation of waste into this country, although we see a role for dealing with special wastes. I would not care to comment on the activities of an allied Government.

Mr. Favell: It is absolutely vital that such plants should operate safely and, therefore, the new proposed legislation is welcome. Is it reasonable for organisations such as Friends of the Earth to attack companies such as Rechem, which is ridding the world of unwanted chemicals? Surely that company is being a friend of the earth.

Mr. Grist: If we did not have such firms the question would arise as to exactly what would happen to the PCBs and other emissions. Presumably, they would endanger Third world countries which are too poor to have our high technology.

Mr. Murphy: Is it not true that the large profits made by Rechem come from imports and that those profits have declined dramatically in the past few weeks? Is the Minister aware that reports in the business press this weekend have indicated possible insider dealing in Rechem shares? Will he ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to investigate those reports? Does he accept that the only answer to this controversy is a proper, independent public inquiry?

Mr. Grist: After that barrage, I am not quite sure into what the hon. Gentleman wants an inquiry. I do not care to comment on the insider dealings, but I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have noted what the hon. Gentleman said. Only 20 per cent. of the company's dealings come from imported waste and, if there is a fall in the company's profitability, I imagine that it would be of some concern to the hon. Gentleman's constituents who work there.

Uniform Business Rate

3. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the implementation of the new business rate in Wales.

15. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had on the Welsh business rate level.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): I have received a number of such representations.

Mr. Murphy: Is the Secretary of State aware of today's business news in south Wales—a staggering increase in the number of bankruptcies and liquidations of small businesses? Does he accept that the business tax will increase the possibility of such events? Why does he pretend to help industry in Wales but introduce a tax that is universally condemned by all organisations that represent commerce in the Principality?

Mr. Walker: I am well aware of today's commercial news. I have seen the survey done by the Cardiff chamber of commerce and industry which shows that 24 per cent. of firms expect to take on more people in 1990—three times more than those set to reduce their work force—that turnover is 75 per cent. higher than last year, and that firms expect 60 per cent. higher profits. That fits in with an industrial survey carried out by the Institute of Directors, which comes to similar conclusions. We are having record inward investment, record growth and a record drop in unemployment. I am sure that the news that factories and warehouses in Wales will have a 27 per cent. reduction in their business rate will be good news for the Welsh economy.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Secretary of State recall that when he was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food he gave farmers the incredible advice that if a nuclear attack was imminent they should drive their cows into ditches and cover them with a tarpaulin sheet? Is not the advice and protection that he has given to Welsh business men just about as effective as a tarpaulin sheet would be against a nuclear attack? In his long litany of records, the Secretary of State forgot that today we know that there are record bankruptcies among Welsh businesses. Why do Welsh businesses have to pay 5 per cent. more for their business rate than those in England? What will he do about it?

Mr. Walker: Once again, the hon. Gentleman's production of fiction is on the most extraordinary scale. As Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I never made any such remarks, which are a total work of fiction by the hon. Gentleman. Welsh businesses will contribute 20 per cent. of the costs of local government and those in England, 30 per cent. If the hon. Gentleman calls that a disadvantage to Welsh business, that is a funny analysis.

Mr. Burns: When replying to representations he receives about the business rate, will my right hon. Friend tell those people that when the transitional phase is over, the maximum amount by which the business rate can increase in any one year will be the inflation rate? That will be infinitely superior to some of the rate increases faced by businesses in Wales over the past 10 to 15 years. Will he confirm that when we take the business rate and Government funding together, community charge payers in Wales will pay only 15 per cent. of local government finance?

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend is quite correct—community charge payers will pay only 15 per cent. of local government finance. I am glad that it is also true that the rate burden of factories and warehouses throughout Wales will be reduced by 27 per cent. That should be a cause for celebration in the Principality.

Mr. Alan Williams: Is not the Secretary of State's early optimism likely to be hit on the head by the very tax that we are discussing? Will he confirm that the interim protection to which he has referred is lost if a firm changes premises? Premises will therefore become more difficult to sell or to rent; firms wanting to expand will find it difficult to move to larger presmises; and firms in trouble will find it difficult to move to smaller ones. Is not that contrary to the mobility that is essential to regional policy?

Mr. Walker: The figures that I gave have nothing to do with the transitional arrangements. I know of the right hon. Gentleman's passion to help the valleys, so he will be pleased to know that valleys factories will have their rate burden reduced by 35 per cent.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that manufacturing industry will benefit particularly from the new business rate? How will that act on the valleys' initiative? As many concerns involved will be smaller businesses, will he give further consideration to the present threshold of £10,000 and increase it to, say, £15,000?

Mr. Walker: We shall keep the present figures.

Factories in the valleys will pay £13 million less in rates, and warehouses £2 million less.

National Curriculum

4. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about implementation of the national curriculum in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has received many representations about the implementation of the national curriculum in Wales, most of which have been in response to the numerous consultations he has conducted.

Mr. Rogers: I am not surprised that the Minister has received many representations, because the whole teaching profession in Wales is disaffected with the proposals. Does not the Minister realise that under these proposals teachers will have not only to teach and maintain discipline but to absorb and implement the new curriculum—and to assess and record almost continuously the progress of their pupils? Teachers have been placed in an impossible position without the resources to help them and without the extra manpower to deal with some of the extremely large classes in the Principality.

Mr. Roberts: The hon. Gentleman must remember that more is being spent per pupil now than when we came to office, and that there are fewer pupils per teacher now than then.

We consult after each national curriculum working group has produced its final report, and we consult again at the draft order stage. We realise, of course, that teachers carry a burden but we also have faith that they will see that the work is well worth doing and that they will carry it out.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: When does my hon. Friend expect to make a decision on the applications from a number of schools in my constituency to be exempt from Welsh at secondary level?

Mr. Roberts: We shall be consulting separately on the regulations relating to possible exemptions.

Mr. Barry Jones: Is not the national curriculum causing severe difficulties with staffing and with the teaching of

Welsh and modern languages? Teacher morale is very low. Why is the Minister so indecisive? He has legislated for major change but provided minor resources. If he does not wake up he will have a serious situation on his hands.

Mr. Roberts: I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman say that. Is he now saying that he is against the introduction of the national curriculum? His party was not when we dealt with the matter in Standing Committee.

As for staff morale, I have explained that teachers have good reason to feel proud of the work that they do. I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that we are raising the additional education support grant and the money available for local education authority training grants from £7 million this year to £10 million in the next.

Sheltered Accommodation

5. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many units of local authority-provided sheltered accommodation for the elderly currently exist in Wales.

Mr. Grist: At 1 April 1989 there were 16,219 units of sheltered accommodation for elderly people provided by local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Davies: Will the Minister confirm that under the new ringfencing arrangements local authorities will have to exclude the costs of warden services from their housing accounts, and will therefore no longer be eligible for housing subsidy? Does he realise that the full cost of warden services will then fall on the poll tax? The Minister's estimate of poll tax in the Rhymney valley of £166 per head has already increased on the basis of the local authority estimate of £225 per head. That seems to generate laughter from the Secretary of State. Will the Minister seriously reconsider those elements of local authority expenditure that should be eligible for housing subsidy?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the considerable increase in funds that are being made available next year to local authorities for housing and through the Housing Corporation for mixed housing in sheltered accommodation. The hon. Gentleman can look there for considerable growth. The effect of the pay of wardens on the community charge will be infinitesimal compared with the good that will be done by sheltered accommodation.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister compare his figure of 16,200 units of accommodation with the anticipated increase in the number of elderly—48,000 over the next 20 years—and with the figure for the very elderly, those over 85, of 26,000? Given the emphasis on community care and on people being enabled to live independent lives, will he provide the money to enable local authorities to undertake rapid acceleration in the provision of sheltered accommodation?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman should consider that we have been able to provide the finance for an increase of more than 3,000 units of accommodation for elderly people in the last two and a half years. We shall be able to maintain that rate in future. He will also be aware of the new renovation grants scheme that will considerably assist private elderly owners in Wales, of whom we have a high proportion and for whom local authorities will have an unlimited financial draw on the Treasury.

M4 (Port Talbot)

6. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in which month in 1991 the two unfinished sections of the M4 in the Port Talbot area will see work commence; and by which month in 1991 the work will be completed.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Work on the Briton Ferry-Earlswood and Baglan-Briton Ferry schemes is planned to start early in the period April 1991 to March 1994. The schemes will take two and a half years and three years respectively and are expected to be completed in mid-1994. It is not possible to be more precise at this stage.

Mr. Wardell: The Minister will know that it is a national disgrace that after 10 years of Conservative rule there is still not a single finished motorway in Wales. Will he look again at this to see whether this missing gap in the M4 can be filled before the time period that he mentioned? That gap is a major sore in the economy of south Wales and urgently needs attention.

Mr. Roberts: If it has been a disgrace for 10 years I am surprised that the previous Labour Government did not anticipate building this section of the M4-A48. We have planned extremely well. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have already carried out remedial works at the Baglan roundabout which have eased traffic congestion there. We have further works planned for the two other roundabouts, and here we have work that is estimated to cost £116 million at November 1988 prices. We shall accomplish that work within four years. That is a very good rate of progress for the building of roads.

Rechem

7. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the taking of soil samples around the Rechem incinerator.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend is considering what further action may be necessary in the light of the results of monitoring undertaken by the Welsh Office and other agencies in the Pontypool area.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Minister authorise comprehensive environmental tests not only of the soil but of grass and meat to test for toxins passing into the food chain? Does he agree that the stock exchange is investigating Rechem share insider dealings and that a Welsh Office public inquiry on Rechem is long overdue?

Mr. Grist: That seems a very muddled supplementary. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is currently conducting further environmental soil surveys in the vicinity of various types of incinerators, including that at Pontypool. As I said in my answer, and as the hon. Gentleman will know, we have been carrying out various surveys ourselves and releasing the results to interested parties.

Mr. Alan Williams: Given the poor level of monitoring of the plant by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the general lack of confidence in HMIP's work, will the

Minister note the work commissioned by Torfaen borough council, whose independent analysis shows that levels of polychlorinated biphenyls in grasslands around the Rechem plant are extremely high—50 to 100 times the background? In the light of such findings and of the general concern in the area, why does the Welsh Office refuse to allow a public inquiry into the operations of the plant?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman has raised this matter before, I think in the Select Committee. The surveys carried out by HMIP are the surveys for which we have most respect. We aware of the findings given to us by Torfaen borough council, and that is why we have instituted investigations of our own. We are looking into the findings of all the surveys to decide what step to take next.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

8. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on hill livestock compensatory allowance payments in 1990.

Mr. Peter Walker: We shall announce the hill livestock compensatory allowance rates for 1990 shortly.

Mr. Jones: The Secretary of State will be aware that the value of HLCAs has been eroded by inflation since the last increase in 1986 and that in 1989 incomes in the less-favoured areas fell by 13 per cent. in real terms. He will also be aware that the European Commission's cut will represent a loss to Welsh farmers of £1·2 million in HLCA payments this year. Will the Secretary of State give the House and Welsh farmers an assurance that the Government will make up the difference?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman knows that last year the Government gave careful conideration to the matter and paid out £30·2 million in allowances. Our latest figures show that net farm incomes on less-favoured area livestock farms rose by just under 40 per cent. on average, partly reflecting increases in output and lower-than-expected increases in input costs.

Mr. Barry Jones: Will the Secretary of State consider a concerted policy programme to bring greater social and economic prosperity to Wales? Has he carefully assessed the need for a rural affairs unit in his Department—for example, a task force for north Wales? Will he fight harder in Brussels for rural Wales?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman asks about help for rural Wales. I can only say that the reduction in unemployment, the increased farm income figures that I have just given and the programme for north Wales that we have just announced completely dwart anything that was achieved when the hon. Gentleman was a Minister at the Welsh Office.

Inward Investment

9. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what figures he has for the amount of inward investment that took place in Wales in 1989.

Mr. Peter Walker: I am pleased to say that preliminary figures show that during 1989, Wales secured on average two projects per week—100 projects, promising 8,252 new and safeguarded jobs and a capital investment of £520 million.

Mr. Cran: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the success of the job-attracting agencies in Wales has been outstanding and that they have beaten into a cocked hat the achievements of the other job-attracting agencies in the United Kingdom? Does he further agree that the quality of that investment is far higher than was the case in the 1960s and 1970s and is unlikely to suffer in the same way as investment in those decades suffered when adverse trading conditions came along?

Mr. Walker: The quality has been very high. An important factor for the Welsh economy is that three of the biggest inward investments of the past two years have been in the Toyota and Ford engine plants and the Bosch motor component plant, which are all under construction and have yet to recruit labour forces. When fully in production, those plants will require a whole mass of component manufacturers to supply them. The investment has been of high quality and will bring permanent benefit to the Welsh economy.

Mr. Roy Hughes: The Secretary of State talks of inward investment. But does he appreciate that today Mitel, which has a large factory in Caldicot, has announced its intention of divesting itself of its 51 per cent. shareholding in that company? Does the Secretary of State realise that the company has pioneered advanced technology? What is to be the future of the work people employed there?

Mr. Walker: I cannot comment on an announcement about the disposal of the ownership of a particular company. However, inward investment into the hon. Gentleman's constituency continues to be made on a considerable scale, as in the past.

Tertiary Education, Clwyd

10. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals have been submitted to him by Clwyd county council for tertiary reorganisation of the schools in Clwyd.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has not received any formal proposals affecting the organisation of secondary education in Clwyd.

Sir Anthony Meyer: As my hon. Friend has a wider area of responsibility than his English counterpart in the Department of Education and Science, will he, when assessing any proposals from Clwyd county council, take into account not only the possible educational advantages of concentrating sixth form teaching in one place but the conceivable social disadvantages of removing from a place such as Abergele the element of a school that provides a valuable service to the community?

Mr. Roberts: Tertiary education is only one option for consideration by local education authorities wishing to rationalise their provision for 16 to 19-year-olds. It would not be right for me to comment on the merits of tertiary education in Clwyd. If the local education authority publishes notices of its intention to abolish sixth forms and there are statutory objections, the matter would be referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, for him to determine.

Mr. Foot: Does the Minister recall the reply that the Secretary of State was ill-advised enough to give me during Welsh questions last time, when I suggested that his best course would be to make his next annual or biannual speech on the catastrophies of the Government's general economic policy in the constituency of Clwyd, North-West? Do not recent events emphasise the truth of that? Will the Minister ask the Secretary of State to make special arrangements to visit Clwyd, North-West, not only to speak on the subject of tertiary education, which is very important, but to give his views on interest rates at 15 per cent. and all the other elements of the Government's catastrophic economic policy? We want that speech to be made as soon as possible, and only regret that it was not made last week.

Mr. Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is welcome throughout north Wales, including the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer), who is very much his own man, and my constituency of Conwy.

Dr. Thomas: Will the Secretary of State and the Minister of State consider the future of tertiary education in Clwyd in the context of the plans that are simultaneously being prepared for Gwynedd? The two counties share a substantial border, and there is a clear need for tertiary facilities along the border to be shared. Will the Secretary of State consider any representations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer), who has a distinguished record of public service to his constituents and whom we shall certainly miss if the disastrous course that was inflicted on the Conservative party in Clwyd, North-West is followed?

Mr. Roberts: A tertiary education scheme has already been adopted for Gwent, West Glamorgan and South Glamorgan, and a similar scheme is under consideration for Gwynedd and Mid-Glamorgan. I am sure that Clwyd's proposals will take into account the interests of Gwynedd and that there will be collaboration between the two. I remarked earlier that my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West is very much his own man. He has an enormous amount of courage, which we all respect.

Polytechnic of Wales

11. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives of the Polytechnic of Wales; and what was discussed.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Neither my right hon. Friend nor myself have had occasion to meet representatives of the Polytechnic of Wales in the last 12 months.

Dr. Howells: In terms of the sums allocated across all subjects, the Polytechnic of Wales receives half the amount allocated to universities, and about 12 per cent. less than that allocated to British polytechnics in general. The Secretary of State and the Minister for State know the vital role that the polytechnic plays in supplying scientific and engineering expertise to the new Welsh industries. What will be done to ensure that its funding is made commensurate with that role?

Mr. Roberts: We have been increasing the funds available to the Polytechnic of Wales in recent years, and one hopes that they will continue to increase. The polytechnic is, as the hon. Gentleman says, of great importance to us as it serves industry in south Wales. I have faith in its future being assured.

Green Pound

12. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the effect of the green pound gap on Welsh farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received a total of eight written representations; seven from hon. Friends and hon. Members representing Welsh constituencies, and one from the Wales branch of the National Farmers Union.

Mr. Bennett: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable concern among farmers in Wales about their growing competitive disadvantage compared with farmers in other parts of the European Community as a result of the increasing gap in the green pound? Will he make strong representations to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, saying that this is a matter which requires deep cuts in the forthcoming price round in the EC negotiations?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. I am well aware from experience —my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is also aware of it—that, in a price-fixing exercise, the movement of monetary compensatory amounts is of considerable importance. There is a commitment to remove all monetary gaps and, therefore, MCAs by the end of 1992. When that happens, it will be of great benefit to Welsh agriculture.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls

13. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will carry out an inquiry into the effect upon the environment of the emissions of polychlorinated biphenyls from the combustion of plastic clinical waste in hospital incinerators in Wales.

Mr. Grist: No, Sir. Such an inquiry would anticipate implementation of the proposals contained in the Environmental Protection Bill which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment laid before the House on 20 December 1989. When it is enacted, NHS incinerators will be required to meet operating and emission standards that will be published and will be enforceable by the relevant local authorities.

Mr. Davies: Does the Minister agree that, when plastic PCBs are burnt—a considerable amount is burnt in hospital incinerators—biphenyls and dioxins are emitted unless the combustion temperature is extremely high? He mentioned the new legislation. At what temperature should these plastics be burnt to prevent the emission of biphenyls and dioxins?

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is undertaking consultations on standards of incineration which it is intended should be introduced later this year.

Sir Dudley Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been so much controversy about this in Wales that it is a matter of considerable urgency? Will he urge my right

hon. Friend the Secretary of State to take every step to get the issue moving? Is my hon. Friend aware that the county town of Warwick has been threatened with an incinerator and that there is considerable anxiety about it?

Mr. Grist: My hon. Friend should be reassured by the fact that the power to control and license the incinerator would be given to his local authority by the proposals in our Bill. He would be able to exercise such authority locally. That should give him and his constituents a great deal of assurance.

Ruthin and Caernarfon Agriculture Department Offices

17. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be *(a)* the beneficial and *(b)* the adverse effects to farming in the proposed reorganisation of the Ruthin and Caernarfon Agriculture Department offices.

Mr. Peter Walker: The reorganisation will provide a more cost-effective administrative structure for my Agriculture Department in Wales. There should be no effect on the farming community, since Ruthin will continue to be served by a substantial area office.

Dr. Marek: Can the Secretary of State give a categorical assurance that no farmer from Clwyd, particularly east Clwyd, will have to travel to Caernarfon, that the furthest he will have to go is to Ruthin, and that he will not suffer any loss of quality because of going to Ruthin?

Mr. Walker: The new area office will be purpose built, and will be linked by a computer network to the other office, so all the information will be readily available.

British Rail

18. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will discuss with the chairman of British Rail plans to prepare the rail infrastructure of Wales *(a)* generally and *(b)* to improve links with the continent.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend will discuss these issues when he next meets the chairman of British Rail.

Mr. Anderson: Are the Government prepared to invest £195 in the report by the *Economist* intelligence unit, published today, on the social and regional implications of the Channel tunnel? In the report, British Rail is sharply criticised for its failure to plan for the regional effects of the tunnel. Is it not clear that Wales may suffer major adverse repercussions unless the Government intervene as a matter of urgency to protect areas such as Wales?

Mr. Roberts: As the hon. Gentleman knows, British Rail has produced its plan as required, and has made provision for Wales. The hon. Gentleman will know that there will be an overnight passenger service from Swansea to the Channel tunnel and daytime services from south Wales to the international centre at Waterloo; there will also be services from mid-Wales to Wolverhampton to connect with services to the tunnel, and from north Wales to Crewe. Freight terminal sites are also under consideration: there will be one in south Wales, one in the west midlands which will serve mid-Wales and one in Cheshire to serve north Wales.

This is a basic plan, to be reviewed and updated annually. Therefore, I cannot possibly agree that British Rail has completely ignored the interests of Wales.

THE ARTS

Admission Charges

26. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his policy on compulsory admission charges to national museums.

27. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his policy on free access to national museums.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): The Government's repeatedly stated policy is that the decision whether to operate a system of admission charges or voluntary donations should be for the board of trustees responsible for each institution.

Dr. Marek: Surely the Minister now recognises, given the evidence all round him, that the introduction of charges has affected museum attendances. At the national maritime museum, for example, attendances have dropped by 35 per cent; at the natural history museum they have fallen by 40 per cent; and, worst of all, at the Welsh national museum they have fallen by 85 per cent.

Does the Minister agree with the claim by my hon. Friend for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) that the Government believe that people value only what they pay for? Does he value only what he pays for? Does he think that the public value only what they pay for, and does he believe that members of the public who now pay charges to go to museums value those museums doubly because they have paid twice over?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman may care to note that museum attendance all over the country—including attendance at a mass of independent museums, most of which charge—reached record levels last year, which was museum year. It is entirely for the trustees to decide whether the introduction of charges would bring benefits to the public and to individual museums, and it is right for us to leave that practical, pragmatic decision to them. All this must be seen against the background of a real increase in resources for our national institutions, to the benefit of the taxpayer.

Mr. Haynes: May I ask what responsibility the Minister has? He is always blaming someone else. Let me tell him in no uncertain terms that the proposed charges will reduce attendances, and let me tell him this, too: I have the backing of Nottinghamshire county council, which does a marvellous job for the arts. Let us have less rhetoric from that Dispatch Box, and let us have some action—and we do not want any charges either.

Mr. Luce: I feel inclined to recommend the hon. Gentleman for a drama award: he certainly qualifies for one.

Each individual institution has its own decision to make. Evidence shows that, since the introduction of charges, attendances at the imperial war museum are up on the last full year in which there were no charges. Other museums have experienced a drop in the first year or two of charges, but it is usually temporary. If museums are to

introduce charges, however, I strongly believe that they must be linked with an improvement in services to the public, and that is what is happening in most museums.

Sir Philip Goodhart: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the national museums in almost all the EC member countries make admission charges? Does he agree that, in France, all Louvre museum acquisitions are paid for by admission charges? If that is right on the continent, why should it not be right here?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One is being told repeatedly that people in France are less philistine than people in this country. There is nothing philistine about making admission charges; the vast bulk of the French museums do just that.

Mr. Jessel: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is no reason why the trustees of museums and galleries should not be allowed to make up their own minds about this matter? Does he know that the most important thing is the quality of display? Will he congratulate the Tate gallery on its rehanging?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I congratulate the Tate gallery on its remarkable achievement. I am glad that, in addition to sponsorship from British Petroleum, the Government and the taxpayer have been able to contribute to the very excellent rehanging and reorganisation of, the Tate.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there have been remarkable improvements in museums that have introduced charges. That is very important, but it is equally important to note that a large number, if not a majority, of museums that have introduced charges have set aside certain free, open days and hours, in addition to their concessions for school parties and for other people in special categories.

Mr. Fisher: Is it not clear that the Government are content to sit and do nothing while admissions to national museums plummet through the floor? Indeed, are not the Government directly responsible, in that the Minister's refusal properly to fund the base budgets of national museums is forcing museums into making admission charges? Is the Minister now repeating his disgraceful remark to the conference of the Council of Regional Arts Associations a few years ago—that if a service is any good, people will pay for it?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman talks an awful lot of nonsense. He will have to make up his mind. During previous questions on the arts he was good enough to congratulate the Government on the substantial increase in taxpayers' funding for national museums and galleries. In fact, provision has been made for a 27 per cent. increase in the amount of taxpayers' resources allocated to museums and galleries. To suggest that national museums base decisions on inadequate funding when, in real terms, funding is far greater than it was under the Labour Government is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when the Select Committee examined this matter in 1981, it got it about right? It produced a unanimous report which said that trustees should have the ultimate discretion, but that, in exercising that discretion, they should always make provision for days free of charge and so preserve a great tradition. My right hon. Friend will agree that if we are seduced by the latest Select Committee report we shall reach the stage of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Mr. Luce: The Government will, of course, reply to the Select Committee's latest report. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress the importance of allowing decisions to be taken on a practical, pragmatic basis by the trustees, who are the people in charge of these national institutions. The evidence suggests that museums that have introduced charges have made a wide range of concessions, including open days and free days. Those changes are extremely important, and they follow the recommendations of the Committee to which my hon. Friend referred.

Wilding Report

28. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many responses he has received to the Wilding report on funding of the arts.

Mr. Luce: I have received almost 6,000 responses, of which approximately 4,500 are preprinted postcards.

Mrs. Golding: Following the representations from many people, including constituents of mine, will the Minister reject the proposal to merge the West Midlands regional arts association with the East Midlands regional arts association, to form a massive and unwieldy regional body that would attempt to serve more than 9 million people? He will agree that that would be an impossible task.

Mr. Luce: Of course, I take note of what the hon. Lady says. She probably knows that the chairmen of the East Midlands and West Midlands regional arts associations have been to see me and expressed views similar to hers. I shall take very seriously the views of the chairmen and directors of the regional arts associations, as well as the views of hon. Members. My concern is to achieve an arrangement and a structure for funding of the arts that makes sense in terms not only of efficiency but of coherence of funding and management.

Yorkshire-Humberside Arts Link

29. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received regarding the creation of an arts link between Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Luce: I have received a small number of submissions from individuals and organisations about such a link.

Mr. Cran: Arising from the Wilding report, is my right hon. Friend aware that there is considerable opposition in my neck of the woods to any suggestion of a merger of Humberside and Lincolnshire Arts with the Eastern arts association and that the majority opinion would seem to be that, if there is to be a merger, it should be with the Yorkshire arts association? Will he take that opinion fully into account when he decides these matters?

Mr. Luce: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall do so. I have met a delegation from the Yorkshire arts association and am due to meet one from Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts this week.

Mr. Heffer: When the Minister has met the delegation from the Yorkshire arts association, will he be prepared to agree with the letter that I sent to him and state that he will see hon. Members—especially Labour Members from Merseyside, but any other hon. Member, too—plus the Merseyside arts committee, to discuss the whole question of the merger between Merseyside Arts and North-West Arts? There is a strong feeling in Merseyside that there should not be a merger because we have a cultural background of our own. We agree with much of the Wilding report, but believe that a merger is not the answer to our problem.

Mr. Luce: If the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member wishes to express his or her views to me, I am prepared to hear them, just as I have heard the views of many other hon. Members. The report has to be seen as a whole, and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman said that he accepts or supports many of its recommendations. The report contains 80 recommendations and the objective is to achieve a system of accountability and management of the arts that will serve the arts as we move towards the turn of the century.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service Unions

48. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the Civil Service unions; and what subjects were discussed.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Richard Luce): I meet representatives of the Civil Service trade unions from time to time. A wide variety of matters is raised.

Mr. Fisher: When the Minister next meets the unions, will he discuss with them the responsibilities and remit of the ombudsman? Will he particularly discuss with them why the ombudsman does not set standards or administer good standards in the public agencies so that the interests of the public are safeguarded? Why can the ombudsman deal only with maladministration when he could be looking into many other important matters on behalf of members of the public?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman's question relates to the ombudsman's terms of reference, which are a matter for wider debate. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the civil servants in the agencies will remain part of the Civil Service and will be under the responsibility of the Secretary of State of the day. There are no plans to change the ombudsman's terms of reference.

Miss Emma Nicholson: In the light of the report of the Hansard Society, under the chairmanship of Lady Howe, on the deficiency of women in public life that will be published tomorrow, when the Minister next meets the Civil Service will he address himself particularly to that problem? Does he have any women at senior level in his office, for example?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to the report which, I believe, will be published this week. Of course, I and my colleagues in Government will take the report seriously. My concern is to increase the number of able women in the Civil Service to as high a level as possible, based on merit, ability and fair and open competition. There has been an improvement in the number of women in the service and 60 per cent. of recruits into the service are now women. I am interested in ensuring equality of opportunity.

Dr. Marek: I welcome the Minister's statement to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) that increasing the powers of the ombudsman is a matter for wide debate. Will the Minister put away his dogma about agencies being the stepping stones for privatisation and a means of lowering the salaries of individual groups of civil servants? The public will not understand the creation of agencies unless the agencies themselves increase public confidence in them and provide a better public service. Will the Minister ensure that the creation of any further agencies is coupled with service standards for the public so that the public have a better service? Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman initiate that wider debate on increasing the powers of the ombudsman?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman appears to have muddled several points in his question. I do not know which one he wants me to answer. Whether the powers of the ombudsman need changing is an issue for separate debate. The policy on agencies is clear, and the Government's first priority is to determine whether any service would be better managed and operated if it were not privatised. If not, the second option is to determine whether it should be made into an agency. That does not preclude the agency from being privatised if, at a later stage, the Government think that that is right. It is because it has been precluded from being privatised that it becomes an agency. Strict performance targets are now set for agencies, which the hon. Gentleman must support as it will lead to an improvement in services.

Mr. Barry Field: Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that many retired civil servants earn much more than they did in employment, thanks to the indexation of their pensions? How can my right hon. Friend reassure the House and the country that the Government are receiving impartial advice on the defeat of inflation, given that civil servants have an inbuilt advantage enjoyed by no other employee in this country?

Mr. Luce: Whatever the terms and conditions of civil servants, I am sure that my hon. Friend did not mean to suggest that they do not give impartial advice. All the evidence suggests that the vast bulk of civil servants give loyal service to the elected Government of the day.

Code of Conduct

49. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on the new code of conduct governing the activity of senior civil servants.

50. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on the proposed changes to the Civil Service code of conduct.

Mr. Luce: The relevant section of the Civil Service pay and conditions of service code, which applies to all civil servants, is being revised to take account of the Official Secrets Act 1989.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is the Minister aware that that revision has been widely interpreted as a scandalous attempt by

Hacker to hamstring and hogtie Sir Humphrey? If the conditions that apply to senior civil servants in their duty to the Crown are thought to be deficient, why is it necessary to change them, so as to try to restrict senior civil servants in their duty to the Government as opposed to Her Majesty's estate?

Mr. Luce: I am not sure that I fully understood the hon. Gentleman. The first duty—it is clearly set out—is that civil servants owe their allegiance to Her Majesty's elected Government of the day. The code is being adjusted and revised because of the passing of the Official Secrets Act 1989. It was necessary to do so because certain categories of civil servants, which were formerly subject to criminal proceedings if they had wrongly divulged information, are now subject to ordinary disciplinary proceedings.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister take into account the reported views of the leadership of the unions representing the Civil Service, which are opposed to the proposed code?

Will the Minister assure the House that the interests and views of the Civil Service will be properly taken into account and that there will be proper consultations and no hasty decisions? Will he protect the interests of civil servants who found their Box taken over on Friday by a member of Tory Central Office?

Mr. Luce: The Secretary to the Cabinet—the professional head of the home Civil Service—has agreed to meet Civil Service unions to discuss that matter and a number of other issues. There should be no misunderstanding—there is no basic change in the Armstrong guidelines—over matters of conscience for the civil servant. He can apply to his permanent secretary or to the head of the home Civil Service. These new procedures have been in operation since 1987 and they are not changing.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I understand from what my right hon. Friend is saying about the Armstrong submission to the Treasury Select Committee that, for all practical purposes, for a civil servant the interest of the Government of the day is the national interest—the interest of the Crown. Hon. Members on both sides of the House find it difficult to say that the interests of the Government of the day are exactly synonymous with the national interest. Surely that is wrong in a free democracy and perhaps we need sunshine laws.

Mr. Luce: I should like to clarify the position. As the Government see it, the primary duty of a civil servant is to serve Her Majesty's elected Government of the day. That has always been the position and it remains the position. There are, rightly, procedures for dealing with a matter of conscience.

Mr. Conway: On the activities of senior civil servants, does my right hon. Friend think that it is wise or desirable that they should have contact with organisations involved in governmental or parliamentary lobbying? Is not that very poor practice?

Mr. Luce: I am not certain whether my hon. Friend refers to serving or to retired civil servants. There are clear rules and obligations and civil servants understand the position. Their duty is to their Minister, who is accountable to Parliament.

Mr. Winnick: Should not any new code for senior civil servants who have official dealings with the police make it clear that where there is deep public disquiet—as now, over the Stalker affair—there should be no resistance to a full public inquiry? Will the right hon. Gentleman pass on that view to the Home Secretary?

Mr. Luce: As the hon. Gentleman implies, that is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. If Mr. Stalker wishes to submit a document to the Government, that is up to him.

Agencies

51. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what agencies have been established in the last 12 months.

Mr. Luce: Seven of the 10 executive agencies set up so far were established in the past 12 months. A full list is given in the White Paper "The Financing and Accountability of Next Steps Agencies" (Cm. 914) which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Martin: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the main objective of the agency system is to improve service to the public? Can he give examples of how this is working successfully in practice?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right. One of the main purposes is to improve the management of the Civil Service, especially the service function. The aim is also to ensure that, by setting performance targets, services to the public or to the interests that are served are improved. There is already evidence of that in the Vehicle Inspectorate and Companies House. There is evidence that the 10 agencies are carrying out surveys on their consumer interests and taking account of the views of those whom they serve. The purpose of these reforms is to lead to a better service to the public.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that you had the good fortune to miss most of Friday's rather boring debate, which was initiated by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) and which was enlivened only by the chairman of the Conservative party, who masquerades as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on these occasions, admitting that there had been a mistake in that the authorities allowed a Conservative Central Office official to occupy the Civil Servants' Box. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"I have already said that I apologise to the House if there was a mistake. There should not have been an official from central office in the Civil Servants Box and he has withdrawn from that position."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1990; Vol. 165, c.558.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker was good enough to say that he would initiate inquiries as to whether the Cabinet Office or any other Department had written to the House authorities requesting permission for the Conservative Central Office official to occupy the Civil Servants' Box. I wonder whether the outcome of those inquiries is now known and whether, Mr. Speaker, you can assure the House that there will not be a repetition of Friday's events.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Allow me to deal with the first point of order, please.

Mr. Skinner: It is on the same point.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not care that it is at the moment.

The matter was reported to me and I have carefully studied *Hansard*. I have received a letter of apology from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who accepts personal responsibility for the fact that a Conservative party official was on the list for the Civil Servants Box and was admitted to that Box. I was asked about security. I am satisfied that there was no breach of security at any stage. As the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has now apologised to me, in addition to the apology that he made to the House on Friday, I regard the matter as having been dealt with as far as I am concerned.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that during the debates on the English revenue support grant last week the Opposition were challenged to state their policy. We have had no reply. In the newspapers this morning we have had a sign that the Labour party wants a property tax which might be levied on separate people in the same household. As the Opposition chose not to say on Thursday what is to be their policy, may we have a statement from them so that we may question them on this important subject and find out exactly what they believe?

Mr. Speaker: I have not studied the whole of Friday's debate, but I am surprised that the matter did not arise then.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). Would you Mr. Speaker, rule further on the matter? It is unsatisfactory and out of order that a clear, gross abuse has been committed deliberately. Surely it is not enough for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster simply to apologise. The House is entitled to an explanation of how the abuse happened. What happened was part of a pattern of the blurring of lines between the Government and party, which is no accident. We want, and I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, want from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster something more than an apology which is, in effect, an apology for being caught.

Mr. Speaker: I have looked into the matter with great care. I received a full apology from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in which he explained exactly what happened. I accept that apology. The way in which we deal with each other in matters of this kind implies that if an apology has been given we should accept it.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you will agree that your job is to maintain the dignity of the House and its central role in our political affairs. I hope that, like me, you consider that it does not add to our dignity when either the Government or the Opposition deliberately refuse to reveal a policy or fact to the House which is known to them. A major debate last week was held in a vacuum because the Labour party refused to reveal its policy on the new local property tax based on the capital value of houses. Just four days later it revealed its policy. How is that consistent with the dignity of the House?

Mr. Speaker: The House will accept that I am not responsible for the policies of either the Government or the Opposition.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Are you, Mr. Speaker, not surprised that someone as experienced as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster should seek to introduce a member of Central Office into the Civil Servants' Box? After all these years, one would have thought that he would be aware that that clearly was not in order. In his apology, which is easy enough to give, did he explain why the incident arose in the first instance? What sort of security exists behind your Chair? After all, your back needs to be protected. We must make sure that people from Central Office do not creep into the Box.

Mr. Speaker: I am concerned for my back. I have checked and I think that it is safe. I have received a full apology from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and I have nothing more to say on the matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We accept each other's apologies in this House. Mistakes can happen, even here.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Further to the points of order raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett). You Mr. Speaker, will recall that during that debate the Minister of State was interrupted and challenged when he said that certain Labour authorities misuse their powers to the detriment of the intended community charge. It has been brought to my notice today by the leader of the Conservative minority in Nottingham county council that the Labour authority seeks to increase spending in that county by over £100 million in order to push the

community charge beyond what is reasonable in anybody's book. Is there no way in which the House can protect my constituents from such conduct by Labour authorities?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must do that himself. It is not a matter for the Chair.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have nothing more to say on the matter. An apology has been received and I have accepted it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): How is it that Tory Members can get in to speak?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot call the hon. Gentleman every time he attempts to intervene on a point of order. He got in on Friday.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Is this a different point of order?

Mr. Skinner: No, it is not.

Mr. Speaker: Then I cannot hear it. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to sit down.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have nothing more to say. I have accepted the apology.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not deeply unsatisfactory that named public figures are, by implication, under a cloud of suspicion, seemingly for having done something wrong? Is it not a pity, therefore, that you may not have received a request from the Home Secretary, the Attorney-General or the Minister for the Civil Service at least to clarify the assertion by Mr. John Stalker that the letters "RA" stand for either Armstrong or Robert Andrew? Should not the House of Commons be told exactly what the Government know about Mr. Stalker's assertions on this delicate matter which is of increasing public anxiety, and rightly so?

Mr. Speaker: I heard what the Minister for the Civil Service said. Ti..s is not a matter for the Chair. What the hon. Gentleman said will have been heard by members of the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this about a different matter? I am not taking further points of order on what happened on Friday.

Mr. Skinner: This is a different matter.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that I can trust the hon. Gentleman. He has already said once that his point of order is on the same matter. I shall hear it only if it is on an entirely different matter. As a man of honour, he should do what he says.

Mr. Skinner: You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in a previous parliamentary Session you were in the Chair when a statement had to be made about issuing passes for admission to this House. It was followed by a debate. On that occasion my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) was at the centre of the matter. There was widespread discussion about people who should not be allowed into the House getting into this place. It has been made clear that people who are allowed into the Box must receive authority——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is letting himself down, and me.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No. The hon. Gentleman said that he would raise a different matter and now he is trying to get round it. I am sorry, but I cannot hear him further.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not hearing any more.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall not hear points of order about the same matter. I shall take the point only if it is on a different matter.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that, if Mr. Stalker wants to submit documents under the protection of privilege, he can submit them to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee and if he does not need privilege, he can submit them to the Library where they can be made available to hon. Members? In the circumstances, is it not a little unreasonable of Mr. Stalker to dangle these documents before the British public without being prepared to reveal them in so far as Parliament wants to know what is happening?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for Mr. Stalker. It is not a matter of order in the Chamber.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek to raise a question about passes——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman talking about last Friday's passes?

Mr. Corbyn: I am talking about the point made two years ago in the debate about research assistants. It was made clear that no one could be admitted beyond the public areas of this building without a pass and that a pass had to be approved, in effect, through your office, Mr. Speaker. I am worried that those rules are not being upheld. If they are not, it makes nonsense of the debate we had two years ago. It would be seen to be entirely selective against one person if others, merely at the behest of another Member, were brought not just beyond the public areas of this building, but, in effect, almost into the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: We do not need to dwell on this. I have looked carefully at the matter, and in my original comments I said that I had considered the security aspect of it. I am satisfied that there was no security risk and that an error was made. I hope that it will not happen again.

Orders of the Day

Social Security Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Those in the House who have shared with me much of the experience—that certainly includes the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—will know that there has been a Social Security Bill before the House every year since the Government took office. I make no apology for that and for presenting yet another this year. It would no doubt be rash of me to suggest any parallel with Finance Bills, but it is certainly right, as with the tax system, to ensure that we have the means to keep our social security system properly adapted to changing needs and demands.

This year's Bill is relatively short, but its scope is wide ranging. It makes a number of important changes across the areas of social security and occupational pensions. As with most Social Security Bills, it has both substantial measures of policy and some necessary points—quite a lot of them—of technicality and detail. The two main themes of the Bill are a number of changes to disability benefits and the provision of greater protection for the members of occupational pension schemes. In addition, the Bill makes a number of more minor changes to various benefits, to national insurance contributions, and a change to the scope of the national insurance fund. It also gives new powers to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy—who is admirably represented this afternoon—to introduce a new scheme of grants towards the cost of insulation measures in low-income households.

During my speech I shall seek to describe the main provisions more fully, but, of course, the Bill as such is only one element in the continuing development of social security policy as a whole. As the House will be aware, next year we will spend more than £1 billion each week on social security. The total expenditure next year of £56 billion is more than a third higher in real terms than expenditure in 1979 when the Government took office. Hon. Members will understand that the point that I want to stress in the context of the Bill is the increasingly important part of that expenditure that is committed to providing for the needs of disabled people. We are spending more than £8 billion this year alone on the long-term sick and disabled. Since 1979 such expenditure has almost doubled in real terms, largely because of the great increases in the number of beneficiaries.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I shall give way in a moment.

To take just two examples of the increase in coverage since 1979, which has been an important gain for the disabled community, the number receiving help with extra costs through mobility allowance has multiplied six times and the number receiving help through attendance allowance has increased three times. Those are encouraging and welcome trends.

Mr. Winnick: I had hoped to intervene before the right hon. Gentleman spoke of the disabled, so I hope that he will bear with me.

The right hon. Gentleman has spoken about the increased sums spent on social security, but he should bear in mind the increasing hardship faced by so many pensioners. That is certainly the case in my constituency where pensioners constantly write to me and visit me to discuss their problems. Their pensions have not increased in line with earnings and they have lost a great deal. A married couple, for example, have lost £20 a week because of that. Such pensioners are also facing hardship because of the substantial reduction in housing benefit. One of my constituents receives a total income of £54 a week, but he pays more than £10 a week for his housing as he is no longer allowed a rebate, arising from Government policy. No rebates are allowed on a works pension. Why should pensioners, many of whom fought in the last war and now live in such poverty, constantly be penalised as a result of Government measures?

Mr. Newton: It might have been more appropriate if the hon. Gentleman had sought to make a speech rather than an intervention. I shall resist the temptation to make another speech in reply.

From exchanges that the hon. Gentleman and I, and others, have had in the House in recent weeks and months, he well knows that he is generalising wildly when he implies that anything like his remarks could conceivably apply to pensioners as a whole. Their incomes on average —I readily accept that I am using averages—taking account of state social security benefits and the other sources of income have, according to the latest evidence, been rising about twice as fast as the incomes of the population as a whole. I readily accept that those are averages and not everyone has had the advantage of the improved occupational pensions and improved income from savings which have taken place under the present Government. Therefore, it is right to seek to direct additional resources to those who are least well off. That is precisely what the Government have been seeking to do —most recently with the changes made last October which, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, took additional help to about 2·5 million pensioners with the greatest needs either through income support or housing benefit.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Presumably, one of the Bill's general aims is to improve the quality of service given to claimants and would-be claimants. Surely that would be most welcome, particularly in the light of recent Public Accounts Committee's report on poor quality of service given to claimants and would-be claimants. Has not the time come for the provision of an ombudsman to assess the kind of treatment given to claimants? May I remind the Secretary of State that I recently wrote to him about an investigation carried out by the parliamentary ombudsman into the appalling treatment given to a young pregnant constituent of mine? That case demonstrates the need for such a monitoring service.

Mr. Newton: We have had yet another almost separate speech, but I shall seek to respond in my usual helpful fashion. I readily accept—indeed, it was one factor in our minds when we carried through the major reforms of the system between 1985 and 1988—that some changes were necessary in the system's structure to enable us to deliver

anything remotely like an acceptable service. Whether we consider the speed or accuracy with which claims are processed or the shorter amount of time that people have to spend hanging about in DSS offices, it is clear that a substantial improvement is taking place. That is not to say that errors are not still made, but there is no good reason for departing from the current arrangements by which—as the hon. Gentleman implied—the ordinary ombudsman, if I may call him that, on the request of a Member, is perfectly at liberty to investigate maladministration by the DSS in respect of the payment of benefits, in the same way as in any other sector.

Dr. Godman: He is not.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman says that the ombudsman is not, he must be quarrelling about the distinction between a policy matter and a matter of administration. We could get into a potentially endless argument about that. It would not be sensible to do so, as the Bill has relatively little to do with that. I shall seek to ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives a reply to his letter as soon as possible. However, we shall not gain too much by prolonging the argument now.

I compliment the hon. Gentleman on the actions of people, some of whom are possibly his constituents. There has been a dramatic improvement in the service provided to social security claimants in some parts of north London as a result of the removal of the processing of benefits from offices in north London to the new, central office in Glasgow which is performing extremely well. I visited it and was most impressed. I may say, on behalf of some social security claimants in England, that we are grateful for the effective efforts of some of the hon. Gentleman's constituents in Scotland who have helped us bring about the improvements that he wants.

My statement in the House on 25 October on the annual uprating of social security benefits gave a further clear illustration of our continuing desire to give real extra help to those disabled people in greatest need. The range of measures for long-term sick and disabled people that I announced at that time will increase spending by some £100 million a year and help about 500,000 disabled people and carers. Those changes include the extension of attendance allowance to disabled babies, the extension of mobility allowance to people who are both deaf and blind and a new carers' premium in income support and housing benefit. These measures have been widely welcomed, and they show also how the reformed system of income-related benefits can be used to focus additional help quickly and effectively on particular groups.

These measures, most of which will be in place by April, and all by October, are the first stage of a wide-ranging programme of action that seeks to improve the balance and structure of the benefits provided for disabled people. That programme was set out in the paper "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People", which my right hon. Friend the Minister responsible for the disabled and I laid before the House on 10 January.

The measures in the Bill represent the second stage in our programme. They abolish the attendance allowance six-month qualifying period in respect of terminally ill people. They introduce an age-related addition to severe disablement allowance. They end reduced earnings allowance for new cases and they provide for the end of the accrual of further entitlements to the additional pension element of invalidity benefit.

The third phase of the programme, which, for purely practical reasons, will have to come in a later Bill, is to bring in two new benefits that will substantially improve the help given to disabled people—the new disability allowance and the new disability employment credit. The first will replace the existing attendance allowance and mobility allowance schemes for people under 65 and will extend help to less severely disabled people. The second will make it easier for disabled people to take up and stay in work. The only reason why we are not legislating in this Bill is because such significant changes in the benefit structure need a great deal of detailed work for which there has not yet been time. In pressing ahead with it, as we most certainly shall, we want to take account—this is welcomed on both sides of the House—of the views of interested organisations and individuals.

Thus, the four measures in the Bill are part of a wider strategy to improve the coverage of help with the extra costs of disability, to improve the balance and structure of benefits for disabled people who are unable to work, and in particular to do more for those disabled from birth or early in life, and to improve the help given to those disabled people who can and want to work.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Secretary of State confirm that official figures show that there are about 6·5 million disabled people in this country? Will he also agree that the various measures that he has announced are, although welcome, extremely modest, and that on the highest estimate only 1 million disabled people, including carers will benefit from them?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be wholly dishonest if he or anyone else pretended that the measures that he has announced represent a dramatic improvement in the standard of living for all the 6·5 million disabled people whose interests are at the heart of this debate?

Mr. Newton: Had I attempted to suggest in any way that these measures would benefit 6 million or more people in the way that the hon. Gentleman has described, I should have misled people. But, as I am sure he realises, the figures that he is talking about are derived from the substantial surveys set in hand by the Government and conducted over two or three years by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which deliberately set a very low threshold—some organisations for the disabled think that it was too low—for the assessment of disablement. The surveys therefore covered large numbers of people who, it found, had little in the way of additional costs; and they included some disabled people who are in perfectly ordinary work and are quite as capable of taking part in everyday life as those who are not disabled.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that I have not sought to oversell the substantial improvements that I have proposed. Equally, I hope that he will not seek to exaggerate the extent of the problem. The Government's proposals that I and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State brought forward on 10 January seek sensibly to address some of the main additional needs clearly revealed by the OPCS surveys.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray) *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I shall give way, but I am anxious not to turn this into a series of separate speeches.

Mrs. Ewing: The Secretary of State will recall that when the OPCS survey was commissioned the Government's Social Security Advisory Committee stated that this was an opportunity to revise the system with great precision to ensure that the disabled received the income that they required. Is he convinced that his proposals will reflect that statement? Disabled groups are very concerned that they do not.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady refers to the report published by the Social Security Advisory Committee in 1988 in advance of the committee seeing the main results of the OPCS surveys. That report made suggestions on which we have drawn extensively in developing the proposals that the Minister of State and I put before the House 12 days ago. I would not attempt to speak for the SSAC or to predict the comments that it will no doubt wish to make when it has had a chance to study the paper. I hope that it will recognise that we have drawn constructively on the suggestions that it put forward.

In particular, we have taken considerable account of the SSAC's view that perhaps the top priority, certainly one of the main priorities for additional help, is the group of people for whom the system does least at the moment. That is the group consisting of people who were disabled from birth or disabled very early in life and who have never had the opportunity to build up contributory benefits entitlement or occupational pensions or to make savings on which they can draw when difficulty occurs. That is undoubtedly the group for whom we do least at the moment and our proposals seek to do significantly more for them.

I now want to speak in detail about the clauses in the Bill. The House will recall that last summer we made a firm commitment to tackle the problems faced by terminally ill people who satisfy the eligibility criteria for attendance allowance, but who die before the six-month qualifying period is complete. Clause 1 honours that commitment and gives extra help for terminally ill people, and thus to their families and their carers. It does not just mean extra payments for attendance allowance of what will be from April £37·55 per week. It means extra payments of invalid care allowance and of income support or housing benefit via the disability premiums and the new carers' premium. The total cost is some £35 million a year. That proposal at least is welcomed by all hon. Members.

Clause 2 introduces an age-related addition to severe disablement allowance. I touched on that in reply to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). That, of course, is a non-contributory benefit which is available to the long-term sick who have not paid the required national insurance contributions to qualify for invalidity benefit. That, of course, includes people who have never been able to work at all. Again I underline what I said to the hon. Lady. This group of people is one of our major priorities for additional help.

The measure will give people who become incapable of work before the age of 40 an extra £10 per week in benefit from next December. There will be a lower addition for those who become disabled later in life. That is exactly parallel to the current contributory invalidity addition that goes with invalidity benefit itself. The net additional cost is expected to be about £16 million in 1990-91 and about £50 million a year thereafter. The gross additional cost is much larger.

The third measure relates to the industrial injuries scheme which presently provides for what is called a reduced earnings allowance for loss of earnings by people whose disabilities are caused by industrial accidents or diseases. The majority of recipients of that allowance who are not working are, however, receiving the normal long-term national insurance benefit—invalidity benefit—for those who are unable to earn as a result of sickness or disability. Clause 3 will remove this duplication by ending new—I underline "new"—entitlements to reduced earnings allowance after the autumn. Existing beneficiaries—this is why I emphasise "new"—are not affected by the change. Their entitlements, if continuous, will be preserved after the change, and uprated as at present.

Although the measure will, in due course, reduce expenditure below what it would otherwise have been, the effect will build up rather more slowly than the increases in benefit expenditure to which I referred a few moments ago. We expect the reduction to be about £1 million in 1990-91, £15 million in 1991-92 and about £40 million in 1992-93.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Was not that benefit originally intended for people injured at work who could continue to work but could not achieve the same level of income as they enjoyed before their accident? The benefit was intended to make up for someone's injury and to enable him or her to work for lower wages but still have a reasonable life. That opportunity for people who have been injured at work is now to be wiped out by the Government's actions.

Mr. Newton: We are seeking to direct attention to the general problem on which the hon. Lady touched with the new disability employment credit. I accept that the origin of the present arrangement, known until recently as the special hardship allowance—the name has now been changed—may be as the hon. Lady describes it, but it is also true that the majority of those out of work who receive the REA also receive the ordinary benefit that replaces earnings for those who are unable to work. There is therefore a degree of duplication which can be sensibly tackled in the context of our proposals.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The special hardship allowance is paid to many people in the mining industry who suffer from pneumoconiosis, bronchitis and emphysema who have had to leave highly remunerative face work and move to light occupations because of their disease. Those people depend heavily on the special hardship allowance. Is the Secretary of State saying now that those who continue to work at reduced wages are to lose the benefit? If so, the proposal needs to be looked at again. Moreover, because the earning capacity of people who suffer from such diseases is reduced, their saving capacity is also reduced and they can no longer save as much for their retirement. The continuation of the special hardship allowance and REA has compensated for that to a certain extent. The Secretary of State will be doing a disservice to a lot of good, honest people by making this change.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman makes a point on behalf of his constituents. I have emphasised the principal reason why the Government have felt it right to introduce

the proposal. I should also remind the hon. Gentleman that, regardless of the existence of the reduced earnings allowance, those who suffer from certain prescribed diseases and experience industrial injury—according to the assessed percentage effect of their disablement—already receive substantial preferences, under the industrial injury scheme, over those injured domestically or in the course of their daily lives. In considering these matters, we have sought to consider the balance of provision among disabled people generally—I have never made a secret of that—and in that context, we think that the proposal is reasonable.

Mr. Allen McKay: Let me pursue the matter a little further. The compensation that is paid is not compensation for reduced earnings. The special hardship allowance and the reduced earnings allowance deal with that. Compensation is paid for the accident or the contracting of the disease if there has been negligence and according to the extent of disablement or disfigurement. That is an entirely different matter. If compensation were intended to make up for loss of earnings—as the Secretary of State implies—compensation payments would have to be considerably higher.

Mr. Newton: At least part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks may relate to proposals in another part of the Bill, concerning the balance between benefits paid and the amount of compensation awarded by the courts in an action concerning industrial injury that is judged to be the result of negligence by the employer. That separate matter is one on which my right hon. Friend will comment when he concludes the debate.

The last of the four measures relating to long-term sickness and disability benefits concerns the additional pension element paid with the main invalidity benefit. That benefit has three components. They are a basic pension with increases for dependants, the invalidity allowance which I touched on once or twice earlier, in the context of explaining how we extend it to the severe disablement allowance, and an earnings-related additional pension.

The Bill's provisions make a change affecting only the last of those three elements. Additional pension first became payable with invalidity benefit in 1979. The average payment currently is £9, incurring a cost of about £450 million a year. However, that commitment is growing rapidly and we estimate that by 1998, the average payment will be £21 at a cost of about £1·6 billion, which will continue to grow thereafter.

As I pointed out in my statement on 10 January, a continuing commitment on that scale would be likely not only to inhibit the very welcome growth of occupational sick pay schemes—now thought to cover more than half the population—but widen the gap still further between those who are able to work and those who are not. Such a commitment would take more and more social security resources to those who already enjoy good entitlements, do nothing for people never able to work or whose working life is cut short early, and make it increasingly difficult for any responsible Government to find resources to help disabled people with the greatest needs, as I have done—this relates to the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short)—with the measure in clause 2 to pay an age-related addition with severe disablement allowance.

We want to ensure that we can, both now and in the future, place proper emphasis on the needs of people who most need extra help. Clause 4 provides that no new—and I emphasise again "new"—entitlement to additional pension with invalidity benefit will arise after the end of the 1990-91 tax year. From April 1991, all entitlement to additional pension will be assessed on earnings between 1978-79 and 1990-91. All existing rights up to that time will be preserved. Earnings will continue to be revalued, and I assure the House that the clause does not in any way restrict rights already earned or earned up to that time.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): What is the Government's best estimate of the total cumulative saving from the abolition of the additional pension over future years? Why is it that although a benefit of substantial cost to the state is to be abolished, there is no equivalent reduction in national insurance payments?

Mr. Newton: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question will become clear when I come to the national insurance fund. I have not sought to disguise any figures, and I shall not do so in respect of the information for which the hon. Gentleman asks.

As with the reduced earnings allowance, the change to additional pension will reduce expenditure—but quite slowly, building up from £5 million in 1992-93 to about £100 million by the middle of the decade and about £350 million by the end of it. It is important for the House to recognise that, despite that reduction, total expenditure on such additional pensions with invalidity benefit will continue to grow rapidly, from £450 million now to more than £1·3 billion by the turn of the century.

Incidentally, because invalidity allowance—the age-related addition to invalidity benefit which remains unchanged—is reduced by any entitlement to additional pension, invalidity allowance will for many people replace to some extent entitlement to additional pension.

The complete package of measures, including the two new benefits on which we are working, will give extra help —this picks up the figure mentioned by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden)—to an estimated 850,000 people. The total net effect by 1993-94, even allowing for the measures I have just commented on to restrain future growth, will be to add some £300 million to the total costs of the benefits we pay to the disabled and their carers. That is over and above the money we will pay on account of inflation or any increased demand.

Because of the relatively slow build-up of the effect of what we propose on additional pensions, the result of the package as a whole is to make expenditure on the long-term sick and disabled higher than it would otherwise have been in every remaining year of this century.

Mr. Meacher: I have listened extremely carefully, but the Secretary of State has not answered my question. Will he now tell us what the total cumulative saving to the Government is, over future years, for the abolition of the additional pension?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member, quite reasonably, asked a long series of parliamentary questions immediately after my statement about disability benefits. I have the answers here. The hon. Gentleman also has the answers. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State went to some trouble to ensure that the hon. Gentleman had the answers before this debate.

[Mr. Newton]

I have stated the effects on expected expenditure on additional pension between now and the end of the century. The hon. Gentleman knows from answers that he has been given—it was implied in my earlier remarks—that those effects continue into the next century. The reduction of expenditure on additional pension with invalidity benefit by 2015—some far distant time by which many things will have changed—compared with what would otherwise have taken place if the current commitments for the future had remained unchanged, will be in excess of £1 billion.

I shall give the hon. Gentleman the credit of suggesting that he has not sufficiently considered what I said about the consequences of continuing to make commitments—we had some of the same argument on what I shall call main SERPS—about what a generation of taxpayers and contributors will be prepared to do in 2015. Their form may or may not be honoured. At that time, demographic trends may be at their worst.

It is not certain that a future generation will be able to honour such commitments. As long as they remain unchanged and we continue to make long-term promises about what future generations of taxpayers and contributors will be asked to do, it is increasingly difficult to add additional commitments to current expenditure—as I have tried to do to help disabled people today—because those commitments would be piled on top of long-term commitments.

It would be difficult—I would say impossible—for any responsible Government to make the short and medium-term improvements I am making if we had not taken action to restrain the scale of the uncertain promises that are being made for the future. I make no apologies to the House for that. It is the responsible position for a Government to adopt when considering these matters.

Mr. Meacher: The practicality of SERPS is at the heart of the debate. It is, for the Opposition, a point of principle that SERPS offered far and away the best pension provision for this country—provision that the present Government have destructively undermined.

How does the Secretary of State justify his argument that SERPS was not a practical scheme, given that this country spends about 7·5 per cent. of its national income on state pensions, while in the free-market United States the figure is 8 per cent. and in Germany and France it is as high as 14 per cent? How can the right hon. Gentleman possibly say that SERPS was wildly extravagant or that it was not viable, which it clearly was?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is trying to rerun some rather old arguments dating back to social security measures of 1985 and 1986. I accept that looking ahead 40 or 50 years involves a huge range of uncertainties, not least economic uncertainties; those measures, however, set out clearly the reasons—including demographic trends—for doubting whether it was sensible to continue to make commitments affecting future taxpayers and contributors on the scale represented by SERPS.

I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's comparisons with the position in other European countries take us very far. At present, those countries do not match our structure of support for retired people, which has for a long time included substantial provision for occupational pensions. We need to think in terms of total provision for those in retirement, and in that context the hon. Gentleman's comparisons are misleading.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): The comparisons offered by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) are not valid, because provision for occupational pensions is just as extensive in those countries as it is—increasingly—here. What does my right hon. Friend think of the proposal that the retirement pension—for which the Government are responsible—should be increased in line with either prices or earnings, whichever is the greater? What would have been the cost of implementing that policy over the past 10 years?

Mr. Newton: The cost would have been substantial. The last Labour Government, who implemented such a policy, proved incapable of sustaining it. In the middle of their time in office, they had to fiddle about with the uprating mechanism, which saved some £1 billion at current prices—at pensioners' expense—because they found that they could not live with the consequences of the formula that they had promoted so strongly.

What is more, there is no doubt that an attempt to pursue such a policy would have serious inflationary consequences, thus damaging one of the key factors in the improvement of recent years in pensioners' living standards—the increase in the real return on their savings. As I have told the House numerous times, the available information suggests that—almost unbelievably—pensioners' income from savings actually fell under the last Labour Government. Under the present Government that income has risen sharply, and has contributed significantly to the improvement in their living standards.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Will the Secretary of State confirm that under the last Labour Government the real value of the old-age pension rose by 20 per cent., while under the present Government it has risen by less than 3 per cent? The poorest pensioners had a much better deal under Labour.

Mr. Newton: Pensioners as a whole have done significantly better——

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On average.

Mr. Newton: All right, on average. We are now rerunning exchanges that have taken place on numerous occasions in recent weeks. It can be said, as a broad generalisation—although, as I have always accepted, it is not true of every individual case—that pensioners have done significantly better as a result of various features of what has happened under the present Government, including the improvement in savings income, the greater value of occupational pensions which has resulted from reduced inflation and our measures to price-protect faithfully the basic retirement pension.

I have acknowledged clearly on many occasions—indeed, it is reflected in Government policy—that not all pensioners have benefited to the same extent and, in particular, that older pensioners who tend to have less savings because they retired at a time when there was less prosperity or because they have less entitlement to occupation pensions, have not benefited from those general trends as others have done. But, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) argued last week in a newspaper article, by which I was quite struck, the logic of

that is not that we should go down the path of the wholesale, massive increases that the hon. Member for Oldham, West is advocating, with their inflationary consequences, but that we should focus help on the less-well-off pensioners, as the present Government have been seeking to do.

Mr. Frank Field: Perhaps I will be able later to develop the ideas that I expressed in that newspaper article—*[Interruption.]* No I am not making a speech: I am making an intervention, and if hon. Members behind the Minister keep interrupting, it will take longer.

The Secretary of State's point is that, under this Government's price protection, the real value of the old-age pension has risen by 3 per cent., whereas in a much shorter period, under a Labour Government, it rose by 20 per cent. When the Minister talks about pensioners without savings or occupational pensions perhaps he should remind the House that those people represent about 45 per cent. of all pensioners.

Mr. Newton: The essential point, on which I hope that there will be some community of view between the hon. Gentleman, who takes a close interest in these matters, and myself, is that the average total net income of pensioners rose by 3 per cent. under the last Government, whereas it has risen by 23 per cent. under the present Government. Part of the reason for that is that the approach that the Labour Government adopted to public expenditure as a whole, including social security expenditure, generated rates of inflation that decimated large parts of the income of pensioners as a whole.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise that nearly three quarters of single women pensioners do not have access to occupational pension schemes and that often they do not have access to savings? Does he not agree that over the past 10 years, under this Government, the breaking of the link between the state old-age pension and average earnings has made those people £13·10 a week worse off than they would have been had the link been maintained in 1980? Of course it was callously broken by the Government of which the Minister is a member.

Mr. Newton: No, I do not accept that. Those people, too, would have suffered, perhaps even more harshly, from maintenance of the sort of inflation—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ladywood ought to remember that even the present rate of inflation, which the Government have indicated clearly is higher than they would wish, is barely more than half the average rate of inflation that we experienced in the latter part of the 1970s.

Ms. Short: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Newton: My normal instinct is to give way, and I will think about giving way to the hon. Lady after I have had an opportunity to complete my reply to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). I think that that would be better than allowing intervention to pile upon intervention.

I have already made the first main point that I wanted to make to the hon. Gentleman. The other point, of course —and here I am not endorsing his figure of three quarters, or whatever it was—is that many single women pensioners, especially those who might be described as always having been single, rather than widows who may be entitled to an occupational pension arising from their husband's entitlement, may well be less likely to have the sort of extra provision from which so many pensioners have benefited. Consequently, of course, there will be a disproportionate number of such people among those helped by the measures that we have taken, most recently last October, to steer additional support to the over-75s and the more disabled pensioners by way of increases in income support and consequential increases in housing benefit.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Newton: Yes, I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but so that I do not cause any unnecessary aggravation, perhaps I should give way first to the hon. Member for Ladywood.

Ms. Short: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I should like to put two points to him. The first, which he has completely ignored, is that if we sustain our rate of economic growth at just over 2·5 per cent., our national income will double every 20 years. Therefore, when the Secretary of State says that we cannot afford in the future better pensions or better payments to people with disabilities, he is saying that, relatively, those people will get worse and worse off while our income doubles every 20 years. That first point is extremely important, because it wipes away many of the points that the Secretary of State made earlier about what we can afford for pensioners and for people with disabilities.

My second point relates to inflation. The Government constantly tell fibs about the old economic statistics. They inherited a rate of inflation of about 8 per cent. at a time when inflation across the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development was massively higher than it is now. The Government then doubled that rate by doubling the rate of VAT. They took inflation up and squeezed the economy, causing enormous suffering. They then took inflation down until, with the silly Lawson boom, inflation is now up again. The Government's record on inflation is not a fine one. We now have a problem with inflation although we have had the benefit of North sea oil. The Government should not boast about that.

Mr. Newton: I shall make only two points in response to the hon. Lady. First, she will have to do a great deal more detailed work before she can show that the previous Government's record on inflation was better than that of the present Government, which is to fly in the face of all reality.

Secondly, if—as I should certainly expect in view of the expected continuation of the present Government in office —we were to maintain our success in generating more rapid economic growth than we have over recent years, that would make a whole lot of things easier. However, what is equally true is that if the dismal record of the last Labour Government had been maintained, it would be extremely difficult to maintain the commitments that we have already made, let alone those that the hon. Member for Oldham, West wishes to pile on top.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the last few interventions by Opposition Members display the extreme paternalism and old-fashioned attitudes of the Opposition? After all, most women now enter the professions and earn occupational pensions. On top of that, our introduction of portable

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

pensions means that pensioners no longer have to be dependent on the state. Do the Opposition welcome these moves or do they want to keep us all as permanent beggars?

Mr. Newton: I am not quite sure whether the Opposition welcome the moves or not—perhaps the hon. Member for Oldham, West will enlighten us on that when he speaks. However, I certainly welcome the trends to which my hon. Friend has referred, but at the same time I recognise the point that the hon. Member for Islington, North made. Quite a lot of women who are already retired —and especially older women—have not had the advantage of those trends and we are rightly seeking to concentrate on them some of the additional help that we can give.

In a way, these exchanges lead me naturally into the second main theme of the Bill, which is occupational pensions. We are building on the platform that we have established in recent years with changes that have encouraged people to make proper financial planning for their retirement, and have given them greater choice in deciding what is best for them in their particular circumstances. Individuals have responded—the success of personal pensions is just one indicator of that. In my view at least—I recognise that this is a matter of some controversy to the hon. Member for Oldham, West who will no doubt return to this point when he speaks—a more stable and sustainable pensions structure has been created, in which a larger part of provision over and above the basic state retirement pension will be firmly founded on people's own savings while in work, not on Governments today making commitments that the taxpayers and contributors in 30 or 40 years' time may or may not be able to fulfil.

The Bill covers a number of miscellaneous technical amendments to existing occupational and personal pensions legislation. It also provides for a number of significant measures designed to give greater protection to the members of schemes. I announced last November that we would be taking specific legislative action to respond to the recommendations of the Occupational Pensions Board in its report "Protecting Pensions". This report followed a request to the board from my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) to look at a number of issues relating to the balance of interests of employers and scheme members, and the involvement of schemes in company mergers and takeovers. I should like to pay tribute to the board for its work. The Government have accepted the vast majority of its recommendations, and our proposals have been widely welcomed. Their general thrust is to improve the benefit security, the information and the help available to scheme members.

For some pension scheme members it has come as a painful awakening in recent years that the takeover or merger of their company has resulted in a sharp reduction in the value of the pension they expected to receive. Not only did they enjoy the full value and security of pension rights built up over a number of years; they also had expectations of discretionary increases on top. Instead they can end up with a pension based on the lower salary that they had when their original scheme was wound up. Only part of that is protected by revaluation each year. That, as I have made clear, is no longer acceptable. We are, therefore, proposing that revaluation should be applied to the whole of the preserved pension rights of future early leavers, not just that fraction accumulating after 1985. That will help not only people affected by takeovers and mergers, but those who change jobs. The preserved pensions of all members who become early leavers after the appointed day will be covered. The value of the pension rights above the guaranteed minimum pension level will be revalued until they come into payment in line with price increases, or by 5 per cent. per annum, if that is less.

In addition, we are introducing a further obligation to revalue benefits when a scheme is wound up. Sufficient resources will have to be provided to revalue all present and future pensions in payment in line with price increases up to a maximum of 5 per cent. a year. Any deficiency in the scheme assets necessary to meet those liabilities are to count as a debt on the employer. It has been suggested by some organisations representing employers and pension funds that that could be an undue burden on some employers and schemes. I am, of course, willing on this as on other matters to listen to specific problems that are raised, but I believe that the Government's proposals are a sensible and measured step forward which will greatly improve protection for ordinary scheme members. We are also providing for the appointment of an independent trustee in certain circumstances. That can be only beneficial in ensuring that the interests of both employers and members are taken into account.

The Bill also includes measures to restrict self-investment where pension funds own any assets in companies to which they relate. We think that it is important to spread risks and equally important to remember that the prime purpose of those pension schemes is to provide a good retirement income, not to improve the company's financial position. If a pension fund invests in the company to which it relates, failure of the company leads to double jeopardy, both for employees' job prospects and for their pensions at the same time. In general, our antipathy to that being allowed to happen is widely accepted. Concern has been expressed about the position of small self-administered pension schemes. Those are schemes with fewer than 12 members, often directors of a small family concern which, since their institution, have been accustomed to the opportunities, within Inland Revenue rules, for a certain degree of investment in the related company. It was forcefully argued to me that, in those cases where the shareholding directors and trustees make poor investment decisions, the double risk is for their own jobs and pension prospects rather than those of other people, and that different considerations therefore applied. As I made clear to the House in an answer shortly before Christmas, I have accepted the validity of that argument, and we therefore intend that, where small self-administered schemes consist only of controlling directors, they should be excluded from the proposed self-investment restrictions.

Clauses 7 and 8 of the Bill are concerned with providing a better service for the individual members of schemes. I believe that the introduction of a pensions ombudsman is a major step forward. Although assistance is already available from various sources such as the occupational pensions advisory service, there is a clear need for a mechanism to provide a straightforward method of redress for consumers' problems. Individuals will have free access to the ombudsman and schemes will have to abide by the decisions given. A tracing registry should also assist many

people to track down where past pension rights may be held. On both those issues we are continuing to talk to the pensions industry about how to provide the best possible service to consumers.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Newton: I am conscious of the fact that I have been speaking for the better part of an hour and that I am in danger of trenching unduly into the time available to other Members. *[Interruption.]* I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. The explanatory and financial memorandum states:

"The public expenditure effects of Clauses 7 and 8 are still under consideration."

Will my right hon. Friend explain how the ombudsman and the register will be funded?

Mr. Newton: To a significant extent, apart from details of the arrangements, that issue is under consideration. We hope that the industry will join us in providing this important underpinning for people's confidence in the industry. We are having discussions on that matter.

When I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) that I wanted to make progress, I thought that I heard some mutterings among the Opposition to the effect that they would all have retired by the time I finished my speech. It is right therefore to observe that the principal cause of the length of my speech has been my willingness to give way to Opposition interventions. On the one occasion when I sought to make progress by not giving way, the hon. Member for Ladywood, no less, expressed some concern at the idea that I was not prepared to offer her the same opportunity that I had offered others.

Clauses 11 and 12 concern the administration of the national insurance fund and arrangements for the collection of contributions. As the House will know, the Government Actuary has recently produced his annual report on the state of the fund. It shows that the fund will remain well above his minimum recommended level during the next financial year, but that the balance will fall. That reduction in the fund's surplus is the result of a number of factors, including most notably the major reduction in national insurance contributions worth £3 a week to the great majority of contributors, which took place in October last year at an annual cost of between £2 billion and £3 billion, and the success of our personal pension initiative, since, of course, such pensions attract contracted-out rebates in the same way as occupational pension arrangements generally, under the arrangements introduced by the previous Government.

Personal pensions have proved very popular. We introduced them at a time when the number of people in occupational schemes had remained virtually static for about 20 years. Many people who wanted to make additional provision for their retirement had no ready means of doing so. Now over 3·5 million have opted for the personal schemes. We welcome that unreservedly. The change has enhanced the choice available to individuals in a way they have manifestly welcomed and helped significantly towards the wider objective of getting people to think further ahead about provision for retirement than has traditionally been the case.

Although this means more income forgone by the national insurance fund in the short term, it reduces the burden on the state earnings-related pension scheme in the longer term. As I have said, despite the reduction in contributions, which was generally welcomed, and the very encouraging response to personal pensions, there is no immediate problem. In the present year, the expected balance in the fund, at 34 per cent., is over twice the actuary's recommended minimum. Next year, at 25 per cent., it will still be far in excess of the minimum.

We need, however, to ensure that the balance stays healthy in the years further ahead, and clause 11 does so in a way which could well be argued to be sensible in any event, by simply removing from the fund three benefits that are not related to national insurance contributions and are, therefore, more properly paid out of general taxation.

The benefits in question are industrial injuries benefits, statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay. As the House is well aware, entitlement to national insurance benefits depends on an individual's contribution record, but that is not the case with these benefits. To receive industrial injuries benefit, the only requirement is that the claimant has been in employment. Statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay depend on an earnings test and not on the need to satisfy particular contribution conditions; thus, for instance, married women and widows who have actually opted not to pay contributions in full are nevertheless entitled to receive SSP or SMP. It is, therefore, more appropriate for these benefits and their administrative costs to be met from general taxation rather than from the contributions of those paying for the national insurance system. The national insurance fund, in our view, should concentrate on the proper contributory benefits, and clause 11 provides for that to be done.

I should make it quite clear to the House that this change does not in any way alter the present or future benefit entitlement of any individual. It will not affect the way these benefits are administered by the Department. It will not affect the current arrangements whereby employers recoup the cost of statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay from their national insurance contribution payments. We will simply ensure that the national insurance fund will be reimbursed from general taxation.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): How much will the right hon. Gentleman's Department lose in income as a result of the 2 per cent. bribe for people to move out of the SERPS into private pension schemes?

Mr. Newton: The amount paid out in the current year for commitments in the previous year is £500 million. It is a small part of the total change that is occurring in the balace of the national insurance fund. With respect to personal pensions, the overwhelming bulk is not the incentive to which the hon. Gentleman referred but contracted-out rebates, which have been part and parcel of the system since they were introduced by the Labour Government in the late 1970s. Because of the growth of personal and occupational provision, contracted-out rebates are a longer-term addition to the income forgone by the fund, rather than the incentive to which the hon. Gentleman referred, which, in any case, is due to come to an end.

[Mr. Newton]

I am not trying to dismiss the point made by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), but it should be understood that the incentive is a relatively small part of the change. This should be put in the context of a fund that has an income and outflow of roughly £30 billion a year.

The one significant effect of the clause will be on the finances of the national insurance fund. In the first full year, the fund will gain overall by about £1·9 billion—although, of course, the overall financing of benefits will be unaffected. We see this as a straightforward and sensible rationalisation. It also represents prudent housekeeping for the fund.

Clause 12 concerns the arrangements for national insurance contributions. It introduces provisions which mirror the Inland Revenue legislation contained in the last two Finance Acts to streamline tax collection by encouraging prompt payment. It provides for a system of penalties for late national insurance contribution returns and for interest charges on late paid contributions. I hasten to assure the House that the arrangement is even handed: the Bill also provides that the Secretary of State should pay interest to employers who are owed refunds on their contributions.

The last main point on which I need to touch is clause 10, which gives powers to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to introduce a new scheme of grants towards the cost of insulation measures in low-income households. The new scheme of grants will build on the success of the community insulation projects and the current home insulation scheme. It will, however, go beyond what they have achieved. As the House will be aware, the community insulation projects began in 1982 as part of the community programme. Over 700,000 low-income households have benefited from that scheme. However, with so many fewer unemployed people—which hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome—we can no longer rely on a training programme for the unemployed to deliver this valuable national service. The projects need now to be developed into fully fledged local business.

The clause does no more than give an enabling power to my right hon. Friend to make regulations governing the new scheme. These regulations will set the detailed framework for the new arrangements.

Ms. Short: No new money.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Lady is muttering, "No money." I draw her attention to the financial part of the explanatory and financial memorandum which shows that the expenditure is expected to be about £12 million in 1990-91.

I know that my right hon. Friend wishes to consult widely before those regulations are laid and will be issuing a consultative document on the scheme very shortly. He hopes to do that—I am sure that hon. Members agree that that is proper—before the clause is discussed in Committee, in order to assist the discussion which will, no doubt, take place there and which, from the sound of it, the hon. Member for Ladywood will seek to illuminate.

I shall not seek to take the time of the House by going at length into the more minor and technical provisions of the Bill, although, of course, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will seek to respond to any points that are raised when he speaks at the end of the debate. However, I shall draw attention to one provision, tucked away in paragraph 16 of schedule 5, which, although modest, will, I believe, be warmly welcomed. This provision will extend statutory maternity pay to service women on the same basis as for other women.

The Bill is designed mainly to carry forward the process that we have embarked on to give a better balance to the system of disability benefits. It also makes important and valuable changes to the operation of occupational pension schemes and makes a sensible rationalisation in the scope of the national insurance fund. It will further improve both our social security system and the strength of wider provision for retirement, and I commend it to the House.

4.50 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): After listening to what must be a speech of record length from the Secretary of State, I refer to the long title of the Bill. It begins:

> "The Bill makes a range of amendments to the law relating to social security".

After such a marathon speech, one might have expected that either the Bill or the Secretary of State would have dealt with some of the key outstanding priorities in social security. I submit to the House that in at least four areas urgent action is needed now. On all of them there is a deafening silence in the Bill and they were scarcely mentioned by the Secretary of State. Nothing has been said about the almost 2 million pensioners living on or below the poverty line who have increasingly fallen further behind during the past 11 years. Nothing has been said about the social fund fiasco, the young homeless scandal or the child benefit freeze. Therefore, my first point is simply that the Bill signally fails to tackle the major issues that urgently need attention.

What does the Bill deal with? In his usual amicable way, the Secretary of State made a modest presentation of his proposals. He has a lot to be modest about. As he said at some length towards the end of his speech, the main purpose of the Bill is to give more security to members of occupational pension schemes. The other side of the coin, about which he ostentatiously said nothing, is that Government policy takes away security from members of SERPS, which, I submit, is a much better scheme. Even in respect of occupational schemes, the proposals will do little or nothing to stop employees being cheated of their pension rights.

Let us take as an example the proposal on early leavers, which is central to the Bill. At present only pension rights built up after 1985 are revalued in line with prices, up to a limit of 5 per cent. The Government now propose that all preserved pension rights will be uprated by the same formula—only up to 5 per cent. That is an improvement as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. The average rate of inflation over the recent historic period has been, not 5 per cent., but 10·2 per cent. It is currently 7·7 per cent. In other words, the Government have offered to uprate the pension rights of occupational scheme members at a mere half of the historic rate of inflation. As pensions are nothing more than deferred pay—at least that is the Opposition's view—that is like saying to one's employees, "I am going to give you a pay increase this year of 3·8 per cent.—half the current rate of inflation." That would not

go down well with the ambulance men, with the Ford workers or with Lord King who gave himself a pay rise last year of 11·6 per cent.

Mr. Madden: Or with us.

Mr. Meacher: I am coming to us. That would not go down well with hon. Members, including Tory Members who cheered the Secretary of State's announcement as if it was a bonanza for the pensioned classes. They would not accept it for a moment, not even for one year, let alone for the 20, 30 or 40 years proposed in the Bill. My point is not simply a debating point but an important issue of principle. Why should employees, who are compelled by law to contribute from their gross incomes to pension schemes, be forced meekly to watch that part of their earned income whittled away by increases at only half the rate of inflation? Employees would never put up with that formula in respect of their current pay. It is a form of legal expropriation—I choose those words advisedly—to allow employer controlled pension schemes to extract earned income from employees and then reduce its real value.

Mr. Tim Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that private sector occupational pension schemes are voluntary and that when the Occupational Pensions Board examined the issue in 1981 it said that there should be some ceiling, because otherwise the commitment is open-ended? His proposal is wholly retrospective and could go back many years in the case of a long-serving employee. The hon. Gentleman proposes a huge new cost for employees in the future. They are the people who will have to pay.

Mr. Meacher: Indeed, I appreciate that. However, employees deserve their pension rights. It is a disgrace that pension schemes with funds that currently total over £50 billion are indulging in contribution holidays rather than meeting their prior obligation to their employees.

There is a serious political point here. We are constantly told about the benefits to Sid from privatisation. In pensions, the disbenefits from privatisation are absolutely enormous. SERPS and most public sector occupational schemes, including the scheme for Members of Parliament, offer full inflation-proofing of pensions. The hon. Gentleman and every hon. Member in the Chamber should bear in mind that they will have the advantage of full inflation-proofing. Virtually no private sector scheme provides that. That is not a minor matter. Cumulatively over the years it has a huge impact, not only on the value of the pension achieved on retirement, but on the remainder of the person's life, which might last another 20 years or more.

It can be argued that the income losses from most private occupational schemes—let alone from personal private pensions, which I shall come to later—far outweigh any income gains that individuals may have received from all other forms of privatisation put together.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): The hon. Gentleman is entitled to make the point that index-linking in occupational schemes is not as high as he would like. Will he also make it clear that the contributory pension scheme for hon. Members has a contribution rate of 9 per cent., whereas the average rate for occupational schemes is of the order of 5 per cent.? He is saying to the work force that if it wants index-linking it will have to pay for it and pay for it severely. The hon. Gentleman has not made that clear.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman's figure is not right. Contributions are on average somewhat over 5 per cent. and I shall give some examples later. Certainly, index-linking would not require significant increases in contribution rates when there are huge and growing fund surpluses. The hon. Gentleman must face that. The trustees of pension schemes do not have a divine or unmitigated right to that money. It is owed to the employees who contributed to it in the first place.

Mr. Cran: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Meacher: I want to get on. The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech.

The Secretary of State says that the Bill provides more protection to occupational scheme members, but it is rather like a car insurance policy that excludes crashes. According to the consulting actuaries, R. Watson and Sons, if his formula had been in operation over the past 20 years a pensioner retiring in 1989 who left the scheme 20 years ago would have found the real value of his pension rights reduced by more than 60 per cent. That is a telling figure. That is the acid test. It reveals the pathetic inadequacy of the so-called protection in the Bill for what it is.

I want to be open about this and tell the Secretary of State that the Labour party will not accept the formula. When we come to power we shall ensure a proper level of protection for early leavers. That means that we shall require pension rights to be uprated each year by the full rate of inflation. That is not an unreasonable requirement for schemes when surpluses currently top £50 billion—that figure is not even the most recent and the sum may well be significantly more—and when many companies have recently declared extended contribution holidays for themselves. To require anything less is to cheat employees of a significant part of their entitlement to their deferred pay.

There is another major weakness in this part of the Bill. It does nothing to ensure that occupational pensions maintain their value in payment after retirement. It is a scandal that some, not many, private sector schemes make no increase in pension after retirement.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): Hear, hear.

Mr.Meacher: I am glad to have support for that point.

The same actuaries have shown that some people who retired in 1969 would have found the real value of their pension reduced in those circumstances to a mere 15 per cent. of its original value. The Bill will do nothing to stop what is little more than legalised robbery.

Even where private schemes guarantee increases, and most do, it is normally at the low level of about 3 per cent. That is only one third of the average rate of inflation for the recent historic period. That is completely unacceptable. In our view, pensioners should have the first call on the surplus of a scheme until the real value of their pensions has been restored fully. Then it should be maintained annually.

Mr. Hawkins: Hear, hear.

Mr. Meacher: I am glad again for support for that point. It is important. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to have a word with his right hon. Friend. The Bill lamentably fails in that necessary requirement.

[Mr. Meacher]

We reject the Government's view that it is sufficient to urge employers and trustees as a matter of good practice to price-index pensions up to 5 per cent. a year. Because company pension schemes are in a healthy financial position and companies continue to enjoy contribution holidays—a position which could last several more years——

Mr. Cran: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way now because I am making a point.

Mr. Cran *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall give way in a moment.

We shall table amendments in Committee calling for the full inflation-proofing of occupational schemes. I say advisedly to the right hon. Gentleman—perhaps I anticipate the point that the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) seeks to make—that it would be far better to offer companies an escape clause to cut pension payments in conditions of real economic crisis than to continue at a time of sustained profitability grossly to underpay pensioners on the grounds that occupational schemes cannot accept an open-ended commitment to inflation-proofed pensions.

For the same reasons we criticise the Bill because it does nothing to stop employers declaring unilateral contribution holidays for themselves while making their employees continue to make contributions from their pay. The British Aerospace scheme, for example, is in surplus to the tune of £300 million. Recently the employers declared a two-year contribution holiday for themselves, yet they continue to require their employees to contribute 6 per cent. from their pay.

Mr. Tim Smith: We do the same.

Mr. Meacher: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is asking what is wrong with that.

Mr. Smith: I am not.

Mr. Meacher: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is not. It is manifestly unjust that employees should have to contribute towards their deferred pay when employers do not.

The GKN scheme is in substantial surplus and a three-year contribution holiday was declared from 1988. Yet pensions in payment are being uprated only by 5 per cent., which is less than two thirds of the current rate of inflation. The Manufacturers Hanover Trust company scheme, a major banking scheme, has already had four years of contribution holidays which are expected to continue for another three to four years, yet pension rises are not indexed and increases are discretionary.

Mr. Cran: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the surpluses of a pension fund can be given away only once, yet the whole point of a pension scheme is to take obligations for liabilities for a long period? That being so, is he not oversimplifying the case and duping employees who happen to be members of a pension scheme by telling them that they can get something for nothing when they cannot?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman, who, before he came to the House, had a position with the CBI, seems to be a spokesman for the pensions industry. It would be helpful if the pensions industry, which has substantial and still growing funds, recognised its proper responsibility to those who made the contributions in the first place.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry to prolong this, but the hon. Gentleman made an important statement. If I understood him aright—I should be grateful if he would confirm whether I did—he said that he would prefer to impose by legislation fresh obligations on occupational pension schemes along the lines that he suggested, but at the same time make legal provision for the schemes not to meet those obligations if circumstances became difficult. If the hon. Gentleman did not say that, he certainly talked about conditions of economic crisis. I do not know how he would define them. If what he said had any meaning, I understood him to say that he would impose new obligations on schemes now because conditions look good —because of nearly 10 years of a good Government—and would give them powers to welsh on or reduce those obligations if conditions became difficult. I am not sure that that would be welcomed by occupational pensioners.

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State must explain how he can justify surpluses continuing at their current enormous level without full inflation-proofing being provided.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Answer the question.

Mr. Meacher: I am.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman is not.

Mr. Meacher: That is what I am proposing. I accept that there could be conditions of real economic crisis—I used those words advisedly—when in some cases it might be impossible for those schemes to meet their obligations. In that limited and marginal case I am prepared to accept that there may be an exception. The vast majority of schemes will not be in that position and they should be given proper standards. There should be a proper benchmark for their obligations. There is none now and there is none in the Bill. That is not fair or right.

Mr. Newton: I shall not seek to intervene again as I do not want to prolong the hon. Gentleman's speech unnecessarily. There will be a great deal of interest, however, in what he has said. When he speaks of conditions of economic crisis, does he mean a broad, generalised crisis affecting the economy or would his dispensation clause let out a particular pension fund that got into difficulties, which is a much more likely eventuality? Often such funds are connected with particular firms. What the hon. Gentleman is seeking to do is to encourage all sorts of hopes and to impose all sorts of commitments on funds to make additional payments at the moment, because things happen to be good, but those commitments would not be worth the paper they were written on as soon as things got less good. That is fundamentally irresponsible.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman has a nerve to say that what I am proposing, which is widely understood to be reasonable and perfectly viable, is something that occupational schemes somehow could not manage. He is

simply not addressing himself to the size of the current surpluses, which, at £50 billion, represent one-ninth of the entire national income. Those surpluses are colossal. For the right hon. Gentleman to use weasel words about the inability of such schemes to meet those obligations shows a craven feebleness and an unwillingness to accept responsibility on behalf of employees.

Mr. Cran *rose*——

Ms. Primarolo *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way again to the hon. Member for Beverley, but I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo).

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Perhaps we should turn my hon. Friend's comments round the other way so that the Minister understands them. I understand my hon. Friend to say that where a pension fund has a surplus it is unreasonable for the employer to have the option to suspend his contribution while compelling the employee to continue to make his. The employer, by suspending his contribution, is spending the surplus to his advantage now instead of paying out from that surplus in the future to the people who contributed to the scheme.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is right. This is a pipsqueak of a Bill as it allows employers and trustees to go on paying miserly increases in pensions, below the rate of inflation, when pension schemes are in massive surplus. Even then it allows employers——

Mr. Cran *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall certainly not give way to the hon. Gentleman for a third time—he can make his own speech. I have answered his point at considerable length and if he had a better point to make, I might consider giving way again.

It is not acceptable to allow employers to go on making small increases to pensions, below the rate of inflation, when pension funds are in such enormous surplus. Even then the Bill allows employers and trustees to stop contributing to their funds without consultation. The Labour party believes that that is the opposite of good practice. We shall instead require occupational schemes to meet full inflation-proofing targets and so we shall place a ban on employers' or trustees' unilateral contribution holidays to ensure that they do so.

Mr. Hawkins: I agree with much of the hon. Gentleman's speech. Many funds have allowed employees who have retired in the past to be grossly ripped off by inflation. It is possible for everyone to be offered an index-linked pension and it is possible to invest in index-linked bonds.

Mr. Tim Smith: At what cost?

Mr. Hawkins: I do not care about the cost. I look forward to the day when everyone will be offered the choice of investing in an index-linked pension rather than taking up the absurd Mickey Mouse offers from insurance companies. Such offers speak of £65,000 at the age of 65, but one has no idea whether that £65,000 will be worth 4p or £1 million as that pension is not indexed for inflation. Everyone should have an index-linked pension.

Mr. Meacher: I am glad that at least one Conservative Member is knowledgeable enough and, with genuine respect to the hon. Gentleman, brave enough to make that intervention. He is absolutely right that index-linked bonds are one way in which to achieve the desired result.

If it is impossible for occupational pension schemes to manage inflation proofing—the minimum requirement of a good pension scheme—people should reconsider whether SERPS is a better system in terms of providing minimum guarantees in retirement. That system guarantees full inflation-proofing as well as many other important benefits, for example, allowing women to choose the best 20 years of their working lives as the basis for their pensions—at least that is how Labour left it.

The second major issue in the Bill concerns disability benefits. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) will be dealing with this matter in more detail on Wednesday in our Supply day debate. The Secretary of State said that the provisions for the disabled had been widely welcomed, but that must be another Government euphemism, meaning that the provisions have been widely attacked by the disability organisations. The over-trumpeting of the proposals is matched only by their modesty. After 10 years of waiting and six reviews from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, churning out more and more information, all the Government have brought forth is a mouse. The proposals were heralded as a comprehensive review, but they represent a narrow tinkering with existing provision without any radical reassessment. Despite overblown claims of substantial new money being available, we are talking about old recycled money, even without the cuts in the package that drain that money away.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I am not sure when that 10-year period began. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the period since the Conservative party has been in government, payments to the disabled have increased at a far greater rate than they were ever increased under the previous Labour Government. What does the hon. Gentleman mean by a 10-year wait?

Mr. Meacher: I am rather surprised that the hon. Gentleman should seek to draw attention to this as it is embarrassing to the Government.

Ten years have elapsed since the Government made a commitment in 1979 to improve benefits for the disabled. Between 1979 and April 1989 there has been a cut in the value of almost all disability benefits—the disabled have been forced to wait 10 years for a mouse. First, the Government said that they needed to be sure that the economy could bear such benefit improvements. By 1984 they said that they were satisfied by the rate of economic growth, but they then said that they needed more information. They set up six OPCS studies, which have now reported, but, as a result, we have got a feeble set of proposals.

There is a huge hole in the middle of the Government's review as it omits the two thirds of disabled people who are elderly, including many of the severely disabled. The Government believe in targeting on those in greatest need, but obviously only as long as it is cheaper to do so; and if it turns out to be more expensive, they ignore that need. As a result, the needs of seven out of every eight disabled people have been neglected by that so-called comprehensive review.

[Mr. Meacher]

The Bill proposes an age-related addition to the severe disablement allowance. Any increase in disability benefits is welcome, but the additions are small and, regrettably, the right hon. Gentleman has not followed the advice of his Social Security Advisory Committee to raise progressively the rates of SDA to the level of invalidity benefit. The new addition does nothing to remove the inherent discrimination in SDA against people who have never been able to pay national insurance contributions, particularly those disabled from birth. Worst of all, most disabled people on SDA are also on income support. The increase that they will receive in severe disablement allowance will simply be offset by an equivalent cut in income support. That is one of the many examples of recycling contained in the package.

The cost of the new benefit is estimated by the Government to be £50 million in 1992-93. But they also calculate that that will be offset by savings on other means-tested benefits for the disabled of £65 million in 1993-94. Therefore, even with this, the disabled will make a net loss.

The right hon. Gentleman's disability statement two weeks ago was more than an exercise in the mysteries of semantics than a guide to the Bill. He said then that the net extra cost of the package would be £300 million by 1993 and all the extra money was new. I can only assume that the right hon. Gentleman is into his Alice-in-Wonderland phase in which words mean what he says they mean. By any normal dictionary definition of new, none of the so-called extra money is new.

In his statement on 10 January the right hon. Gentleman told the House:

"The extra provision for the first three years . . . has been included in the totals for my Department published in the Autumn Statement."—*[Official Report,* 10 January 1990; Vol. 164, c. 943.]

In other words, it is within the existing budget.

Mr. Newton: I am trying to resist the temptation to intervene, but I cannot when the hon. Gentleman seeks to place on record points that are manifestly misleading. He must know that the Autumn Statement is the outcome of prolonged, sometimes difficult, discussions between Ministers and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The result of the discussions was an agreement between the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and me, endorsed by the Cabinet, to increase expenditure on long-term sickness and disability benefits to the extent embraced in the Autumn Statement. That does not mean that it is not new money, but that we did not advertise it to the world until the Autumn Statement was made. It will be clearer when the White Paper on public expenditure is published at the end of the month.

I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to mislead the House and therefore, while I am on my feet, I shall explain that the hon. Gentleman was given an answer last Friday on the severe disablement allowance invalidity addition, in which it was made absolutely clear that the £50 million which I said will be spent is net of savings on income-related benefits. If he looks at the answer he was given, he will find that the gross expenditure is £115 million and the net expenditure is £50 million. No one is seeking to disguise the fact that there will be an offset. Equally, he should not disguise the fact that there is an increase in expenditure on severely disabled people.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman seeks to make the point that because the expenditure was mentioned in the Autumn Statement—about which he had already issued a lengthy statement, press notice and departmental brief—when he announces it again, we should assume that when he says that it is new money it really is new money. However, it has already been announced. We have heard for the third time today about the content of the Autumn Statement. He repeated his announcement at the start of his statement on 10 January and repeated it again today—that is the third time. He is talking about exactly the same money which has already been announced. There is absolutely nothing new here.

If there is any genuinely new money, it will be swamped by three major cuts in disability benefit in the Bill. By far the most important is the abolition of the SERPS additional pension to invalidity pension, about which we have already had some exchanges. Disabled people have waited patiently for 10 years for the long-promised improvement in benefits. Frankly, the right hon. Gentleman should be ashamed that the centrepiece of his review is a massive cut which will save the Government £350 million by the end of the century. I tried to make this point earlier: it will save a great deal more because the Government's document, "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" states that by 1998 the cost of the additional pension will still be £1·6 billion a year.

Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that one estimate shows that the eventual saving to the Government from the Bill will amount to no less than £3·5 billion cumulatively over future years, at the expense of disabed people? If that is the result of a review designed to improve benefits for one group in poverty, I only hope that the right hon. Gentleman will treat the other groups to a long period of benign neglect.

The Government's reasons for the destruction of this valuable benefit are instructive. Astonishingly, the right hon. Gentleman repeated them today without any apparent embarrassment. Paragraph 6.8 of "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" states that the continuation of the additional pension

"would have been likely not only to inhibit the growth of occupational cover but also, through the constraints inevitably imposed on Government's ability to do more for those with no such entitlement, to have widened yet further the gap between those who have been able to work and those who have not."

In other words, if everyone cannot have it, no one shall have it. That is the classic argument of a Government who prefer to level down rather than up.

The Government's other pretext is no less contemptible. They say that the benefit will inhibit the growth of occupational schemes. There we have it: it is more important for the Government to promote private sector insurance than to leave in place good, existing benefits for disabled people.

The Government's explanation for getting rid of the reduced earnings allowance—another cut in the Bill—does not bear looking into either. They have said, and the right hon. Gentleman repeated it today, that it overlaps invalidity benefit. That is surely to misunderstand the purpose of industrial injuries benefits which are intended to be compensation benefits, not income maintenance benefits. I suspect that having ended 90 per cent. of industrial injuries entitlements, through the Fowler review

of 1986, the Government have fastened on the pretended and small anomaly as an excuse to pave the way for the ending of industrial injuries benefits.

There is no coherent or comprehensive restructuring of benefits, as the right hon. Gentleman likes to claim, merely a rehash of existing provision, with small extensions, but enough camouflage for a substantial cost-cutting exercise. If only the organisations for the disabled had been consulted. However, it is no accident that they were not. The review was published on 10 January without any invitation to comment on its contents and complete with a timetable for its implementation. The very next day the Social Security Bill was published executing phase 1 of the proposals. To go from White Paper to Bill in one day, after a wait of 10 years, is simply to give the most insulting confirmation that the Government wish to avoid, at all costs, any input from the people most affected. It is a tragedy that this component of the Bill is such a huge missed opportunity.

The present framework of disability benefits is a patchwork of disconnected, uneven and jumbled rights. It desperately needs an integrated structure that coherently combines cover for extra daily living costs with a flexible allowance according to either partial or total working capacity. Sadly, in the Bill there is no vision, no sense of measured steps towards a final objective, no sign of the comprehensive disability benefit which is urgently needed.

I do not blame the Government for failing to bring forward such a ready-made benefit at one go. However, I roundly condemn them because, after 10 years in which they have not even uprated existing disability benefits in line with prices, let alone earnings, they have failed to show any signs of ever having any intention to move towards such an integrated benefits system. For that, we cannot forgive the Government.

On behalf of the Labour party I pledge that we shall introduce a new and comprehensive disability benefit which will provide assistance with the extra costs of disability matched to the degree of disability. It will also supply a guaranteed income, without a means test, for disabled people of working age who cannot obtain employment because of long-term illness or disability.

For those who can work, the cost element of our new benefit will not be means tested and will not be withdrawn if a person obtains work. When the earnings of those able to return to work are insufficient to meet their basic needs the new disability benefit will supplement their income. We want disabled people to participate in and make their fullest contribution to society, and we have the vision and the drive to bring that about. If the Tory Government will not bring it about, we shall.

The third and last main element of the Bill concerns the proposed new grants for home insulation and for advice on energy efficiency for low-income households. There was a gaping hole in the Secretary of State's comments on this matter, too. He did not tell us how large the grants would be; what the total funds available will be; how much of the £12 million that he mentioned will be merely transferred from other budgets; and how much will be new money. Nor did he tell us whether the new money is once again Department-speak for no new net money, and merely a euphemism for clawback.

I warn the right hon. Gentleman that, early in the new post, he is already earning himself a dangerous reputation for laundering social security money, with sleight of hand and hidden juggling his specialities. On this occasion he has chosen selective silence to protect himself. He did not say a word about the fact that the Government's enforced switch in 1988 from community programme to employment training has caused the number of draughtproofing jobs carried out to plummet by 34 per cent. He did not say a word about the fact tht the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 abolished the 95 per cent. grant to local authorities for roof insulation and draughtproofing for low-income households; and he said not a word about the fact that, with 5·5 million low-income households estimated to have no draught-proofing, it will take 45 years at the current rate of progress to provide them with this minimal protection. As most of those in such households are elderly, I suspect that not too many are likely to live to see the benefit—or is this another recycling device to reshuffle the costs on to the next world?

There is no overall theme to the Bill; it is more like an exercise in filling holes in the dyke. The background to the Bill, about which the Secretary of State never breathed a word, is that Government policy is increasingly splitting that dyke open all over the place. It is ironic that this is called a Social Security Bill, given that the one recurring characteristic of Government policy in this area is the production of insecurity.

Nowhere is this more glaring than in pensions. The Government inherited SERPS, which had all the virtues of a first-class pension scheme. It offered very low administration costs, job mobility, comprehensive inflation-proofing and maximum security in old age. Nothing in the private sector can equal this combination of advantages.

The Government tried to abolish SERPS, and when they found that politically impossible, they hobbled it. Then they introduced personal pension schemes which are expensive to administer and which offer no security because, being money purchase schemes exposed to the vagaries of the stock market, investors have no idea of what benefits their contributions will eventually buy.

Then, to encourage people to take a flutter on their retirement, the Government offered a 2 per cent. bribe which has now cost a cumulative total of £1·5 billion, and then forced other national insurance contributors to pay for it. Despite this huge subsidy, a high proportion of the 3·5 million people who have gone on a personal pension gamble will end up with grossly inadequate pensions. It is sheer humbug for the right hon. Gentleman to claim that he is improving protection in pensions when every major act of the Government's pension policy has undermined the long-run financial security of millions of people in our country.

Insecurity is the hallmark of Government policy in other areas that are also conspicuous by their absence from the Bill. The Prime Minister likes to claim that hers is the party of the family, but how can 7 million mothers feel security about their budgeting when the Prime Minister has frozen child benefit for three years running so that it is now worth 14 per cent. less in real terms than in 1979? How can those on the lowest incomes feel security when the social fund is grossly underfunded by the Government and now exhibits refusal rates that top 60 per cent? How can young people obtain security of getting a job when the denial of all benefit rights has turned thousands of 16 and 17-year-olds into an itinerant army of cardboard-box outcasts, unable to get a job until they have a place to stay and unable to get a place to stay until they have income from a job?

[Mr. Meacher]

This is a patch-up-and-mend Bill which tackles none of the fundamental insecurities plaguing the lives of millions of our poorest citizens, many of them caused directly by the Government's policy. It is like a medical insurance policy that tidies up a few minor administrative anomalies but neglects to provide cover against all the major illnesses. That is why we shall reject the Bill's feeble ineffectiveness in the Lobbies tonight.

5.36 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I support the reforms outlined in the Bill, which I know will be warmly welcomed by Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) adopted a policy that was appropriate for a Labour Front-Bench spokesman last Thursday; when repeatedly pressed for his policy on local government he chose to say nothing. Today, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) adopted another policy, which was to come up with a commitment that I had never heard before on the future index-linking of pensions. When that policy and commitment are analysed, it may turn out that the hon. Member for Dagenham chose the right approach.

There are two sets of reforms in the Bill, one dealing with pensions, the other with the disabled. At the end of the Bill there are also some useful reforms which are basically tidying-up measures.

I greatly welcome the additional protection afforded by the pensions ombudsman. As responsibility for pensions shifts away from the public to the private sector, as the sums involved become much larger and as the whole subject becomes more complex it makes sense to institute the protection given by an ombudsman to those with pensions, especially as this has been tried and found successful in many other parts of society.

I noticed that the building societies ombudsman, who was not initially included in the Building Societies Bill but was added in Committee, was funded by the building societies. This Bill provides that the Secretary of State will pay for the pensions ombudsman. Why is one criterion applied to building societies and another to pensions?

Schedule 3 gives the Secretary of State power to help organisations such as the occupational pensions advisory service. I very much hope that this opportunity will be taken to give it more resources to strengthen its network throughout the country of advisers who give independent advice to people with pension problems.

As hon. Members who have received a briefing today from the Consumers Association will know, that body hopes that the ombudsman will publish his report. It has been helpful in other areas and I see no reason why such an obligation should not be placed on the pensions ombudsman. I hope that that suggestion will be added to the Bill in Committee.

I welcome the additional rights for early leavers. Of course, I understand that an employer will wish to use his pension fund to retain his staff and dissuade them from leaving. However, it seems that there is a countervailing national interest in job mobility. A healthy economy is a changing one. It has to respond to new demands and new technology, and it would be wrong if penalties for early leavers were to pull too hard in the opposite direction, as they do at the moment, and inhibit the essential job mobility that the economy needs. I understand the objections of the CBI, and I do not agree with them.

The Government's proposals are much more modest than those advanced by the Opposition. Against the background of most pension funds, the relatively modest extra insurance included in the Bill is such that a well-run pension fund should be able to take it in its stride. A growth rate of 5 per cent. seems a fairly modest target.

I welcome the change of approach by my right hon. Friend on small self-administered pension schemes. I never understood why it was proposed to prevent an SSAP investing in the firm's own freehold, when that might have been a secured loan, while allowing it to invest in somebody else's freehold without any security at all. The change of heart contained in a parliamentary answer before Christmas has been well received by small businesses for which the pension fund has often been a useful source of funds.

I welcome the pension changes in the Bill because they go with the grain of increased reliance on the private sector while underpinning that with useful extra insurances such as the ombudsman and the funding for independent organisations. One cannot ignore the disappointment expressed by many voluntary organisations about the levels of benefit for the disabled. However, one needs to distinguish between the levels of benefit and the new structure. Benefits can be increased. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) said in an intervention, the Government have an excellent record on increasing benefits, far better than that of their predecessors. I hope that the debate in Committee and in the House will concentrate on the structure of benefits rather than on the level. Good progress has been made, but we must still try to make the structure more streamlined, simplified, user-friendly and comprehensible.

I am returning to social security matters after a gap of some 10 years and I have been struck by their growing complexity. Hon. Members find the subject complex and so will the disabled. I hope that we can look again at the income of carers. Caring Costs, an organisation which I think has been in touch with most hon. Members, has outlined a number of improvements, many of which involve little structural change but involve increasing the level of benefits. Some of us serving on the Committee considering the National Health Service and Community Care Bill will want to see how the structure of benefits in this Bill interrelate with the implementation of Griffiths, which the Committee is about to discuss. It is important that the philosophy outlined in Griffiths is made reality by any social security reforms that are going through in parallel.

I welcome the provisions in clause 1 for the terminally ill. I understand that they will help about 58,000 people. The explanatory memorandum shows that almost 275 more civil servants will be required to administer the provisions. That implies that each employee in the Department will process one case a day, which seems to be a low level of productivity. Perhaps I have misunderstood, but we need an explanation of why so many staff are needed.

The theme running through the reforms for the disabled, coupled with other announcements, seems to be that work is now a real option—more of an option than it was for the disabled. That is partly because the economy is picking up and there is a demand for labour, partly as

a result of changes made by employers to make their premises more adaptable for the disabled, and partly as a result of changing expectations about the role of the disabled. The Bill seems to tidy up the interface between income in work for the disabled and benefit out of work, and it removes any perverse incentives not to seek employment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) may deal with clause 10 in more detail because she had direct responsibility in the Department for administering the home insulation scheme. That scheme combines wholly worthwhile objectives, such as training the unemployed, saving energy and helping those on low incomes to keep warm. Local newspapers have pictured hon. Members posing with a roll of insulating material under one arm and a pensioner under the other before insulating the loft.

There has been some uncertainty about the future of the home insulation scheme and I am delighted to read that Neighbourhood Energy Action, whose work in this field I commend, has been involved. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State proposes to consult before finalising the scheme, as was demanded of him by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. I hope that as soon as the consultation is over, we can put that type of scheme on a firm footing because it has been an outstanding success.

The reforms outlined in the Bill are balanced, realistic, prudent and carefully targeted and I have no hesitation in commending them to the House.

5.45 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I intend to touch on some of the points of the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), to whom the House always listens with great interest. The Secretary of State is one of the most respected members of the Government, but his Bill lets disabled people down badly. The best way to judge the proposals is from the reaction of disabled people themselves and, of course, from the reactions of organisations for the disabled. They are furious about the provisions in the Bill and feel insulted.

I do not know whether the Secretary of State saw Professor Townsend's letter in today's issue of *The Independent*. It is a fine letter by a great authority on disability. It is careful, authentic, logical and well reasoned. Writing on behalf of the Disability Alliance, Professor Townsend speaks for many millions of disabled people. I am glad to see that the Minister has the letter.

Disabled people have waited patiently—too patiently—for the implementation of the 1979 Conservative party promise of a coherent disability income. All that has emerged are these pathetic proposals which will help 850,000 disabled people out of a total of 6·5 million identified by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The Bill will help only 13·5 per cent. of the disabled population. In addition to those disabled people there are 6 million carers. They were mentioned by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and identified in a general household survey in 1985.

The proposals will cost £300 million, and that money has been filched from other parts of the benefit system. The Minister knows that. The money will come largely from child benefit and from industrial benefits. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) was right to complain about hitting industrial benefits. When the Secretary of State was originally making his statement, I put a point to him and I make no apology for repeating it. The £300 million to help disabled people is minuscule compared with the £23 billion given in tax cuts to top earners. I know that the Secretary of State's Department is not responsible for tax matters, but the Government as a whole have given that disproportionate increase to top earners and only £300 million to the disabled. That means that disabled people are denied the benefits of economic growth.

In his foreword to the booklet "The Way Ahead" which, in many ways, is the foundation of the Bill, the Minister of State said that attitudes towards disabled people are changing. He was right. I welcome that, and I know that he does, too. But the attitudes of disabled people are also changing. Disabled people will no longer passively accept such shabby treatment by the Government, and I believe that disabled people are shabbily treated. They are not asking for luxury; they are not even asking for compensation for their disablement. All that they want is an equal chance to participate in society and a reasonable amount of help from the Government.

In addition to their disability, the biggest burden that disabled people have to bear is that of special costs. I am dismayed that the Secretary of State has not provided for adequate help with extra costs. The Bill could have provided him with a marvellous opportunity to do something about it. That help has been the demand of disabled people since I entered the House in 1956, when Megan du Boisson began campaigning with the Disablement Income Group. That marvellous, fragile, disabled woman, who was a great campaigner, explained then that disabled people needed provision to help them with those extra costs.

What are the extra costs? What does a severely disabled man or woman require? Special heating is imperative. Special diet is vital. Laundry needs to be done. Severely disabled people cannot get out to shop around and shop economically. Many disabled people need unprescribed medication. In addition to those problems, they face the difficulty that they cannot save money by undertaking do-it-yourself repairs and so on. All those items add to the costs borne by disabled people, and none of them is covered by the Bill. That is a failure on the Government's part.

The needs of severely disabled people far exceed those documented by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. It would appear from the DIG's survey that the costs of some disabled people are eight times higher than those documented by the OPCS. The Minister is looking somewhat askance at that estimate, but it is the estimate that I prefer. The DIG survey said that many of the disabled people interviewed had described their financial position as "just scraping by" or "permanently in debt". Many severely disabled people are suffering in great debt or living on the margins of poverty as well as bearing the burden of their extra costs. They need very generous provision from the Government. All severely disabled people need that extra help, and they have simply not been given it. I hope that the Secretary of State can be persuaded to think again as the Bill proceeds through the House.

I echo the point made by the hon. and respected Member for Ealing, Acton. The question of the cost of

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caring has been raised in the House on many occasions, and it should become one of the major disability issues of the next decade. The Government have done no more than to tinker with the cost of caring, and have failed to deal with the implications of the present unacceptable burden on voluntary carers. I think that carers are among the nation's most exploited people. The Government have failed to provide for them adequately. That failure means that millions of carers will feel embarrassed because they are doing a job without adequate financial provision. Millions of disabled people will also feel severely embarassed because they do not want to have relatives looking after them who are not being helped adequately. They are being given some help at present, but it is not enough. The relationship between millions of disabled people and their carers will be distorted. These are serious issues and the Government are doing nothing substantial about them. I hope that the Secretary of State will reconsider.

The flimsy nature of the Bill can also be seen in the omission of any help for the 4·2 million elderly disabled people. The growing number of elderly people will swell the total number of disabled people in the future.

Like the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton, I shall make a short speech because so many hon. Members want to speak. I conclude, therefore, by saying that I believe that this Bill is a failure because it does not deal adequately with the major problems of the severely disabled. The 1990s should bring major advances for disabled people, especially given the promises that the Government have made. This Bill makes no such advances. It is a midget of a Bill that takes very limited steps. Disabled people are furious with it. What we now need are gigantic steps to take disabled people, with fresh hope, into the 1990s. No such steps have been made and I regret that the Government have not risen to the occasion.

5.56 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I support the Bill. I congratulate the Government on introducing further measures that will help the sick and disabled people and improve the quality of life of older people. I fully agree with many of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) so I shall not waste the time of the House by repeating his arguments in support of the Bill.

I particularly welcome clause 10, which will allow for grants to improve energy efficiency in low-income households. For many years, energy efficiency has been the Cinderella on the world political scene. Depending on the political and economic circumstances of the time, saving energy has been either at the top or at the bottom of the political agenda. Following the energy crisis of the early 1970s, Governments around the world became overnight converts to energy efficiency, spurred on by the fear that the West would be held to ransom by Arab oil sheiks and by somewhat apocalyptic forecasts of how long oil reserves would last. Energy-saving measures became the order of the day.

The collapse of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries and real falls in oil prices changed all that, but although the economic incentive for energy saving was not as strong in the 1980s as it was in the early 1970s, Britain's energy-saving record in that decade was exemplary. As early as 1985, the International Energy Efficiency Office contrasted the vigour of Britain's efforts to conserve energy with stagnation elsewhere. For the past 10 years, our rate of improvement in energy efficiency has been more than twice the average for the European Community.

Much more remains to be done. Each year, Britain consumes about £40 billion worth of energy. That is equivalent to about one tenth of our national income. Potential savings of about £8 billion still exist, according to the Energy Efficiency Office of the Department of Energy. Such savings could add substantially to industrial competitiveness and significantly improve living standards.

Energy efficiency is not just a matter of economics, however, crucial though savings may be. We are beginning to appreciate the environmental consequences of energy consumption. Although it would be naive to expect the industrialised world dramatically to cut back energy consumption overnight—however attractive such a notion may be to Green party supporters—energy consumption will have a heavy burden to bear over the next few years in the process of reducing environmental damage.

Energy efficiency not only makes economic sense but is an environmental imperative. I warmly welcome clause 10, for there could be no better time to introduce an insulation scheme to help low-income households. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the Energy Efficiency Office's community insulation project has helped to insulate more than 700,000 homes, mostly those of pensioners. The new scheme should help to increase further take-up of basic insulation by lower-income households. I am glad to note that both tenants and owners in the public and private sector will be eligible.

Given the sustained and substantial fall in unemployment that we have seen over the past three years, reliance on the unemployed in implementing insulation schemes should be reduced. I hope that the new scheme will have as one of its aims the encouragement of smaller businesses providing insulation services. Such work could easily be undertaken by one or two-man or woman firms, which would offer the prospect of self-employment to the unemployed. The existence of local firms providing the required services could stimulate demand from households that are not eligible for Government assistance. When the details of the scheme are filled in over the coming months, I hope that consideration will be given to encouraging smaller firms.

Dr. Godman: In my constituency, many home insulation schemes are effectively and efficiently implemented by community businesses and tenants associations, as well as by small firms.

Mr. Roe: When I was a Minister in the Department of the Environment, I saw a number of such schemes in operation, and I agree that they were most effective and that local input is extremely helpful. Nevertheless, there is always room to supplement them with the services of small firms.

I hope, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton, that the Department of Energy will consult Neighbourhood Energy Action over the mechanics of the

scheme. That organisation has an excellent record in energy conservation and its expertise should be brought to bear in designing the new scheme.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can reassure the House that eligibility for the scheme will not be drawn too tightly. It would be a pity if, in trying to target help at those on the lowest incomes, the scheme missed householders who cannot afford the full cost of insulation. The savings to be made from the individual and for the nation from home insulation projects are rapid and proven. I believe that energy efficiency will prove to be the very best environmental investment. The scheme will also bring greater comfort and warmth to lower-income households.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The opening speeches both from the Government Front Bench and the Opposition Front Bench were lengthy—no doubt because the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) were frequently interrupted. I appeal to Back Benchers in all parts of the House to continue making brief speeches so that as many other right hon. and hon. Members as possible can be called. If speeches are limited to 10 minutes, it will allow the Chair to call every right hon. and hon. Member who has indicated a wish to participate.

6.4

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): In following the speech of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) I cannot resist the temptation to remark that, though I appreciate her interest in energy conservation and that home insulation is of prime importance to low-income families in particular, she will understand if I do not accept that home insulation is the most burning social security issue confronting the country. That point was also made most ably by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher).

I also remind the hon. Lady that, whereas housing construction statistics for 1986 show that 400,000 home insulation schemes were completed, the figures for the June 1989 quarter show that the number had fallen to 11,000. I could quote other statistics to illustrate even more forcefully that the trend is going in the wrong direction. Therefore, I hope that the hon. Lady's campaign among her own right hon. and hon. Friends to improve home insulation will meet with success.

I share the disappointment expressed by other Opposition Members about the Bill, which can best be described as a ragbag of different measures. As a former solicitor, albeit only a Scottish solicitor, I begin with a plaintive plea on behalf of people who will have to make some sense of the legislation. Social security schemes are already complicated enough, and the intention now is to introduce not only huge chunks of disability legislation —though even that is not as extensive as it should be—but also new measures embracing pensions and energy matters.

The Minister for Social Security has been a member of the Department long enough to be able to tell his officials that he refuses to use social security Bills as a vehicle every year to sweep up any bits and pieces of legislative proposals that may be lying around the Department at any given time. The Minister would be better advised to go along the road of introducing a disability statute, a pension statute, and so on. That would be a more orderly way to make progress.

As to the inevitable arguments over what is and what is not new money, although I take a close interest in social security matters, I was hoodwinked by the Secretary of State's statement on 10 January concerning the Government's new document, "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People". On that occasion, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned a figure of £300 million, but I did not understand at the time that it embraced £100 million already announced in his uprating statement. I do not say that the Secretary of State deliberately misled the House, but I was certainly temporarily hoodwinked, and care must be taken to avoid such confusion in future. It is not easy to make sense of expenditure levels, and it will be helpful if Ministers bear that in mind.

One bone of contention has for some time been whether any increased expenditure is the consequence of increased take-up or of improved rates of benefit. Agreement among hon. Members on both sides of the House on the true figures would place in context the real improvements that the Government have made. The Minister may take a different view, but I am not convinced that increased take-up, welcome though it is, is something that the Government can crow about, given that the benefits concerned are something to which claimants have a statutory right. Perhaps the Minister can say something about the balance between take-up and expenditure.

The Bill's provisions for the disabled appear to leave pensioners behind. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West said, there is an underlying implication in several recent changes that that is being done. While I appreciate the advice of the Social Security Advisory Committee that progress should be made in respect of the disabled who are still in work or who are of working age, there is genuine anxiety that we are ignoring the problems of people over retirement age. We tend to mention average pensioner incomes, but there are single women pensioners in my constituency who have not had an opportunity to build up a pension entitlement and they are paying for it now with real financial hardship. Their plight must not be forgotten.

Ms. Short: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would appreciate my putting some figures on the record. Two thirds of pensioners are women, because women live longer, and three quarters of them depend on means-tested benefits. They are the poor pensioners.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is a helpful and succinct intervention.

I pay tribute to the work of disability pressure groups which inform all our debates. They are most worried about the opportunities presented by the report of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys being missed. This is a unique opportunity, but it seems that it is to be lost. Everybody has been reining in the temptation to make more strident and urgent representations about disability to the Government recently. Since 1986, and the announcement of the review which I supported, we have held ourselves back. Now we have a glossy document and precious little else. The opportunity for a full review with proper consultation over a long time looks as though it is slipping away.

I recognise that there has been a three-phase approach. First come the uprating improvements, which were

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welcome. Secondly, we have the improvements which are announced in this Bill in clauses 1 and 2. They, too, are welcome. Thirdly, with the move towards a disability allowance, unless it includes resources to meet the true costs of disability, it looks as though the opportunity will indeed be lost. If it is lost, the Minister will never be allowed to forget it. He should not be allowed to forget it.

There is scant regard in the Bill for the plight of carers. I know that there is to be a debate on that subject later this week. The part played by carers seems, by implication, to have been ignored by the Government in the Bill and in their long-term proposals as laid out in "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People".

I listened with interest to the exchange about surpluses in occupational pension schemes. I am worried about them, too. The Government will have to tackle them. I cannot for the life of me understand why the Bill is not an appropriate vehicle to do that. I agree also that index-linked pensions in occupational schemes are the way forward. I hope that we shall move in that direction. The Government cannot stand idly by and do nothing about the gross surpluses that are being built up in some schemes.

I am also worried about changes in the national insurance fund. I was unhappy to have my fears confirmed by an article in the *Financial Times* today. I should be obliged if the Minister would say something about that. The article reports that the Government originally budgeted for some 750,000 people to leave SERPS, but the latest estimate is that 4 million will have left by the end of April. That is only the beginning. According to some estimates, if the promotions continue, some 7 million people will eventually opt out. That is two thirds of the original SERPS membership.

The consequences of the move are proving extremely expensive to the national insurance fund. The cost of contribution rebates has risen, according to the *Financial Times*, from £792 million in 1987-88 to £1·5 billion in 1989-90. Incentive payments, the so-called bribes, have soared from £346 million to £615 million. The article reports:

> "Overall the fund will have lost nearly £5 billion in the three years to next April. Costs are likely to escalate because more people will leave SERPS and because contribution rebates and incentive payments are linked to earnings."

I remember saying, when they were introduced, that I was much more relaxed about personal pensions than the official Opposition, but I said with some vigour that the incentive payments, or bribes, were unnecessary. If the figures I have quoted are anything like true, that is certainly the case. They represent a substantial sum of money that could be used on disability or pension benefits, which would be a far better way in which to use them.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kirkwood: No. I want to conclude my speech.

The revaluation of pensions on winding up schemes is something of a worry for the industry. I have received representations from the industry, and I require some satisfaction that revaluation will be done in a way which will not prove literally to be an incalculable burden on some pension schemes.

There have been exemptions on self-investment for small self-administered schemes, but I am told that some 20 per cent. of such schemes will nevertheless still be caught. I would like the Minister to find time to say something about that. Is it necessary to have the 20 per cent. director rule, the "nem con" vote, and for each director to be a member or trustee of the pension scheme? If so, dozens, if not hundreds, of small firms in knitwear and other industries in my constituency will be prevented from recycling pension funds when there are cash flow problems. That would be a severe curb on their business activity.

The Bill is disappointing both in the short term and in the long term. More than anything else, however, the Government's attitude towards consultation does not augur well for the future of the social security system.

6.18 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak so early in the debate, and, like other hon. Members who have spoken, I undertake to be relatively brief.

Like my hon. Friends, I have enjoyed all the contributions that we have heard so far, but I think that we were all particularly fascinated by the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). As my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) pointed out, some of the promises made in that speech may prove somewhat rash. I noted the get-out clause that it contained —that those promises would not have to be implemented in the event of an economic crisis—and I suspect that if Opposition Members were ever returned to office that clause would be implemented fairly early on.

Ms. Short: In Labour's policy review—I suggest that the hon. Gentleman goes away and reads it—we promised that we would re-establish SERPS, making it as good as it was before and adding the possibility of top-ups. We shall then require any opting-out pension scheme to match SERPS: one of the reasons for the improvement in occupational pension schemes is that they have had to match SERPS. That is the framework of our commitment, and the way in which it will be implemented.

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and I am sure that I shall read the policy review many times during the next few weeks, although I think that Labour may have to look again at what its proposals mean for pension fund surpluses.

I listened with care and respect to the speech of the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), but I hope that we shall not fall into the trap of comparing increases in benefits with reductions in tax rates over an extended period, as if there were a simple choice between the two. One of the reasons for the current record tax revenues is the reduction in tax rates, including those paid by top earners, who are also supplying record tax revenues. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will understand that, rather than a choice being presented between the one and the other, one is required to supply the other.

The Government have a solid record of improving and expanding social security provision and targeting it more effectively—

Mr. Ashley: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but is he disputing my figures?

Mr. Hague: I was not disputing any figures supplied by the right hon. Gentleman. I was disputing the case for

comparing tax reductions with increases in benefit as though there were a choice between the two. Nevertheless, I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will want to check the figures given by all hon. Members in the debate, as is customary.

The Government have received far too little political credit for their achievements in social security provision, and the debate provides Conservative Members with an opportunity to put that right. The improved benefits for widows, the sick and disabled and the terminally ill for which the Bill provides represent the latest example of the Government's effective and prudent spending of increased resources. Over the past 10 years total expenditure on cash benefits for the sick and disabled has increased by more than 100 per cent., even after allowing for inflation.

Although there is and always will be scope for more provision for the needy, the average annual real increase in spending has been dramatically higher in the 1980s than it was in the 1970s: it now accounts for more than 15 per cent. of total social security spending. That is good news, in keeping with what the nation has most wanted the welfare state to provide—help for those who are unable to help themselves. Opposition Members who complain, even now, about the level of benefits were utterly unable to do better when they were in office; indeed, they could not even contemplate being able to give so much assistance to the least fortunate members of society.

Mr. Ian McCartney '(Makerfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I will not give way for the moment, as I have already done so twice. I may do so again later.

Of course we recognise that there are always cases for increases in benefits, but we might be forgiven for thinking that, while requesting so many increases in specific benefits, the Opposition could have had the good grace at least to congratulate the Government on their overall record.

The package announced by the Secretary of State last October is an important part of the background to the Bill. At that time much righteous indignation was being devoted to the subject of child benefit and the Government's refusal to increase it. Such an increase, however, would have constituted an indiscriminate use of the nation's resources, with much of the additional provision going to people who were already better off than many of the taxpayers called on to pay for it. I congratulate the Government on having had the courage to resist the hysteria and to use the money where it might win fewer headlines, but would be of more genuine use.

Half a million disabled people and their carers will benefit from the improvements announced last October. The premiums for disabled children provided through income support have been more than doubled; the help provided by attendance and mobility allowance has been extended to new specific groups; and the benefit structure for those on employment rehabilitation courses has been improved so that they can, for instance, continue to receive invalidity benefit. More support has been given to those who care for disabled people, and the new carers' premium in income support and housing benefit for those receiving care allowance is particularly welcome. I am sure that the Government have not yet reached the limit of the improvements that they can make, but a warm welcome should be given to what they have done so far.

May I make a specific point about the earnings limit on care allowance? I have already written to the Department about this. Many carers manage to work on a part-time or occasional basis, but are often able to do so only in a rather irregular way. Sometimes they can work for only a few weeks of the year, when other members of the family take over the task of looking after their dependants. As a result, the carers may lose care allowance for some weeks of the year, while their total annual earnings are still substantially less than the weekly earnings limit multiplied by 52. Would it not be better to calculate entitlement on the basis of annual earnings, or provide the option to do so? I hope that Ministers will consider that possibility in the coming year.

The Government, then, can point to a strong record on social spending, which I believe should be drawn to the country's attention. The Bill will bolster that record. Let me mention three aspects in particular.

First, the Bill makes further improvements in the assistance provided for sick and disabled people. I know that some of the key features of the package of improvements announced earlier this month are not included—for instance, the new disability allowance, and disability employment credit—but we can look forward to their implementation in the future. Other measures for the sick and disabled are included and are very welcome, particularly the removal of the six-month qualifying period for receipt of attendance allowance by the terminally ill, which has long been a source of discontent. Equally encouraging is the Government's declared aim of dealing with applications in a matter of two weeks. Let us hope that they can deliver on that.

The age-related addition to the severe disablement allowance is also very welcome. It will help many families, including some in my constituency, who are unable to work as much as they might because of the need to take care of young disabled people. The improvement in widows' benefits is also welcome. It is possible that only a small number of widows will be affected by clause 5, which will help those who make a late claim owing to a delay in determining the death of their husbands; even so, the action was worth taking, and the clause is a good piece of tidying up.

The part of the Bill that deals with occupational and personal pension schemes will be good news for millions of people. More than 70 per cent. of newly retired pensioners now have an occupational pension. The new ombudsman service will be of great practical value, and will provide a reassuring presence for many pensioners. I am pleased to note that the ombudsman will have statutory powers of enforcement.

The tracing service established by clause 8 is another important measure: it enables the Government to keep up with the times, and to remove any remaining disincentives and obstacles to the taking out of occupational pensions. Confidence that pensions with previous employers can be tracked down is essential in a world where occupational pensions are more common and the mobility of labour is increasing.

The strengthening of protection for members of pension schemes is another improvement. It is right to strengthen the protection for early leavers of occupational pension schemes, and to give more help to married women and widows by granting the right to a guaranteed minimum pension to those who have contracted out of SERPS. I am sure that the new restrictions on

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self-investment are right, and I am pleased that Ministers have reversed their initial position on restrictions on small self-administered pension schemes. Members of such schemes generally have sufficient control over their funds not to need such protection.

In general, I consider the Bill to be a very positive measure, and part of a continuing positive record. Most of those who complain about its provisions could never have imagined a few years ago that the nation would be devoting such a level of resources to social security, let alone providing such an increase in funding for the sick and disabled. In the face of all the cynicism, the Government continue to spend more, to spend it in the right places, and to do so without bankrupting the nation. That is the proper way in which to improve and expand the welfare state.

6.30 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Despite the attempts of Government to find positive reforms in this Bill and to sell it in the context of the Government's economic approach, I hope that the House will agree that the Bill is a disappointment and a wasted opportunity—not only because it fails to address significantly some key issues, such as the basic retirement pension on which people in the constituencies of some of us have to live, but because it fails to recognise that child benefit has been frozen and does not put before the House the comprehensive benefit for disabled people for which some of us have been pressing for a very long time. In fact, the Bill will implement few of the proposals that were announced in the Secretary of State's recently published report "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People". It even sidelines that long-awaited report.

In his introduction to the report the Secretary of State wrote:

> "When completed, this programme will build on the many improvements already made in recent years to give us a more comprehensive and coherent system of disability benefits than ever before."

That statement seems to hinge on a future promise—one based on the fact that many claimants are experiencing a dismantling of social security and a reduction in their incomes. There are 6·5 million disabled people in Britain, but it is estimated that, in practice, the Bill will affect only 850,000 people, including carers. We are entitled to ask whether this is the Government's best response to the surveys that they have commissioned over the years, the results of which they have now gathered together.

What about pensioners, who make up the majority of disabled people? There are 4·2 million disabled pensioners in Britain, yet the Bill contains no measures to improve their financial position. Conservative Members boast about the improvement in incomes and living standards achieved by the Government. Recently I received from a 74-year-old widow a letter setting out in clear detail a table of her income every year since November 1987, taking account of the changes in the system and of reductions in housing benefit. Her income, at £48·35 a week, is exactly the same now as it was in November 1987. She writes:

> "Every time something is reviewed or reformed by this Government we either finish up with less money or worse services . . . I am now having to find an extra £5·25 to pay for the cut in housing benefit, 20 per cent. of my rates and all my water rates each week. This is on top of all the other increases in gas, electricity, telephone and food."

That letter is from a lady who gave up her job 10 years before her retirement date to look after her sick husband so that he would not have to be in and out of hospital. Is it fair that this Bill will do nothing to improve her position?

Of course, it could be argued that it would be churlish not to say that clause 1, which extends attendance allowance to the terminally ill without a waiting period of six months, is an improvement, but the benefit should be paid as soon as need is established.

Clause 2 proposes an addition to the severe disability allowance related to the age at which the claimant became disabled. But of the 263,000 people in receipt of severe disability allowance, 140,000 get income support, too, and others receive means-tested housing benefit. They will see no difference as a result of this clause. The discriminatory 80 per cent. disability test will remain. Perhaps the Secretary of State, who claims that there have been increases, will tell the House why the Government will not increase the severe disability allowance to the same level as the state retirement pension. That would be a start.

Furthermore, the abolition of the earnings-related allowance, which is proposed in clause 3, will decimate an already reduced benefit. The Government claim that this benefit will overlap with invalidity benefit. The point is that invalidity benefit represents income maintenance, whereas the reduced earnings allowance is compulsory. In practice this is another reduction in benefit.

Mr. McCartney: It is vital that we explain to people what is happening in respect of reduced earnings allowance, which is paid to people who are maimed or injured during their work. Many of those people will never return to the type of work in which they were engaged, or to the workplace at all. The Government have steadily reduced the ability of working people to claim this benefit. We have reached the stage where a worker who has had two fingers amputated can fail to qualify for that benefit. That is the sort of thing that the present Government have been doing to people injured in the workplace.

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has spelt out in detail the implications of the cuts for people whom we have been trying to represent for months, if not years.

Clause 4 will remove entitlement to the earnings-related element of invalidity benefit after the 1990-91 tax year. Even that measure flies in the face of the proposals set out in "The Way Ahead".

The Bill offers a bit of piecemeal tinkering, with no signs of a comprehensive scheme. Worse, it manifestly ignores the main findings in "The Way Ahead", which spelt out in detail the huge gaps in income between disabled people and non-disabled people. Where in this Bill, we are entitled to ask, are the proposals to cover extra costs, such as those involved in diet, heating and laundry, that many disabled people incur as a consequence of their disability? We are no further forward than we were when the special additions were withdrawn as a result of the so-called Fowler review.

The Bill proposes abolition of the invalid pension allowance by April 1991 to encourage occupational pension schemes. In his statement on 10 January the Secretary of State said:

"the forthcoming Social Security Bill will contain measures to enhance the benefits of severely disabled who were never able to work, or who were disabled early in life, while at the same time ensuring a better balanced and more sustainable overall structure of income replacement benefits for incapacity, taking account of the encouraging growth of occupational provision in this field."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1990; Vol. 164, c. 942.]

What lies behind those words about a more sustainable overall structure is a clear attempt to reduce social security costs again—and that amounts to a reduction in benefits. Occupational pension schemes are least likely to exist for those most at risk, and this proposal will only undermine the security that SERPS provided. The result will be a saving of £350 million for the Department of Social Security by 1991 and, in practice, a further erosion of disability benefits.

We welcome the introduction of a pensions ombudsman, but can the Secretary of State assure us that that person will have power to look into the current duping of the taxpayer in the pensions section of the Department of Social Security?

Today's *Financial Times* informs us:

"After running a healthy surplus for years, the National Insurance fund has plunged into deficit. I would be the last to object if this reflected a more generous policy on benefits. Needless to say, it does not. The basic pension, which continues to decline against earnings, is a meagre £43·60 a week—rather less than the cost of a meal for two in a typical City restaurant."

The reason for that is that when people contract out of SERPS, not only does the fund lose contribution income, as the Secretary of State acknowledged earlier, but the Government are paying a 2 per cent. subsidy to people who switch to personal pension schemes. It is a bribe to undermine the SERPS scheme and to promote private pensions. Although, officially, the Government budgeted for 0·75 million people to leave SERPS, the latest estimate —it was echoed in the remarks of the Secretary of State earlier today—is that about 4 million people will have left the SERPS scheme by April this year.

As the Secretary of State confirmed, by next April the fund overall will have lost nearly £5 billion in three years. Interestingly, the *Financial Times* concluded its article with the following:

"It is surely the height of fiscal irresponsibility to undermine the National Insurance fund by spending £1·5 billion of taxpayers' money encouraging people to gamble their pensions. When so many of today's pensioners are obliged to live on so little, the policy looks more than a trifle callous."

Contrary to what the Secretary of State suggested, it is not a sum to be brushed aside lightly, yet the Government have embarked on a totally inefficient waste of significant financial resources that could be used to improve other social security benefits.

In 1979, the Conservative manifesto claimed that there would be a move towards a coherent system of disability benefits

"as swiftly as the strength of the economy allows."

The problem with that trickle-down approach is that it always begs the question whether the economy is strong enough to bring the poor, the elderly and the disabled in our society in from the margins. Worse, since 1984 the Government have regularly proclaimed that increasing economic prosperity has arrived, yet, in the words of the Minister for Social Security at the front of the report "The Way Ahead",

"as a society, we have a long way to go before we accept disabled people as full members of our economic and social community."

We certainly agree with that. Sadly, there is a long way to go and the Bill does not take us much further forward in ensuring that disabled and elderly people have adequate incomes to meet their needs, and incomes that ensure that they have a decent quality of life and retain their independence. This is a piecemeal, cost-cutting Bill. I urge the House to ask the Secretary of State to take the Bill back and to think again because it is just another missed opportunity.

6.41 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I suspect that the sentence that the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has just quoted from the document "The Way Ahead" had more to do with attitudes towards disabled people in society than with the cash that is provided to them to help them to overcome their disabilities. If that is the case, I agree with it. Although attitudes are improving, there is a long way to go until we get to the point where people treat disabled people as if they were not special cases but ordinary people with a disability that could be overcome with the help and co-operation of others. That help and co-operation is not just a question of financial help and co-operation——

Ms. Short: That is important.

Mr. Smith: Yes, it is important, but it is also important that through a process of education we try to improve people's attitudes to disabled people and persuade them that many disabled people could play a full role in society. There are apparently 6·5 million disabled people in our society, but I believe that many of those people have already overcome their disabilities and play a full role. Therefore, I believe that that is a misleading figure from which to start.

I support the Bill because it makes worthwhile improvements to both the system of social security and our occupational pension schemes. I very much support the Government's philosophy on social security, which is, as far as is possible, to devote what are necessarily finite resources to those people who are most in need. So, if it comes to a choice——

Ms. Short: What about tax cuts?

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Lady will allow me, I shall deal in a moment with her point about tax cuts.

The important point about social security is that it should be devoted to those who are most in need. Clearly child benefit does not achieve that objective. So, if it is a choice, which I think it must be, between an increase in child benefit and targeting improvements on specific groups, I think that the Government are right to choose the latter.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) earlier described the sum of £16 million as "peanuts". That epitomises the Opposition's attitude. First, £16 million is a substantial sum of money in its own right in absolute terms; and, secondly, if it is targeted on a specific group of people who are in need, it can result in substantial improvements in the weekly benefits of the individuals concerned. When my right hon. Friend made his statement in, I believe, October, he gave examples of

[Mr. Smith]

some substantial improvements in the weekly benefits payable to individuals in need. I hope that the hon. Lady has taken that important point fully on board.

Ms. Short: Clearly £16 million for one, two or a few people is an enormous sum of money, but £16 million shared among all who are severely disabled is peanuts.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) described £300 million as minuscule. I do not see such sums in that way. We must recognise that they are large sums in absolute terms.

The hon. Member for Ladywood made a revealing intervention earlier when she said that we can assume that we shall have 2·5 per cent. economic growth for the foreseeable future and so we can plan to spend the money now. I advise her that, although we did not have such growth under the last Labour Government, we have certainly had it in the past decade so we have no right to make that assumption. We must have sensible and prudent economic policies because only then will we achieve economic growth.

Ms. Short: The level of economic growth in our country since the second world war has been 2·5 per cent. or more continuously. In fact, there was continuous growth throughout the lifetime of the last Labour Government. We then saw a dip in the early years of the Tory Government and then a continuation to exactly the same slope. Therefore, we can project that the future is likely to be like the past. Obviously if there is a collapse and a crisis, that transforms everything, but we can expect 2·5 per cent. plus economic growth every year into the foreseeable future—*[Interruption.]* Of course, we can.

Mr. Smith: That illustrates the fallacious assumption upon which much of Labour party policy is based. Indeed, the last Labour Government's approch to spending was, "Spend now, and worry about where the money is going to come from later." It was that approach that led to the arrival in this country of the International Monetary Fund in November 1976.

Page 37 of the report of the Occupational Pensions Board that was published in February 1989 contains two revealing tables. They illustrate the absurdity of the statement of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). Indeed, it has been the most remarkable feature of the debate because the hon. Gentleman made a revealing statement about Labour party policy. I suppose that he has been told that in future he should not make any further commitments that would increase public spending, so he has decided to direct himself to private pension schemes and to imposing a huge additional cost on them.

The two tables show the key factors that affect the performance of pension funds. The first column of each relates to average earnings growth each year and the other column to dividend flows each year. One table covers the period 1975-81 and the other covers 1982-87. Although the pattern is irregular, the net result is that in the period of the Labour Government the increase in average earnings was well in excess of the increase in dividend flows. That is why the OPB stated in 1981:

"The picture was discouraging as far as pension scheme finance was concerned, and it is easy to understand why the Board did not suggest a course which would place once-for-all past service burdens on schemes."

The next paragraph is headed "Finance now" and states:

"The growth in dividend flows has greatly outstripped the growth in average earnings. We think it unlikely that many schemes are hard-pressed as far as their general finances are concerned, and we therefore consider that they should be able to shoulder the modest costs involved in our proposal."

Those two tables show the transformation in the finances of pension schemes over the past decade. In the 1970s, I was a trustee of a private occupational pension scheme. It was a constant struggle to keep it solvent. When there was a deficit, one could not ask—one would not expect to ask—the employees to make up the difference, so when there was a deficit the employer had to increase his contributions. It follows that, when there is a surplus, it is not unreasonable for the employer to say that he will reduce his contributions.

I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, are aware that we had a debate in the House only last week on our pension scheme when it was agreed that the contributions of the employer, which in this case is the Treasury or the taxpayer, should be reduced from 18 per cent. to 4·4 per cent., while our own contributions were to remain at 9 per cent. That is right when there is a pension scheme surplus. However, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) assumes that that position will continue come hell or high water. He is hoping that hell will come soon because he is hoping for another Labour Government. If that happens, there will be an immediate collapse in investor confidence and the escape clause that he described will be called into play. He has announced a policy which amounts to fraud and which, if it were persisted with for long, would cripple most private sector pension schemes. Everybody should understand the implications of that policy.

I welcome the proposal for a pensions ombudsman. That is a better idea than the tribunal suggested by the Occupational Pensions Board. Like the other ombudsmen posts in the financial services industry, it should be financed by the industry rather than the taxpayer. My right hon. Friend said something along those lines. There are quite a number of ombudsmen in the financial services sector, and I wonder whether the new post could be combined with one of those. There is a proliferation of them. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) that the ombudsman should publish reports. That would be helpful.

The Bill proposes a pensions scheme register. That will be helpful because of the proliferation of schemes and because many people change their jobs many times. They may have difficulty discovering who is responsible for paying their pension. I hope that it will not be necessary to place the cost burden on the taxpayer. Perhaps the register could be operated by Companies house, which has great experience of registering companies. Many of the companies that register with Companies house also run pension schemes. It might be possible to operate along those lines, but the cost should be paid by the pension schemes, perhaps through an annual registration fee.

We have already discussed at some length the question of early leavers. I am glad that, because of the improvement in the financial position, it is now possible for the Government to accept something that was not acceptable only five years ago in 1985, which is substantially to improve the lot of the early leaver. There must be a sensible balance. Employers set up occupational

pension schemes to encourage employees to stay, not to leave. It is part of the remuneration package and employers hope that their employees will remain with them. However, it is important for the national interest that people do not feel that their pension scheme is such that they cannot afford to leave. Job mobility is important and early leavers should have a decent deal. The proposal strikes a sensible balance and should be welcomed.

I welcome the changes in self-investment that my right hon. Friend announced just before Christmas. The changes originally proposed went too far. It is sensible to omit from the proposal those who are self-employed directors because clearly they are in a different category. I understand the more general reservations about large amounts of pension fund money being invested in the company because employees then have too many eggs in one basket. The proposal is just right. I welcome that part of the Bill that deals with occupational pensions and also the proposals on social security.

6.53 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Like other hon. Members, I shall be brief.

Clause 1 deals with the six-month rule for attendance allowance but, unfortunately, it does not go far enough. I shall give one or two examples of the problems that I have encountered with the implementation of that rule.

Under the six-month rule the applicant who is diagnosed as being entitled to receive attendance allowance has to wait for six months, which gives rise to a number of problems. In particular, if the illness is serious the applicant and his family may need assistance quickly. That relative—perhaps a husband or wife—might have to give up work to care for the applicant, which means an immediate loss of income to that family. The illness could involve certain expenses such as travel to hospital and special diets. When the applicant is elderly, there could be the expense of paying for extra nursing and other help.

The saddest problem with the rule is where the applicant dies after being diagnosed as qualifying for the allowance, but before the end of the six-month period when the benefit would be put into payment. Since 1987, I have dealt with three such tragic cases. It is extremely distressing to experience the tragic death, after serious illness, of a relative at a time when an application for attendance allowance has been granted, but before the end of the six-month period the applicant dies and a letter arrives from the Department of Social Security saying that the benefit is not payable.

I know of a tragic case of an elderly couple where the husband had to employ MacMillan nurses to look after his wife. She was not diagnosed as terminally ill, but she died before the end of the six-month period. He had been put to particular expense only to find that he did not qualify for receipt of the benefit because his wife had died. The only value of the six-month rule is to determine the seriousness of the condition of the person making the application, and to determine whether the illness is serious enough to warrant payment. A six-month period can be classed as too long to determine whether a person is sufficiently seriously ill to qualify for the benefit. Many applicants regard the rule as a Government device to save money on the attendance allowance. Failing the abolition of the six-month rule—which would perhaps be the best way to deal with the matter—any amendment to it should ensure that it takes into account genuinely seriously ill applicants rather than simply using the definition of terminally ill, which is too narrow a definition in this context.

There are problems in diagnosis. A person might be seriously ill, but not diagnosed as terminally ill. A diagnosis might be made at the time of the application and the terminality of the illness might occur later. It puts a responsibility on doctors, delegated medical practitioners and the attendance allowance board to determine what is or what is not terminal illness. I suggest that the criterion should be genuine serious illness rather than terminally ill.

In support of that, I refer the Secretary of State to a letter that I received in June 1988 from the attendance allowance unit of his Department in Norcross in Blackpool, which referred to a claim with which I was dealing. It states:

> "Any system of short-term social security support—over and above the present State sickness benefit and statutory sick pay schemes—for people who might die before completing the six month qualifying period for attendance allowance would involve their classification as terminally ill. Quite apart from the practical difficulties, in some cases doctors can, for good reasons, withhold or delay telling patients and their relatives about the diagnosis of terminal illness. Again, given the many advances in medical science and knowing the spirit of some patients, doctors may be reluctant to commit themselves to such a firm prognosis."

The Secretary of State's Department is casting some doubt on the usefulness of the definition of terminally ill for the six-month qualifying period for attendance allowance. Although it is welcome as a step forward in alleviating the problems with the six-month rule, rather than using the definition of terminally ill, a definition of a genuine serious illness, whereby the attendance allowance board can determine that the illness is likely to extend beyond the six-month period, should be included in the Bill.

Clause 3 abolishes the reduced earnings allowance, which was formerly the special hardship allowance. It is interesting that the Department removed the emotive word "hardship" from the definition of the benefit and now it has decided to remove the benefit. That will have a major effect on certain industrial sectors, for example, the mining industry. For eight years I dealt with compensation claims for the industry—social security benefits and common law damages claims. Many serious injuries would automatically mean deployment of an injured miner to light work, with the inevitable consequence that he would be deployed to light wages as well. Reduced earnings allowance was a necessary benefit to enable an injured miner to maintain his income level during the period of his disability and on recovery.

As the Secretary of State is probably aware, serious injuries that would qualify a miner for reduced earnings allowance and disability benefit extend over a long period. I have dealt with cases that extended over a number of years. If a case is contested, the period can be as long as 12 years. The mining industry has a long history of severe injuries and a large compensation sector. The British Coal Corporation and the union employ staff to deal with compensation claims. Although some 90 per cent. of cases have been settled amicably through negotiation, a proportion have had to be dealt with through tribunals and the courts.

The negligence issue raises the question whether common law compensation would do away with the need for reduced earnings allowance, and I suggest that it would

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

not. There is always a litigation risk in a negligence claim and such claims are not aways successful. A compromise settlement might mean that the compensation awarded to an applicant is reduced by up to 50 per cent., even though he still needs the same treatment. It might not adequately cover future loss of earnings.

British Coal has a no-fault liability scheme, incorporating a loss of earnings allowance for miners who are diagnosed as suffering from pneumoconiosis. Unfortunately, the loss of earnings allowance under that scheme is restrictive, and it is not used often. Pneumoconiosis is a progressive disease. There are problems with diagnosis; often the disease is not diagnosed until late in a workman's working life. To qualify for loss of earnings allowance under the pneumoconiosis compensation schemes, the workman has to work in a dust-free environment, which usually means on a colliery or unit surface, which again means light work and light wages.

A few weeks ago, the case was raised with me of a common law wife who, obviously, did not qualify for widow's benefits or widow's allowances. I ask the Secretary of State to consider the position of that young lady. She visited me, having lost her partner with whom she had been living for the previous 15 years. To all intents and purposes, the lady was in the same position as a married woman in all but the marriage certificate. The occupational pension was awarded to her as a partner. She did not qualify for widow's benefits. It seems hypocritical that, when she went to live with her partner and immediately declared that fact to the social security office, the couple was classed by the Department as, to all intents and purposes, a married couple, yet, when it comes to paying out money on the death of a long-term common law partner, there is no entitlement to benefit.

I welcome the clause on energy efficiency, on which, I presume, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) will touch. As a member of the Select Committee on Energy, I welcome this measure. It is good to see that at least one Department recognises the value of energy efficiency, especially as this follows the Energy Committee's report on the greenhouse effect.

7.5 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I support the Social Security Bill—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, of course. No doubt the Opposition will do the opposite. I intend to confine my remarks to that part of the Bill about which I know rather more, on the principle that I have listened to others speak about state benefits who clearly know more than I do. Such expertise as I have on this subject emanates from the fact that, before becoming a Member, I was—as an Opposition Member remarked during one of my interventions—the man from the CBI. It is equally true to say that, before that, I was the man from the National Association of Pension Funds. From that experience, I gathered some facts, none of which, regrettably, was reflected in the remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). The hon. Gentleman made a number of extravagant, insupportable statements. I assure the House that many Conservative Members will read his remarks carefully when they are printed tomorrow, because they were startling.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West misunderstands the principle of an occupational pension scheme or, for that matter, a portable pension. That was illustrated by his dissertation—"dissertation" is far too kind a word—on inflation proofing. He made promises without cost implications, saying that it could all be paid for out of surpluses. Anyone who knows anything about this subject realises that that is not how it is done. A pension fund must meet long-term obligations, which means financial discipline—about which I heard nothing from Labour Members.

I suspect that the occupational pension fund movement is not worried about the Government, who have produced single-figure inflation. I associate myself with the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that inflation is too high at the moment. The occupational pension fund movement is worried about the return of a Labour Government—I know that we will not have a Labour Government, but let us postulate for a moment —and inflation of 27·5 per cent. I assure the House that the corollary of that would be bankruptcy for the occupational pension fund movement. If I am wrong, and if I am lucky enough to be on the Standing Committee, I shall be interested to hear what actuarial advice the hon. Member for Oldham, West received to lead him to make his statement. I will want to learn which bodies he has consulted and what detailed advice he has been given, because my view is that his remarks are insupportable.

Labour Members may not wish to accept this point, but an occupational pension or a portable pension is a prized possession, as is easily seen by statistics. By 1986, about 70 per cent. of newly retired people had such a pension. Between 1979 and 1986, the incomes of occupational pensioners rose in real terms by 56 per cent.—a staggering performance by any standard in terms not just of the investment managers but of increased returns to pensioners, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). That is a real benefit. I concede that the maximum benefits in occupational schemes accrue to those who stay in them. Not all workers stay in their occupational pension schemes. They move round. That is why the reform introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was an epoch-making measure. The whole system was freed up in a way that many people in occupational pension schemes appreciated.

My conviction and the conviction of my right hon. Friend is that, if possible, we must induce people through occupational schemes, portable schemes and other devices to make provision while they work for the time when they will not work.

Ms. Short: I presume that the hon. Gentleman has read the report of the Occupational Pensions Board which laid the basis for the reforms in the Bill. Many individual pensioners who have lost out and who are increasingly impoverished gave evidence. I accept the hon. Gentleman's average performance figures. Does he agree that we must protect everyone from being conned into disastrous pension schemes that will impoverish them in old age? We need a system of regulation so that that will not happen.

Mr. Cran: When the hon. Lady bandies about words such as "disastrous schemes", she must come forward with evidence.

Ms. Short: It is in this report.

Mr. Cran: I mean evidence from individual schemes. I was a member of a fairly good scheme for several years, but a few years later I moved to another scheme. Difficulties occurred about the transfer payment and all the rest. That is where the problem occurs in the occupational pension fund movement. It is perfectly clear that the hon. Lady does not understand the basis of the occupational pension fund movement. I look forward to hearing her evidence in Committee, and we shall consider that evidence when it is presented to us.

Ms. Short: The hon. Gentleman has not read the report. If he had, he would have seen the evidence laid out in a table. Several individuals wrote in to say that their pensions had been eroded in value over time and that they were angry about it. They believe that Government regulation is needed. The report also makes it clear that money purchase schemes depend on cashing in the moment that someone retires. If that coincides with a drop in the stock market, the members lose out. The hon. Gentleman must be aware of those examples, and I could give more. The question is whether the Government should regulate to protect people from falling into schemes that provide glossy brochures suggesting that they will be fine in old age only to find that they are impoverished. Regulation is needed to protect everyone to a minimum standard.

Mr. Cran: To clear up one anomaly, I have read the report. The problem with reports is the construction that one puts on them. I fear that the Opposition have put the worst possible construction on that report. One must go beyond the report and consider individual schemes. When the hon. Lady makes such allegations, we must see the detailed evidence for them.

If I am lucky enough to be chosen to serve on the Committee, I shall return to the problem of inflation-proofing. The problem will not be solved by a dictum of the Secretary of State that inflation is 11 per cent. so members of all schemes must be indemnified for it. We live with occupational schemes, which are funded, and obligations can be paid only from the earnings that the scheme makes. That is why I believe that, rightly or wrongly, Opposition Members profoundly misunderstand what occupational pensions are all about.

It does not elevate the argument to bandy about extravagant words. Of all the schemes that I have known in my lifetime—I am no longer associated with the occupational pension fund movement—some have been good and some bad, but none has been disreputable—or whatever word the hon. Lady used.

I am in favour of occupational and portable pensions because we should make provision while we work for the time when we do not work. The great advantage of such schemes is that they take the burden off the state—the taxpayer—and release moneys for the social security budget, which is currently about £56 billion. Resources are freed for the people who need them rather than being spent on those who do not. That is absolutely correct, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has my support in that.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is absolutely right to introduce a pensions ombudsman. Such a provision is long overdue. I remember such an initiative being discussed in my days in the National Association of Pension Funds. It is a pity that that great industry did not have the courage to set up an ombudsman to consider matters on which individual pensioners disagree with those who run the schemes. I am therefore delighted that we shall legislate to provide an ombudsman.

The great problem, however, is deciding what constitutes a dispute between a scheme and an individual. My experience tells me that all members are in dispute at some time with their schemes. I have had such a dispute. The last time that I wanted to transfer a pension I thought that the transfer payment was too low. Is that a dispute? It might be. I remind the House that in this business, dissatisfaction emanates from unfulfilled expectations, which are endless in the pension fund movement and, from what I have heard, on the Opposition Benches.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is right to set up a tracing service. Again, it is long overdue. From my time with the NAPF, I remember people sitting round board room tables saying that it would be a good idea, but they did not have the courage, foresight or ability to go ahead and set it up. Indubitably, they should have done. I am heartened to hear that my right hon. Friend intends to set up the service with the co-operation of the industry, and I expect that that co-operation will be forthcoming. He may rely on some of us to put our weight behind some bodies in the movement to help him.

I understand what the Government are trying to do about asset deficiency in winding up schemes and the consequential obligation to revalue benefits. That is correct, even though the Opposition would like to do more. All Oppositions want to do more and to spend more of everyone's money. That is entirely understandable. My right hon. Friend is advancing the conditions of pensioners a little further. His gradualist approach is correct. But I do not understand why the Government have decided to adopt the view that when a scheme is wound up a debt should be imposed on the employer. The OPB suggested that improved preserved rights should be a first charge on the surplus of a wind-up. That is a more appealing solution than the one that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has chosen. I hope that he will be prepared to listen to some of us, as we are prepared to listen to the justification for his proposal.

On the ceiling on self-investment, one is tempted to ask why, in heaven's name, it has not been done before. I do not say that about large self-administered schemes. I used to hear stories of some large and medium-sized self-administered schemes that were unhealthily self-invested. Clearly, for all the reasons that my right hon. Friend gave, it is wrong that pensioners should rely unduly on the fortunes of one company. He is correct to incorporate a provision to deal with that. With his usual perspicacity, he recognises that there is a problem with small businesses. There is no doubt of that. We cannot proceed at the speed at which some would like, so I welcome the concession that he has made.

However, perhaps on another occasion in the House or in Committee my right hon. Friend will explain the problem of small self-administered schemes where the benefits are for people who may not be 20 per cent. directors but less than that and who do not operate the

[Mr. Cran]

scheme for anybody but themselves. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend could address that deceptively important point.

In conclusion, the past four years has seen a stream of legislation and regulations on the occupational pension fund movement and portable pensions. I support most of it. It was forced on the Government, although many of the problems could have been solved by the movement years ago if it had tackled the problems of early leavers. It did not and the Government stepped in. But a balance must be struck in these matters. I suspect that many employers are beginning to say to themselves that occupational pensions are becoming administratively complex and therefore costly. My right hon. Friend will be well aware that the time may come when many employers will ask themselves whether the establishment of occupational pension schemes solves more problems than it creates. I put that thought into my right hon. Friend's mind for him to consider.

Apart from the few small caveats that I have mentioned, these pension provisions are absolutely right, and my right hon. Friend has my support.

7.22 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friends, particularly those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). The £300 million for the disabled is a drop in the ocean when considered against total social security expenditure of over £50 billion.

It is said that one can judge a society by how it treats old people. If we look at how the Government have treated our old people in the past 10 years, our judgment is, indeed, harsh. The social security changes resulted in £4·5 billion being lopped off the budget, while Ministers gave us platitudes about how they cared for people in a non-existent society.

My right hon. Friend said that he had spoken to disabled groups. Last week I spoke to senior citizens in my constituency and they gave me the same message for the Secretary of State. This is an inconsequential Bill. It is turning the ratchet and making people poorer by the day, the month, the year. If that were done through neglect, it would be shameful enough, but it is being done by design. The source of that is the Social Security Act 1986. What did the Government do? They broke the link between pensions and average earnings. It has been said before, but needs repeating, that if that link, which the Labour Government introduced, had been maintained, the single pension would be £12 a week more and the married pension £18 a week more.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies investigated pensions. If pensions and benefits had been linked only to prices from 1948 onwards, the single pension today would be, not £41·40, but only £17·37—only 42 per cent. of what it is now. If we project that 20 or 30 years forward, we can see how much money the Government will save in the long term and their disregard for keeping pensioners' benefits at a decent level.

It is no use just linking pensions to prices or to inflation. That is inadequate. For low income groups the inflation rate is greater than that of the retail prices index. Another study was carried out into the poorest and richest 10 per cent. of the population. Between 1974 and 1982 the retail prices index for poor people was 17 per cent. greater than it was for rich people simply because people on lower income must spend a higher proportion of their incomes on basics, such as food, housing and fuel. Age Concern compared the amount of fuel needed to heat a home in Glasgow and Aberdeen with that for a home in Bristol and found that it took 20 per cent. more in Glasgow and 30 per cent. more in Aberdeen than in Bristol. Yet the Government ignore that evidence.

In the past few years insult has been added to injury. In May 1988 the Prime Minister emphasised that "everyone" had benefited from increased prosperity. The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) said that only a "tiny minority" of pensioners were disadvantaged. Those right hon. Members escaped relatively unscathed from their callous, indifferent comments. Not so the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) who, when he was Secretary of State, tried to get the Government off the hook, but came unstuck when he said that poverty no longer existed. For him, poverty must mean death through malnutrition, if he was serious in claiming that there was no poverty.

Those unfortunate comments must be seen against the comments of Tory guru, Adam Smith, who stated that necessities were

"not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for support of life, but also whatever the custom of the country renders it decent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, not to be without."

Adam Smith talks about the lowest order, but the Government do not even mention it because they treat everyone as being of the lowest order. If the Government cannot be persuaded by that high Tory pantheon, Adam Smith, they will surely be persuaded by what the right hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), now the Minister for Overseas Development, said in 1979:

"it is not sufficient to assess poverty by absolute standards; nowadays it must be judged on relative criteria by comparison with the standard of living of other groups in the community."

If the Secretary of State should learn anything from the debate, it is that he should look into the issue of poverty. He and the Cabinet have studiously avoided it. Let him define what poverty is and what a man or woman needs to get by in life. Then he can start to convince people that the Government are concerned about people's needs and how they live.

Elderly folk, including disabled people, come to my surgery and tell me time and again that they cannot live on the state pension. They know that their visits are futile, but they say, "I am here only to talk to someone. I want to tell you how hard it is to get by, but I know you cannot do anything for us." Tonight the Government could do something for those people if they gave a commitment to study the incidence of poverty and if they realised that there was a relative condition of poverty. If that definition was returned to the political agenda, it would do a lot to improve the Government's credibility and to improve the welfare of our people.

We are all aware of the Government's lack of concern for the day-to-day needs of honest people, but I cannot believe that they are unaware of the inadequacy of the state pension. That pension does not allow pensioners to participate in society. To prepare for this debate, I studied a report produced by Eric Midwinter, of the Centre for Policy on Aging, concerning pensioners in London. He

analysed the involvement of pensioners in society and found that 2 per cent. of pensioners participate in adult education classes and 1 per cent. go to the cinema. One could argue that those percentages are low because many pensioners are infirm, but infirmity affects 4 per cent. only of those aged between 65 and 74 years. Pensioners' participation in adult education classes and their attendance at the cinema is low as they have been excluded from a social life because of poverty. The statistics are there for the Secretary of State to study.

Last week Age Concern told me of an elderly gentleman who buys items such as toilet rolls or washing up liquid every week as he must plan his budget on that basis. The Secretary of State fails to realise that to take a few pounds from such people represents a dramatic loss.

The Secretary of State has discussed occupational pensions. He should remember those individuals who receive an extremely small occupational pension. Some people who come to my surgery receive a pension of £20 a month, but, because of that, they are disregarded for other benefits. They find that they are worse off after a miserly rise in their benefits due to receiving a small occupational pension for which they have worked all their lives.

The statistics prove that pensioners spend less on fuel and housing, not because they can cope better, but simply because they cannot cope. In the past 12 years in Scotland 3,000 people have died from hypothermia. That is on their death certificates, but the figure may be even greater as doctors are reluctant to put hypothermia on the official forms. Nevertheless, 3,000 people have been officially recognised as having died from hypothermia, and surely that is enough for the Secretary of State to realise that there is a great problem.

We should not concern ourselves with any academic debate initiated by the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central. We should be determining the appropriate pension level on which people can live. We should face up to the reality that our pensioners die younger than elsewhere in Europe or in the United States because they receive insufficient money on which to live every week. There is no doubt where the blame lies.

The King's Fund Research Institute looked at statistics produced by the World Health Organisation and its conclusion was clear enough when it spoke of

"severe poverty and disadvantage among a substantial minority"

of British pensioners. The Government have studiously ignored that substantial minority.

The Government should consider why 50 per cent. of our pensioners must depend on means-tested benefits. In a comparison of present pension levels as a proportion of average earnings, Britain is bottom of the European league. We spend less on social security—on which 50 per cent. of old people depend—relative to gross domestic product than any other country. The proportion is getting smaller month by month.

Pensioners are also dependent upon key services which are under attack from the Government—the Health Service, housing and transport. Pensioners have seen cut not only their living standards but the link between average earnings and pensions. Is that miserliness or mendacity? Who knows?

If pensioners cannot get what they need, they must go to the social fund. The recent changes in that fund show that the number of social fund payments represents a third of what was paid out under the single payment regime which operated before the Social Security Act 1986. I have spoken to the staff in social fund offices in Scotland. When people approach the officers for help, they are asked, "Can you pay it back?" If it is judged that they cannot pay back the money, help is refused. They also consider whether applicants will be dependent on the state in future or whether they will go into an institution. If a person is institutionalised, the money will be paid out, but if that person plans to stay in the community the money will not be given as such people are considered a burden on society. That is the reality behind the social fund in Scotland; and the same is true in other regions.

The Government cannot escape their responsibilities because social fund officers deny that money in the Government's name. The number of claimants has reduced, but there has been no corresponding reduction in the needs of society; rather those needs have increased.

The Government talk about targeting, but that is yet another euphemism for cuts. Pensioners in Scotland already face difficulties with the poll tax, which has yet to come into operation in England and Wales. A Scottish pensioner couple on income support will be worse off in any area where the poll tax is more than £299. The Government have made transitional arrangements to pay £3 per week in assistance, but that arrangement is based on a notional tax figure; it is not based on actual tax. Such arrangements will result in increased hardship.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said that under the Labour Government the value of pensions rose by 20 per cent. in real terms. The Secretary of State had no adequate answer to that. If pensions had continued to rise by a similar amount under the Government a single pensioner would be £12 better off and a married couple would have received £18 a week more.

The Secretary of State should take up the issue of poverty. The Government should recognise what elderly people require not only to live on but to participate fully in society. They need that money to heat their homes, to have a healthy, varied diet and to afford decent clothing. We are witnessing the erosion of their living standards.

The Bill is a nonentity as it does not address poverty. It takes us further along the path set in 1986 and, as such, it deserves to be thrown out.

7.38 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made an extraordinary speech, which contained many promises. He attacked the Bill for being incoherent, but his speech was guilty of that.

The hon. Gentleman must have had his beady eyes on the £50 billion accumulated in private pension schemes and I assume that he saw that as a source of money for providing the comprehensive disability scheme that he described. He did not quantify the money involved and it is significant that when the Labour party was in power it failed to introduce such a scheme.

This is an important week for the disabled in Parliament. We have today's debate and another one on Wednesday. Tomorrow the Autumn Statement debate will indicate the public funds available for the next three years. The Bill covers both pensions and disability benefits, as well as the insulation grants scheme. The Opposition say

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

that the Bill does not go far enough, but it already overlaps the important National Health Services and Community Care Bill which is being discussed in Committee.

I wish to speak mainly about the aspects of this Bill dealing with the disabled, but I shall first touch on some other aspects. The insulation grant scheme allows for advice to be provided. Will that advice extend to cover problems of dampness? I have seen far too many council houses in my constituency with severe damp problems. The council is far too quick to condemn tenants for their lack of housekeeping and blames condensation and fuel poverty as the cause of the dampness. In many cases, the causes are much more fundamental: lack of damp proof courses, leaking roofs and gutters or, worse still, major structural defects. There are even cases in which houses have been built over water courses. The tenants should have a good source of independent advice.

The Bill's long title suggests that it covers a host of social security matters. Only yesterday, I did an early morning radio broadcast. I was asked by the Salvation Army in Bolton to raise the issue of social security payments for hostel tenants. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is aware of the large £7 million deficit which is being run up by the Salvation Army. I should be grateful for any suggestions of help he can offer.

Anyone responsible for running a pension scheme would be terrified by some of the points made by Opposition Members, especially by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. The thought that someone can grab the £50 billion accumulated savings in the pension schemes and use them for other purposes and the assumption that employees can have something for nothing—a pension without having to pay anything in—are ridiculous. We must remember that every pension has a price. The Confederation of British Industry has rightly said that extra costs and less flexibility for pension funds could well mean a loss of jobs. I should like to pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) about the need for small self-administered pension schemes to have full flexibility.

Opposition Members have called for a lot more on disability issues than exists in the Bill. The hon. Member for Oldham, West promised an unspecified amount for a comprehensive disability benefit. Why did not his own party do that when it was in power? Why does he not specify the amount that he has in mind? The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), who has done so much for disabled causes, says that he wants gigantic steps to take the disabled into the 1990s.

Opposition Members have condemned the Bill for not going far enough, but the Government have gone much further than did the Labour party when it was in power. Total spending on the long-term sick and disabled is now £8·3 billion—100 per cent. above the real level of Labour spending—and there is an increase each year of 75 per cent. more than the increase provided when the Labour party was in power. I, too, should like there to be more spending for the disabled, but the Bill's measures should be welcomed and not criticised. Surely Age Concern was wrong to say in a letter dated 19 January which I received today from Jane Clarkson, parliamentary officer:

"we believe that these measures should not be introduced until a comprehensive review of benefits and proper consultation have taken place."

That is absurd. Why should 58,000 terminally ill people have to wait for consultation when the Government are offering them £35 million now? They will not be alive to know the results of further consultations if the Government have to wait instead of acting now.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) criticised the Bill because it benefited only 1 million people instead of the 6 million people who suffer from some sort of disability. Surely it is far better to provide some benefit now and then consult further in the future. The Disability Benefit Consortium says that it is angered by the White Paper. I am sorry to hear that comment. Surely the Government have been right to commission the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' survey as the bedrock of future intelligent discussion about the further development of the benefit structure.

The White Paper calls for comments from the disability groups, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues intend to go further than hearing comments. I hope that they will want full consultation and that my right hon. Friend will confirm to Mencap and other organisations that full consultation with disabled persons and their organisations will take place to determine the development of new benefits.

The OPCS surveys cast light on our ignorance of the disabled. The number of severely handicapped children in institutional care because their families cannot care for them was provisionally estimated at 2,500. The survey shows that there are more than 5,000 children in institutional care. The first OPCS survey shows that there are more than 200,000 people in the most severely disabled category—category 1O—but that half of them are living at home and being looked after by their families. If my right hon. Friend and his colleagues would like to visit Bolton, they could see just one of my constituents, a severely disabled young adult called David Cummings, being looked after by his family and would appreciate the need for more benefits and services. The OPCS survey showed that 70 per cent. of disabled people live on 75 per cent. or less of average incomes, but their living costs are above average.

Public opinion will not allow a two-tier benefit structure to continue. Under such a system those with legal claims or industrial injury benefits have a relatively high income, while many of those whose disabilities arise as an accident at birth or who cannot make claims for compensation have to exist on a standard of living which is far too low, by any reckoning.

The Bill is right to bring in some benefits without delay. I look forward to further steps being taken in full consultation with disability organisations to provide the further benefits which are so desperately needed. Voluntary unpaid care in the community has been valued at about £12 billion per annum. Much more of that should be paid by the taxpayer. The challenge facing us all, especially the disability groups, is to accept each step as a positive development, while working with the Government to gain full public acceptance for further increases in disability benefits within the limits of the increasing expenditure which a successful economy can afford. I support the Bill and welcome its provisions.

7.47 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Anyone wanting to know the views of disabled people and others on the Government's record and the Bill should have been with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) and I outside the luxurious offices of the Department of Social Security earlier today. I was strolling towards my office when I saw a large group of people. I subsequently learnt that many of them were from the National Federation of the Blind, the Disability Alliance and other disabled groups. They were with guide dogs and in wheelchairs, and were extremely angry. They were handing in a petition to the Department.

I remind all taxpayers that we have spent about £50 million building luxurious offices in which Ministers of the Department of Social Security preside over this country's social security system. The Government spent £400,000 on paving stones around the offices, and the expenditure that caught my eye was the £40,000 for pot plants and other adornments for the offices.

This morning the petitioners were handing in a petition headed, "The way ahead for disabled people? Or a way out for the Government?" It stated:

"The Government has failed to understand the needs of disabled people.

The Government has failed to respond to the gross inadequacies in current benefit and service provision for disabled people.

The Government has failed to accept that the way to eliminate poverty amongst disabled people is by the introduction of a comprehensive disability income scheme."

They handed in the petition and spoke to a small group of journalists who were there to record its presentation.

Next, a group of 20 or 30 people started walking across Whitehall, and in the middle they decided to stop. For 15 minutes they held up the flow of traffic from Trafalgar square to Whitehall, protesting about the Government's record on helping the disabled, protesting against the inadequacy of this Bill, and affirming their rights.

I spoke to a number of people who told me that this was the only effective action that they could take, and that nobody would listen to them unless they took it. Newspapers and television and radio, they said, rarely report anything that they do—unless they take this sort of action—and Ministers take no notice either.

As other hon. Members have said, this is a miserable failure of a Bill; in no way does it meet the challenge that the Government face after 10 years in office. In 1979 the Government's election manifesto said that they wanted to "move towards a coherent system of disability benefits . . . as rapidly as the strength of the economy would allow". Since then, billions upon billions of pounds have been given to the richest in the land, to people who do not need the extra money. Billions have been spent on arms, and in the past 12 months we have seen that that expenditure was wholly unjustified—as the vast majority of people now recognise. They want the resources spent on those who are most in need—those whom we are discussing tonight.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) complained about ministerial sleight of hand and about being hoodwinked by figures given to the House about new money which, on investigation, turned out to be old money. He had every justification for complaining. I shall point out three measures that the Government have slipped through by stealth, with no approval—still less discussion—by the House. They will hit many of our constituents hard in the coming weeks and months.

The Secretary of State referred to the statutory sick pay scheme and gave the impression that these changes were marginal, affecting only a few people. I do not take that view; I understand that in April the Government are introducing changes to the scheme which will affect more than 2 million people who depend on statutory sick pay for help in the event of falling ill. I understand that those who earn between £46 and £83 a week, and who now receive £36·25 a week under the scheme, will get an increase in April of £3, to £39·25. Those earning £125 and above and who now receive £52·10 will get an increase of 40p in April, to £52·50. But the group of people about whom I am most concerned, those earning between £84 and £124 who now receive £52·10, face a cut in April to £39·25—a drop of £12·85 a week. I am advised that that will save the Government—or rob our constituents of—about £70 million or £80 million a year.

I come now to the changes made to the entitlement to unemployment benefit of those forced into short-time working. I have raised this matter several times recently in debate and in parliamentary questions. There are 9,000 workers on short time in the textile and clothing industries, many of them in Bradford. If they earn more than £43 a week they will not be able to apply, as they have done in the past, for unemployment benefit to top up their wages. I wonder whether Ministers in their luxurious offices could live on £43 a week. I doubt it. Most of them spend much more than that on lunch every day, yet my constituents and thousands of other people on low incomes who are forced into short-time working because of trading conditions will be compelled to live on that sum and be unable to receive the unemployment benefit that they formerly got.

I have read the proceedings of the Committee that dealt with this matter and discovered that no Minister mentioned that many short-time workers would be adversely affected by the changes that crept in on 10 December.

Probably few hon. Members have heard of the welfare milk scheme. I had not until I started receiving a stream of letters from those who deliver our milk daily and from a number of organisations which are concerned about the likely effect on recipients of not receiving welfare milk on the doorstep.

The welfare milk scheme has been in existence for 40 years. It sets out to provide free milk to pregnant women, single parents in receipt of family credit who have children under five, and the long-time unemployed. These people are provided with a weekly token which can be exchanged for seven pints of milk. The milk is usually delivered by a roundsman, although tokens can be used in shops and supermarkets. Tokens have a nominal value equivalent to the suppliers' current normal retail price. Typical doorstep prices outside London result in a token value of seven times 30p, which is £2·10.

Without discussion in the House, still less with real negotiations with the industry, the Government are proposing to reduce the amount of the token value to the roundsmen, making it uneconomic in many constituencies, including mine, for the milk to be delivered daily to the doorstep. That will result in roundsmen going out of business, especially in areas where they are financially dependent on supplying welfare milk, and many pregnant mothers and women with large families will be forced to buy their milk daily at the supermarket or corner shop, with all the inconvenience of having to bring it home. I

[Mr. Max Madden]

understand that these changes will be introduced on 28 January, and I urgently appeal to the Minister to make it clear that that will not happen.

I am indebted to Mr. J. T. Blackburn, managing director of Northern Dairies, who wrote to me earlier this month as follows:

"In areas of high density of welfare milk tokens, which admittedly affect a relatively small number of rounds, the introduction of this discount could threaten the viability of the service. For example, we are aware of customers of ours who collect over 200 tokens per week. The impact of the proposed discount of 21p per token is to reduce that individual's income at worst by £42 per week. This could make the difference between viable or non-viable business in areas where doorstep delivery is often already not without its difficulties."

I urge Ministers to get a grip on this matter. I am aware of correspondence sent out by bureaucrats in the Department in which they claim that these matters have been extensively discussed with the the trade. My information is that that is untrue. Ministers must suspend the scheme that is due to take effect later this month so that proper negotiations can take place.

My last point is about elderly people in Bradford. We are involved in great controversy over the council's closure of 12 elderly persons' homes. Local residents have attended two large public meetings about Upper Syke home and made clear their wishes in a community ballot. Of more than 1,000 people who voted, 97 per cent. voted to keep Upper Syke as an elderly person's home and to keep the grounds round it as an open space. They did not want it sold for development into eight luxury bungalows that will sell for £250,000 each. That home and the others should be kept.

I have been told about a gentleman aged 87 who is of Ukrainian origin and speaks little English. He suffers from a range of physical complaints that plague him daily with a great deal of pain. He has been in care—if that is the right term—of Bradford social services for the past fortnight. His neighbour wrote to me and said:

"The arrangement was that an attendant would come to him three times daily, and alas, this has not happened.

On Saturday morning one visit included a breakfast, (porridge only) and a few sandwiches for later, a repeat performance occurred on Sunday morning after a lapse of 24 hours.

This morning I inquired why this was and was informed that this is regarded as weekend cover.

I think you will agree that this is totally inadequate for a person this age, and whose mental confusion can lead to tragic consequences, especially when left alone for long periods.

Although he is waiting for a place in which he can be given respite care, this has not so far been available, and the events leading up to it are turning out to be dismal."

I spoke to that neighbour tonight by telephone and was told that the old gentleman is still in exactly the same plight. He has every right to proper respite care, which was available at Upper Syke and which would be available at the other homes if our Conservative-controlled council were not busy selling them off at less than market value.

I hope that Ministers will heed what has been said in debate and will not ignore it as the blind, the disabled and others who were outside their offices this morning were ignored and will continue to be ignored unless they take action. The Government will have great difficulty painting those blind and disabled people as Left-wing extremists, subversives and agitators. They speak for the decent people of this country who want resources put into the pockets of those who are most in need and not into the pockets of rich and privileged people who can look after themselves. That is the message of the debate. For 10 years the Government have turned a deaf ear to that message and I plead with them to heed some of the points made in the debate. I hope that they will pay heed quickly, not for our sake but for the sake of those whom we seek to represent.

8.2 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): In his statement of 10 January my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services identified three main strategic needs. He said:

"The third is to help those disabled people who can and wish to work by making it easier for them to keep or take up jobs."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1989; Vol. 164, c. 941.]

He went on to describe the two new benefits by which he would achieve those goals. One was the disability allowance which would address itself to the care needs and mobility needs of those of working age and below, and the other was the disability employment credit which is aimed at supporting those in work and those who would like to work and could do so but whose earning capacity is low. That followed his October 1989 package which aimed to improve the benefit structure for those who choose to go on to employment, rehabilitation courses or beneficial employment.

In this debate the Secretary of State spoke of his desire and purpose to help those for whom the system does least at the moment. To me, that shouts immediately about the young disabled seeking work and I want to bring to the attention of the House some small points which might sink into people's hearts and minds and make them think a little harder about how the Secretary of State can achieve his goals.

Only one third of young disabled people seeking work after leaving school or college manage to find it. That compares with nearly three quarters of their peers—the non-disabled of the same age group. Some 51 per cent. of them end up not in work or in youth training schemes. That is one in two, whereas less than one fifth of the non-disabled find themselves in that position—17 per cent. This is where the issue impinges on the Secretary of State. Some 49 per cent. of the young disabled rely on social security benefits as their main source of income, and that compares with 16 per cent. of the general population. All those people had less than half the income of those with a job—£31 a week as opposed to approximately £78 a week. I take issue with Opposition Members because poverty and disability are relative. I have just been in India where the definition of poverty is different from the definition here. I strongly support the Secretary of State when he talks about relative poverty. There is also relative disability.

The tragedy for these youngsters is that most of them want and deserve to work and they have much to offer. Disabled people have great motivation, an ability to plan and a knowledge of how to use scarce resources to reach a goal in a prescribed time. They are good at those things, because for them they are the stuff of everyday life. They may have a lower physical or mental capacity than other people, and in order to achieve their goals they have to plan and work with scarce resources. Those are the hills that they climb every day.

Nearly 80 per cent. of all disabled people are unemployed compared with about 6 per cent. of the general population. I suggest that that is the real discrimination in our society and that we face a psychological barrier in society's perception of the disabled. The title of that popular BBC programme "Does he take sugar?" sums it all up.

The needs of the disabled are shared by three Departments—the Department of Health, which looks carefully at prevention and treatment, the Department of Employment, which cares for the job provision of the disabled, and the Department of Social Security, which, in today's world, defines how we treat people with needs other than those that we have ourselves. That is why the Secretary of State for Social Security has to be the brand leader in changing society's perception and in supporting the disabled in their initiatives to enter the outside world.

The psychological barrier is particularly profound in the world of work where employers deliberately turn aside from tapping this deep vein of marketable skills and energies, yet little is asked of the employer. The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 set a quota of only 3 per cent. of registered disabled to be met only by companies employing more than 20 people. In 1965, a total of 53·2 per cent. of companies met that target. In 1980 it was 35 per cent. and in 1989 it was 26 per cent. The percentage of employers not meeting the quota at all because they were issued with exemption permits—and that includes Parliament and the BBC—was 27 per cent. in 1965, while in 1986 it was well over half. One fifth of all employers neither meet the quota nor have permits. They just ignore the system. The scheme has failed the disabled and thus they are not registering.

In 1950 just under 1 million disabled people registered as opposed to 389,000 today. That is 1 per cent. of the total population. Perhaps our failure in offering employment to the disabled accounts for the huge gap between those who are registered disabled and the number that the OPCS survey found as disabled—6·5 million, more than 10 per cent. of our total population.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the hon. Lady confirm that Government Departments number among those organisations that have not employed their quota of disabled people?

Miss Nicholson: I know that Government Departments have not employed their quota of disabled people. Society as a whole has failed disgracefully.

Much is being done, and I am proud to support the Government's many initiatives. We have a fund for employers to adapt premises, which has been quite widely used, although not widely enough. We have a fund to provide for a disabled person's introductory period at work, which I welcome. There is a fund for special equipment—such as a wheelchair, or a computer for a blind person perhaps. We have a fares-to-work scheme for peole who cannot use public transport, and that, too, is a welcome initiative.

Into that pattern fall the large new proposals introduced by the Secretary of State. There is so much that my right hon. Friend can do. I call on him to undertake a large and widespread educational programme to change the public's perception of disability. I call on him to ensure that knowledge of his new initiatives is widely disseminated in a form or forms that disabled people themselves can understand. Disability so often means lack of educational opportunity. Many deaf people cannot read properly or have other similar problems. Many blind people also have problems of perception.

I challenge the Department of Employment, and call on the Secretary of State to do the same in his leading role in this crucial matter, on the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944. How many prosecutions have there been under that Act? None that I can trace. Although it is not a crime to be under quota, it is a crime not to take on a disabled person for the next vacancy when one is under quota. Who has been prosecuted? No one that I can find.

The Secretary of State for Social Security and his Department should take credit for the extent of their achievements to date. The Secretary of State is not present, but I believe that hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree that his perception and sensitivity have been great, although he has much more to do . I support the Bill.

8.11 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): We have been told that we should congratulate the Government on the Bill, but, in my opinion, it is an absolute disgrace. Many of my constituents have written to me about the original version of clause 1, which deals with the attendance allowance. That has now been amended, and the person who suggested the six-month qualifying period must have been a Rasputin. The clause caused a great deal of concern and indignation to people who have watched their parents dragged out of bed by a rude, abrupt or abrasive doctor. As recently as 12 January I received a letter from one of my constituents to whom that had happened. Sometimes medical practitioners get it all wrong, and it is difficult anyway for them to determine whether a person will live or die. One of my constituents was told by the doctor whom she had called out that she should not be wasing his time —that she should not have called him out because an emergency call-out cost £40. That was on a Friday. My constituent did not bother to call him out the following Sunday and the patient was dead by Sunday night. People who live in poor areas tend to believe what their doctors say.

Last week another constituent wrote to say that her father had been reduced to tears by a doctor who had been called out to try to get the question of the six-month qualifying period out of the way. The Government did not change the clause because of compassion; they were shamed into changing it. In May I tabled an early-day motion which was supported by many of my hon. Friends who had also received letters from their constituents. It was some time before I received a letter from Lord Skelmersdale, who was very sympathetic and who told me that there were plans to change the clause.

What about the psychological effects of the provision on those suffering from terminal diseases? Some children do not like to tell their mothers or fathers—or any other member of the family—that their time is up. How will they claim the allowance? Is it not sad that the financial tally-up in the Bill allows for only 52,000 of the 150,000 people who are dying to claim, at a possible cost of £18 million? What about the other 100,000 people? And what about sons and

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daughters who do not bother to tell their terminally ill parents or grandparents that they are not claiming any allowance? The Minister did not mention such cases.

Clause 2 deals with the age-related addition to the severe disablement allowance. What a pittance that is—at £10, £6·50 and £3·10. That illustrates the way in which we are treating the disabled. Look at all the legislation that has been passed about which nobody cares. People are not really interested. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1972 is one example. A great deal of time was spent amending that Bill and telling local authorities what they should do. The Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). The Government gave the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities instructions regarding that Act—that Scottish local authorities should implement only those provisions which did not involve expenditure.

That is why disabled people do not trust the Government. To implement that Act fully would have cost about £26 million. Thousands of pounds remain unclaimed under the Act and thousands of chronically sick and disabled people have never even been interviewed by the social workers of their local authority because there is a large backlog. The chronically sick and disabled do not owe this Government any favours.

The extent of poverty in this country is a scandal. I remember the miserable excuse that Ministers gave when we last debated child benefit, which has remained frozen for three years—that the Government do not want to subsidise people who do not need the benefit. The Government claim that they cannot afford to do that, yet they can afford to lose £1·6 billion by not lifting the national insurance ceiling for higher-paid workers and a further £2·1 billion by reducing the top tax rate from 60 per cent. to 40 per cent. That is how hypocritical they are.

When I was a regional councillor, I was chairman of the monitoring group in Strathclyde, and I remember how the disabled felt then. They produced a document called "Living in a Hostile Environment". Those disabled people were not looking for a pittance of £10, £6 or £3·10, but wanted an independent centre so that they could live a normal life. They wanted better access to local authority and private buildings. The proposals to improve access and to form advisory panels were not implemented because the Government did not make available money for that purpose.

Clauses 2 and 3 are a cause of concern to many disabled groups, especially the provision in clause 2 affecting attendance allowance, which is to be abolished, and the earnings-related element of clause 3. What will be done for the people who will suffer as a consequence of those measures? What will be done for those people who will lose security benefits and housing allowance? They have not been mentioned. Where will they go to? The poor suffer all the time.

What of the poverty that has been created by the Government? They have a golden opportunity to do something for the poor. Instead, they introduce in clause 10 insulation grants for low-income families. Last year, 16,000 people in Scotland had their electricity supply cut off. What will the Government do about that situation?

Why has this Bill of shame been brought before the House? It does nothing for the homeless or for those in poverty. Despite everything that has been said in this House, in London 30,000 people still live in cardboard boxes. What kind of heat insulation do they enjoy? The Bill should aim at clearing up the streets of London and of Scotland, where thousands of people are homeless and have little chance of getting a meal at night. Amendments to the Bill should have those purposes in mind. If the Government have any intention of acting, they should introduce a Bill of compassion and pay the money that is needed to resolve the problems that I have described.

8.22 pm

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I support the Bill for a variety of reasons. It improves the conditions of entitlement to attendance allowance, which is why I was surprised by the comments of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). Although some of his criticisms relating to those who care for the terminally ill were justified, the Bill addresses them. He may disagree with certain details of the Bill's drafting, but it will bring a major improvement in an area that has been the subject of complaints that I and many other right hon. Members have received over the years.

I welcome also the modifications to the help available for the disabled. The Government have a good record, contrary to the suggestions made by Opposition Members, of increasing the money provided to the disabled over the past 10 years by more than 100 per cent. in real terms—and many benefits are given more efficiently.

Ms. Short: That is not true.

Mr. Wood: I believe that it is true.

Ms. Short: In fact, there has been a 90 per cent. increase in spending on the disabled, but 90 per cent. of that is accounted for by increased take-up of benefits that were in place before the present Government took office.

Mr. Wood: I thought that even the hon. Lady would be delighted at greater take-up of benefits for the disabled. A huge sum is being spent, and will continue to be spent, for that purpose.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Opposition are being ungenerous in disputing the value of the Government's new measures? One of the benefits will allow a family with a disabled child to enjoy an income £65 more than anything previously in existence. It is untrue to say that there are no new benefits. There are, together with improvements to existing benefits. Together, they have brought about a huge increase in expenditure in real terms on disability benefits.

Mr. Wood: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend's comments. The truth is that there are more benefits and that greater assistance is given to the disabled, which I welcome. I hope that in coming years help will be given as and when new problems are identified.

I welcome also the insulation grant scheme, which will give valuable assistance to low-income households as well as being an energy-efficient measure in itself. Together, those provisions are ample justification for the Bill.

I want to concentrate my remarks on occupational pension schemes, which have also been the subject of problems that the Bill seeks to address. I commend the

Government for developing pensions provisions over recent years. In moving away from the state earnings-related pension scheme, the Government recognised—though after it had been recognised by many actuarial advisers—that SERPS could hit major problems during the next century. It would be absurd to keep in place a scheme that might run into severe funding difficulties. It is no use making pie in the sky provision for the next century if, when it comes to the pinch, it cannot be financed. A number of actuaries responsible for examining pension schemes feel that the Government have still not moved far enough away from SERPS and that there are risks inherent in the level of commitment that remains even now.

At the same time, the Government have enabled and encouraged a wide variety of new private pension provision. In particular, they acknowledge the need to ensure proper job mobility. A considerable number of people, when contemplating a job move, were inhibited from moving because they were nervous of the effect that such action would have on their pensions. Despite the fact that that aspect was widely debated both within the pensions industry and within companies themselves, little was done until the Government took action. Therefore, the legislation covering portable pensions and company schemes is most welcome.

The Bill makes important improvements to the provision for and the protection of members of occupational pension schemes. I join my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) in welcoming the proposal for a pensions ombudsman. The creation of that office would assist and reassure pension fund members who feel that they have been given a raw deal. At times, those members have gained the wrong impression, but it will be immensely valuable for them to be able to refer to an objective, independent observer of the scene. That would serve to increase members' confidence in schemes and in the trusts that run them.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I wonder whether my hon. Friend has encountered cases similar to those that have affected my own constituents. When a firm is taken over by another, obviously existing pension rights should remain with the employees, but responsibility for them should move to the new employer. In such circumstances, difficulties can arise, which, in my own experience, are difficult to overcome. Will the new Bill help right hon. and hon. Members better to assist constituents who find themselves in the circumstances that I have described?

Mr. Wood: The ombudsman may be able to take up a difficult issue, and the Bill makes provision for when problems arise if a company takes over another and that company's pension fund is ended or combined with that of the company taking it over.

I hope that the pensions ombudsman will be required to produce an annual report. That would be immensely valuable as it would demonstrate the problems that arise. Many members of pension funds will believe that they have been mistreated in some way because they have insufficient understanding of how their pension fund operates. If the ombudsman can clarify such difficulties in his report so that pension funds and their advisers can draw the necessary information to members' attention, that would be a great help.

The Government's intention to increase protection and to revalue pension fund rights for early leavers from pension funds because they move company or because their company is taken over is admirable. Improvements have been made in such arrangements, but they can be enhanced. They are being enhanced by the Bill.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) waxed long on whether pension fund provision could be increased completely to cover inflation. We have to reach a rather more careful balance than he suggested. We have to consider commitments and obligations to pension fund members, but we have also to consider the risks and liabilities that might fall on employers. It is all very well to say, when there is a surplus—I have some sympathy with what has been said about surpluses—that the first call must be to improve inflation protection, but it would be wholly unreasonable to say that if a pension fund is unable to meet all those things that people might desire, the employer could foot the bill. That would put a wholly unreasonable liability on employers in some circumstances.

While it can legitimately be argued that employers are good at providing pension funds for their employees, if we increase the risks and liabilities on employers excessively, they might be reluctant to provide pension funds. That applies to the changes that we have made with portability. Some of the attraction for employers, and some generous pension fund provision, has already disappeared. We must tread carefully so as not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

I cannot conceive of how the hopes and ambitions of the hon. Member for Oldham, West could be sustained, in view of the increasing commitment to pensioners. I believe that the pensions industry will be appalled at his commitment concerning liabilities that may fall on pension funds. It would be wholly unreasonable to put all those liabilities on pension funds and the companies that provide finance for them.

The Government are right to propose constraints on self-investment, but I wonder whether the relaxation concerning directors of small companies is sufficient. For a small company with four or five directors and two or three others—or perhaps slightly larger—the proposed constraint on self-investment may be excessive. That should perhaps be considered further in Committee.

The Government have taken several useful steps forward to ensure that we have improved pension provision, taking account of the desirability, in many cases, of employees moving firms. The Government have not followed the unwise course suggested by Opposition Members, who have said that we should put unreasonable and unfair obligations on pension funds or the employers who provide them. Overall, I am delighted to be able to welcome the Bill.

The Government's record on pensions and social security matters is good. The Opposition may scoff, but the finances available to pensioners, albeit on average, have increased substantially. I admit that that is substantially the result of occupational pension funds and the private savings of some individuals, but the Government, to complement that, have rightly concentrated their attention on helping those in most need who may not be properly provided for by occupational pension

[Mr. Wood]

schemes or savings. The Government have taken important steps to continue the policies they have pursued for the past few years.

I am worried, however, about people with small private occupational pensions. Some constituents tell me that, because they have small schemes, they are just above the level at which they can receive income support benefits and that they miss out on various passported benefits. We should encourage people to provide for their old age when possible through a pension scheme or private savings, but, if we create a system in which those who have done their best are deprived of benefits with the result that they are worse off than if they had not saved or taken out occupational pensions, we shall damage our policy of encouraging people to provide for themselves. Although I disagree with much of what Opposition Members have said, I thought that one element worth taking up. I hope that it will be borne in mind.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the greatest enemy of savings is inflation? That is one of the reasons why we should give priority to dealing with it. When Labour was in power inflation reached an average of 14 per cent. per annum, with a peak of 27 per cent. That is why it is so important for us to keep it strictly under control, so that the value of savings is not eroded; and that is why the people of this country have so much more confidence in the present Government's ability to manage the economy than they ever had in the ability of the Labour party to do so.

Mr. Wood: My hon. Friend is right. One of the most damaging experiences for pensioners was the substantial destruction of the value of their savings under the last Labour Government. Furthermore, modest pensions that appeared to be adequate turned out to be inadequate, because of the fall in the value of money engineered by the Labour party.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: I believe that the Government's spending on social security has now reached £1 billion a week. Can my hon. Friend envisage that amount being spent if the Opposition had been in charge of the economy for the past 10 years?

Mr. Wood: If a nation is not generating wealth, it is not possible to help those who are in need. One of the great developments over the past few years has been the generation of more wealth by our nation, which has enabled us to make adequate provision. That is revealed by the various figures giving the average position of pensioners.

Ms. Short: There is a steady growth pattern.

Mr. Wood: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) may say from a sedentary position that there is a steady growth pattern, but nothing could be further from the truth: the unsteadiness of the pattern is one of its characteristics, and often reveals which party is in power. I hope that such sedentary interventions will be treated with less than full regard.

I welcome the additions and modifications to the major social security legislation that has already been enacted. I look forward to their implementation, and hope that in the coming years it will be possible to make further refinements to improve both occupational pension schemes and the provision for those who are most in need when they reach old age.

8.42 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I shall not comment on the speech of the hon. Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood).

This cannot really be described as an "election Bill" —except, perhaps, vis-a-vis the Opposition. Given the growing number of pensioners in the community, we must face the fact that there is a good deal of discontent among them and that they are asking for more. Some elements, certainly, have done remarkably well, but a large percentage, including members of the Public Service Pensioners Association, have been pleading with Members of Parliament to take their worries on board. If public service pensioners are worried, we must assume an even deeper concern on the part of those who are simply on state pensions—although their number may be declining proportionately—and we must ask whether we are doing enough for them.

I welcome some of the proposals in the Bill, and I echo the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) to the caring attitude of the Secretary of State. Over the years, he has sought to improve provision generally. I agree, however, with the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) about the comment by Age Concern that nothing should have been done until a review had been conducted. It may be thought, however, that it is better to give some people something until we have got everything right. We have been waiting since the mid-1980s for a comprehensive review of social security and the disabled, and I believe that disabled people feel increasingly dissatisfied that their cause has not been dealt with more speedily.

I want to mention two aspects of the Bill in particular. First, let me again make a plea for carers. At a meeting of the all-party disability group that I attended last week, a carer described the problems that she had had to face over the years in looking after a young disabled person. She welcomed some improvements in the system—as do we —but pinpointed a perceived need. She had been granted an allowance to care for her disabled child, and was later able to obtain qualified respite help. She then discovered that the helper was being paid £5 an hour, while the allowance with which she was provided worked out at only 15p an hour.

Surely that is not a proper benefit for those who carry the burden of community care. Does the Department really value a loving family relationship at £4·85 and then pay 15p for care, while paying £5 an hour to someone who comes in from outside, is not related to the disabled person and is not capable of the same individual, personal love? I ask for more attention to be paid to those who carry that weight, whether they are parents, sons or daughters—and some are themselves growing elderly.

An article in Saturday's *Belfast Telegraph*, headed "New benefits under scrutiny" and dealing with the disability allowance—which is intended to combine the old attendance allowance and the mobility allowance—observed:

"So far from simplification, we seem to be due another complex benefit unless it is changed before 1992 when it comes in.

I can't help thinking that (praise God) I am strong and in sound mind, but can barely understand this lot."

As we are seeking to improve the benefits system, should we not bear in mind those for whom it is intended, and create simpler and more helpful arrangements for their needs to be met?

8.47 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I want to refer particularly to clause 10, which mentions energy efficiency. I give it one small half-cheer, on a "better late than never" basis.

The Government must surely admit that the clause is an attempt to disinter energy efficiency from the knackers' yard into which it has fallen over the past 18 months. The Minister of State, Department of Energy is not here now, although he was earlier; he will probably recall the oral question that I asked him 11 months ago about the state of play regarding the collapse of the community insulation schemes for local authorities and voluntary organisations. The schemes enabled them to arrange draught proofing and loft insulation in the houses of low-income families.

The Minister told us about the high-powered negotiations that were proceeding between his Department and the Department of Energy to preserve the good work that had been built up under the scheme in the years it has been in existence, and the tremendous enthusiasm that must be maintained. We all knew, however, that, after the last of the community programme schemes disappeared in August 1988, employment training unfortunately came in. Community insulation was no longer of value in the mighty massage parlour that goes under the name of the Department of Employment—or the bureau of unemployment statistics. I am pleased to see that the Minister has now returned.

The Prime Minister used to heap praise on the noble Lord Young for bringing her answers while other Ministers brought her problems. I do not think that she says that now, but at that time he was thought to be the person who could dream up wizard wheezes for apparently bringing down the unemployment. When the Government thought that they had a good tale to tell about unemployment, all these bright ideas for killing two birds with one stone, achieving energy efficiency in low-income households on the cheap, and massaging the unemployment figures in a downward direction by giving everybody three days' work a week if they were under 25 and did not have family responsibilities—all that went by the board in August 1988.

The Secretary of State, perhaps understandably, tried to elide the 17 or 18 months that have gone by since then. In his introduction he said that when the community programme came to an end we would have to do something about it. But that was 17 or 18 months ago. This is one of the outstanding examples of interdepartmental cross-sterilisation, even for this Government. It has resulted in 18 months being taken to come up with a clause in a Bill. We welcome it on this basis, but it will take another few months for a scheme to become operational. But for the first time energy-efficiency projects in low-income households will be separated out from the employment training or community programme rules for giving temporary work to the unemployed.

I suppose it could be said that the Bill has some of the same characteristics as the policy on pension funds, income support and social security. The Government cannot quite make up their mind what they mean by targeting and what they mean by generalised support for a wholesale objective—in this case, energy; in another case, prosperity in old age. In this case, what does targeting really mean? The Government do not want something that old-age pensioners or people on low incomes can regard as an entitlement; they themselves want to be Lord and Lady Bountiful distributing the windfall apples in the autumn and feeling very good about it. This is not an entitlement; it is a device from which the Government will extract the maximum benefit at the next election.

As it has taken so long, Ministers will have to excuse some scepticism on our part. We have to ask what the Bill is intended to achieve. What, after all, is a low-income family? Is it a family with a below-average wage? Is it a family on income support? Or should it perhaps be related more specifically to people in whose case the absence of heating will hurt most? That will not necessarily be the people on the lowest incomes. It may be people with children or with particular health or disability problems; or the oldest pensioners. They are not necessarily the same thing. A family comprising two people in their thirties or forties with no health problems and on income support would not be as much a priority as a couple with a much greater income and with four small children or something of a health problem. The Government need to tell us exactly how they will get round the problem of defining exactly what constitutes priority in the context of low income.

We also want to know more about the administrative mechanism that will be used. Will we have another fiasco like the student loan scheme? Can the Government tell us in what financial year they intend to come to an agreement with the contracting-out agency—clearly they intend to contract it out—to administer the scheme for them? We ought to know what is their target for getting something going. After all, they have told us that they have only £12 million this year because it is the tail end of the Department of Employment expenditure, but they have not told us what expenditure they will assume in a typical financial year when the scheme is up and running and when they have a contracting agency to administer the scheme for them.

We have been told that they have indicated to some of the voluntary agencies that might get involved a budget of £20 million in a typical full financial year. I shall be very glad if the Minister who replies to the debate says something about that matter. The proposals should be efficient in energy terms and in administrative terms, and not simply an attempt to say, "We have done something on the energy-efficiency front for low-income households" when, in the end, it will not amount to anything more than the neo-brutalism of the sadly-departed junior Minister at the Department of Health, who told everybody to lag their grandmothers' legs for winter. I hope that the Minister who replaced her will adopt a more profound attitude to the means of dealing with problems of hypothermia amongst the elderly, the problem of cut-offs for families with young babies to look after, and so on.

I want to make two final points. First, this appears to be a three-part scheme, starting simply with continuation of the draught-proofing and loft-insulation schemes that formed a classical part of the community insulation schemes that have been going for five or six years. The Bill contains a promise that it will go on to a stage two and a stage three. Stage two will involve cavity wall insulation

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

—not so far covered—room thermostats, improvements to heating systems, and so on. Will that be in the next financial year, or in the great blue yonder?

Finally, there is the reference—great so far as I am concerned, if it ever comes about—to advice and practical assistance as regards more efficient domestic appliances in low-income households. I am not sure how many low-income households have, say, dishwashers or freezers, but those which have should obviously have appliances that operate on a low-energy-consumption basis to keep electricity bills down. Obviously very few low-income households are in a position to buy new domestic appliances. For the purpose of achieving lower heating bills they usually buy the cheapest appliances, which are the ones that result in the highest fuel bills. When will this come about? Will it be in six or seven years' time? Or do the Government envisage it happening next year?

We want to know the aim of this scheme. Will the Government try to sell it, completely fraudulently, as a measure that will contribute to a solution of the greenhouse gases problem and the overall question of energy-efficiency improvement in this country? If that is the case, it is a fraud, because there is nothing in the Bill that indicates that energy consumption overall can be reduced. The poorer the family, the more likely it is that it will derive benefit from improved insulation for greater warmth and comfort rather than from reduced energy consumption.

If this is part of the great drive by the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for the Environment to reduce Britain's contribution to the greenhouse gas problem, it is absolute nonsense. Yet again we are in serious danger of the Government merely confirming their overall policy on pensions, on social security and now on energy efficiency. They are walking straight into the trap of Reagan's America and creating a two thirds, one third society. This is energy efficiency for the under-class; we want a lot more than that.

8.57 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I wish that we had a big blackboard in the Chamber tonight—we have heard so many facts and figures. However, we have not had much compassion from Conservative Members about what is happening to the ordinary men and women who live on state benefits. I was surprised to hear the argument about the relative poor here and in India. Do the Government not understand what poverty is all about? Do Conservative Members not walk the streets of their constituencies?

In recent months I have spoken to many organisations about poverty and about the struggle to live. The churches have got together to produce a document entitled "Hearing the Cry of the Poor", and subtitled "A Declaration by Church Action on Poverty." Some of the statements in the document are most revealing. The Church has not been known as a radical organisation, supportive of Socialism, but it is nevertheless concerned about what is happening to ordinary men and women in this country and to their families. The document states:

"It cannot be right:

—that some have to survive on less than £60 per week while others receive pay rises of £3,000 per week.

—that benefit levels are so low that loans are needed for essential items.

—that more people are begging in the street.

—that young people are living in cardboard boxes . . .

—that the mentally ill are discharged from hospitals without adequate support.

It cannot be right:

—to cut taxes as an incentive to the rich but reduce incomes to spur on the poor.

—that economic growth is paid for by those excluded from its benefits."

The Minister and the Secretary of State must have read that document. It is an indictment of the Government if the churches are saying, "Enough is enough. It is time for the Government to do something to help the poor."

I believe that I know my constituents. I know the problems that they are experiencing because I have lived in poverty. I know what it is to use up a week's wages the day one receives them paying high rents, and for food and clothes. I challenge the Minister or any Conservative Member to answer some questions. My first relates to pensioners' food. What is the cost of half a dozen eggs, a loaf of bread, a large tin of beans and 2 lb of potatoes? If any Conservative Member can tell me the cost, I should be delighted to have their intervention.

I ask the Minister to answer these important questions because the Minister and the Secretary of State and their party's supporters should be asking the public, "What does it cost to heat your house?" How much is a bottle of Calor gas and how long does it last? What does a hundredweight of coal cost? I challenge any Conservative Member to tell me that, yet they should all know it if they claim to represent the people and especially the poor. How much does a gallon of paraffin cost and for how long does it heat an average-size room? How much does a week's electricity cost in Glasgow?

I challenge the Minister or any Conservative Member to answer my questions. Do Conservative Members know the cost of those essential commodities? I will even allow the Minister's civil servants to give her the prices, but I am sure that they will not. Until Ministers and Conservative Members in general understand the needs of our elderly people and of the families that we represent, the Government will never get their figures right or eliminate poverty or inequality.

What does a pair of shoes cost? I spent a full year leading a team investigating the needs of elderly people in areas of priority treatment—in places where deprivation was found in such multiples that even the Government recognised that they had to provide some money. We visited most of the pensioners' groups and asked them about the problems that they were facing. The pensioners' problems were simple. They could not afford to eat properly. They could not afford to buy proper food. They could not heat their houses. They could afford to heat only one room.

Does the Minister know where those areas are? I should be delighted to take the Minister or the Secretary of State to them if I thought that they could do something for the people there which would make it worth my spending time with them.

I have met elderly men and women whose suffering would have broken the Minister's heart. They could not go out to buy a pair of shoes when they needed them. They could not afford to buy a heavy overcoat in the winter. They did not have sufficient finances to clothe themselves, to heat their homes or to eat.

My local authority had to set up a winter care centre in Strathclyde. We had to take elderly people into a heated hall to give them bowls of soup. Who would have believed that in this day and age in Britain we would have to heat halls so that we could take our elderly folk there to give them bowls of soup? We had to do that because in the previous year people had died of hypothermia in their homes.

The Government recognise that there are areas of priority treatment, so why do they not recognise that our pensions are almost the worst in Europe? I have visited parts of Europe such as Germany and France. My mother and my mother-in-law are elderly and both live alone on their pensions. My late father fought in the war. I am not a warmonger, but I wonder who won the war. The Germans provide their folk with decent housing, decent health services and a decent education system. The German Government treat their elderly people with compassion, love and understanding. It is time that the Government realised that if we do not look after our elderly, there is nothing worth living for.

The Bill is a miserable package delivered by miserable people. I plead with the Government to have some goodness in their hearts and assist our people who are at the bottom of the pile. They should stop helping the champagne charlies and the designer-wearing wimps and help the ordinary people who put the Government into power. I hope that those same people will put the Government out at the next general election.

9.7 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I shall make a brief contribution to this important debate. I do not recognise the picture that has been painted from the Opposition Benches. As has been pointed out by Conservative Members, the payment of more than £1,000 million per week in social security benefits is a testament of the Government's concern for those in society who are in real need.

Clause 1 includes an act of great compassion. It makes the attendance allowance available at an earlier stage to those who are terminally ill, bringing an additional 58,000 people into benefit. That is a measure of how the Government are trying to improve the social security system. It is also a demonstration of the Government's commitment to organisations such as hospices. I should be grateful for confirmation that the attendance allowance will be available to people who are dying in their own homes as well as people in hospices. The greatest thing for somebody who is faced with death, perhaps through the tragedy of cancer, is the ability to die with dignity. Agencies such as the MacMillan nurses and other caring groups, who can be afforded by the availability of the benefit, will enable those people to die with dignity. I saw the type of nursing care that can be administered by those people when my father-in-law died from cancer of the liver. It is real care that counts and it is greatly appreciated by the families. I congratulate the Government on introducing the Bill.

I and other hon. Members have received representations about the position of carers and several hon. Members have referred to that this evening. Although the Bill does not specifically deal with that matter, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to think again about the various forms of help for carers. There seems to be a difference between the treatment of those of retirement age and those who are below retirement age who care for loved ones. There should be some consistency. The Government, rightly, are encouraging those of pensionable age to contribute to society. They have removed the effect on a person's pension of his going out and doing some work. Work in the home—caring—is just as valid as work in the community for other rewards. If my right hon. and hon. Friends can find time in Committee to consider that aspect, it would be warmly welcomed.

The Government have recognised some of the growing pains caused by the increasing mobility of people with pensions. I am glad that the ombudsman and register provisions have been made. Many people who move from job to job sometimes forget that they have a pension entitlement. In a way, I am a little sad that the Bill does not go further. Some issues in the pension industry need attention—for example, surpluses in company pension funds and pension holidays. As the pension industry grows —encouraged by the Government, enabling people to make the right self-help provisions for their old-age—people will say, "Perhaps we, too, have some claim on the surpluses of the pension funds." If a company seeks a pension holiday, perhaps we should gain from that—[HON. MEMBERS:"Oh!"] Despite the derisory calls from the Opposition, I believe that that is right and proper. Anything that can be done to enhance the private provision of pensions allows more money from the state system of help for those without occupational pensions to be targeted carefully. There is still an underlying problem in that not enough people have good-quality company pension schemes.

I commend the Bill to the House. I congratulate the Government on making progress in their treatment of those who are in genuine need of help.

9.11 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Unfortunately, in the Social Security Bill the Government are doing what they have done in many other Bills—they identify a vulnerable group and use it to disguise their meanness and their callousness.

I am sure that every hon. Member will welcome the automatic right to attendance allowance for those who are terminally ill. We need reminding of the debates on attendance allowance in other social security Bill Standing Committees. In 1987, the Committee on the Social Security Bill discussed the two qualifications then in place —the six-month qualification and the age bar, whereby any child under two, however severely disabled and however much care was needed, was not entitled to attendance allowance. I understand that the Minister has removed that age bar. By far the most sensible thing to do would be to abolish the six-month rule. Rigorous criteria on attendance allowance determine whether people qualify.

The Government are attempting to put into legislation an objective definition of "terminally ill". It is difficult to do that, because doctors' diagnoses vary. What is more, the legislation states that a doctor must be sure that a person is likely to die within the six-month period. What happens if, as occasionally occurs, patients recover from the diagnosed illness after the six months has elapsed and

[Ms. Dawn Primarolo]

they have been in receipt of attendance allowance because the doctor thought that they were terminally ill? Will such people be required to pay back the attendance allowance?

What happens in cases where the doctor cannot be absolutely sure that the illness is terminal? Who decides then, even though the person may be in agony? What happens if the patient does not accept the diagnosis, even though the family accepts it? What happens if the person says to the family that he or she does not want them to apply for attendance allowance? The family will be left in exactly the same position as before. The attendance allowance will not be claimed and yet the care will have to be undertaken. What happens if the doctor decides, for the best of psychological reasons and in his or her best judgment, not to tell the patient or the family that the patient is terminally ill?

I am dealing with a case now in which the doctor decided not to tell the husband, wife or family that the husband was terminally ill because the doctor felt that it was best for them. The family is making a complaint against the health authority and the doctor. What happens if there is no one to claim attendance allowance for supplying extra help and nursing to someone who is identified as terminally ill? This vitally important matter is fraught with problems that are not clarified in the Bill.

The provisions take the Government into incredibly dangerous territory, simply because they are too mean to say that the criterion for paying attendance allowance is whether the patient is allowed day and night provision. In recent statements, the Government have said that the next stage in developing their criteria and streamlining the system is to merge the mobility and attendance allowances. What happens with the definition within that of terminally ill? What happens if the doctor gets it wrong and the person is not terminally ill, but has been in receipt of attandance allowance? The Department has amazing powers in legislation to retrieve money that has been paid erroneously over any period.

It would be much better if the Government agreed that the criteria of day and night provision for attendance allowance was all that was required and that there was no need for a six-month qualification period or a legislative definition of terminally ill. The Government should give these people the money. They desperately need it and they deserve it. The Government will take us into an area of such complexity that they will cause great misery to the very people that they claim to want to help. Why cannot the Government give way on this point? Will it really hurt the Minister that much?

9.18 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): This is the 12th Social Security Bill introduced since the Government took power 10 years ago. That is more than one every year. It is important to set it in the context of the cumulative effect of the changes in benefits and taxes during the past 10 years.

We are all familiar with the way in which the Government have abused official statistics, which are manipulated and deeply unreliable. However, the speeches that we have heard from Conservative Back-Bench Members today about what has happened in the benefit system have no connection whatever with reality. The realities are set out in a useful book by John Hills called, "Changing Tax: How the tax system works and how to change it". It is a handbook to help any of us to design our tax and benefit system. He reviews the combined effect of tax and benefit changes since 1979 and finds:

"The cuts in direct taxes have been entirely paid for by cuts in the generosity of benefits . . . Overall, the bottom 60 per cent. of the income distribution has lost, while the top 30 per cent.—especially the top 10 per cent.—has gained . . . The losses for the bottom 50 per cent. average out at nearly £8·50 per family"—

a substantial proportion of their net incomes—

"while the top 10 per cent. have gained nearly £40 per family. Overall, the bottom half of the population has lost £6·6 billion, of which £5·6 billion has gone to the top 10 per cent.; indeed, £4·8 billion has gone to the top 5 per cent."

That is the reality and it sets the debate in context, so let us hear no more about there being not enough money to go around.

Over the years the Government deliberately and systematically have taken away benefit after benefit and handed out the money in massive tax cuts to the wealthiest people in society. The Government are in favour of redistribution. They have redistributed massive wealth successfully and deliberately from the least wealthy to the rich.

Several hon. Members commented on the quality of the Ministers in the social security team and I agree with them. We probably have the nicest collection of individuals of any Department.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I am not so sure about that.

Ms. Short: There is no doubt about it. I am willing to believe that some of the problems and worries that my hon. Friends outlined concern them, too, and that they struggle to do better, but they are a joke played by the Prime Minister on the wets, as she calls them, in the Tory party. She thought, "Let us find some of the nicest people, put them into a Ministry which is supposed to care for people and make sure that they do not have a cent. The Treasury is in charge and we shall force them to reduce the benefits to the poorest." These nice guys and one nice woman are forced to do the dirty work of the nastier elements in their party.

Clearly, the British people do not approve of or support the Government's strategy on redistribution from the least wealthy to the rich. It has been made clear in every opinion poll and every report of the survey of British social attitudes compiled since the Thatcher Government came to power that the British people think that our society has become too divided and too unequal. The various packages of change in our pensions and benefits arrangements introduced in successive Social Security Bills have created part of that growing inequality which the British people reject.

About a week ago the Prime Minister made an extraordinary speech about the needs of children of lone parent families. There is no dispute between the two parties that we should have a system that encourages fathers to maintain their children. We strongly believe that fathers should have an incentive to do so and mothers an incentive to claim. All the money paid out in benefits should not be clawed back, as happens now, which makes us deeply suspicious that the Prime Minister is not concerned about lone parents or children in those families,

but is simply seeking another cut in the benefit system. We sincerely hope that that is not so and that we can achieve all-party agreement on that part of the package.

In that speech the Prime Minister made an amazingly tasteless comment. She said that the attitudes of the 1960s caused the change in the family structure which had led to an increase in homeless young people in our cities. That was amazing, tasteless and disgusting. Her Government have deliberately deprived young people of any right to benefit, so that there is nothing for vulnerable young people, particularly those who have grown up in care and who have no relatives or friends to whom to turn if they get into difficulties. There are many of them on the streets of our cities and that shames our country. The Prime Minister is responsible for that.

Mr. Allen McKay: A young man in my constituency is celebrating his birthday today. He is one of two chidren in a one-parent family. This should be a day of great joy, but it is not. As he happens to be 19, he loses his income support and his mother loses family benefit. He has a choice between leaving technical college, where he is hoping to take a degree in metallurgy, or sponging on his mother and taking from his sister. Other than that he could take up a place on the youth training scheme and ruin his career.

Ms. Short: I had two such cases at my advice bureau last weekend. Two young men from poor families are struggling to do A-levels and hope to go on to university. They have hit the same barrier as that faced by my hon. Friend's constituent. They may have to leave college to go on some kind of scheme and they will therefore lose out in the future. What a way to run a society.

If the Prime Minister is concerned about the quality of life for lone parents and their children, or even if she is concerned about the cost to the Exchequer in benefits for such families, she might examine the poverty traps with which our system is now deeply riddled.

A useful briefing had been provided by the Gingerbread Association for One Parent Families. In its appendix it clearly shows that no allowance is made for the costs of child care, and a lone parent with two children must earn more than £150 a week to be better off than living on benefits. The system is nonsense as it traps lone parents and causes them to live on benefits when they do not want to. Under the Government the number of lone parents living on benefits has risen sharply. If the Government want to put it right, the answer is simple.

We shall be watching for the package that is introduced as a result of the Prime Minister's speech. Once we have that package, presumably in another Social Security Bill, it will become clear exactly what are the Government's intentions. I hope and pray that that package is not simply further cuts in benefit as that would be too cruel.

The Government's record and all the statistics contrast starkly with the detailed proposals set out in the Labour party policy review for a fairer system of taxes and benefits. It concentrates on creating pathways out of poverty for pensioners, children, lone parents, people with disabilities and the low paid. We aim to be in power in the 1990s and to leave behind the miserable and mean 1980s. We aim to organise a society based on fairness and opportunity so that everyone can participate as full citizens and can train, work and live in dignity. That is possible given the resources and wealth of our country, but the Government have deliberately chosen to increase inequality. There have been many victims of that policy and many people are struggling to survive week in, week out, to provide enough food and heating for themselves and their families.

The Bill does nothing to create pathways out of poverty for anyone. I shall concentrate on its three major parts. We shall want to address many other issues in Committee, but I cannot attend to all of them tonight. The first part of the Bill implements part of the Government's woefully inadequate disability package which was announced recently. It seems to be announced, reannounced and re-reannounced by the Secretary of State every other week. Perhaps he is trying to give people with disabilities the impression that the Government are doing something to help them.

The disability package is set out in the White Paper "The Way Ahead". The blue cover should perhaps be taken as a warning that the contents are mean and disappointing. The Government will be aware of the deep anger and disappointment of all organisations representing the disabled about the proposals. It is no good the Government trying to suggest that there is something carping about Labour's attitude. Disabled organisations in Britain are bitterly disappointed by the package and angry that they have had to wait so long for so little.

For 10 years the Government have promised a review of benefits for people with disabilities. At first, they said that they could not move to implement their manifesto promise because they had no money. They had to continue to pretend that they had created an economic miracle, even though we all knew that that was not so; then they said that they had the money, but not enough information about people with disabilities. They commissioned the OPCS to provide a major survey which was published in six reports. The survey found that there were 6·5 million disabled people in Britain. The Government produced a package which they say will help 850,000 people, including 3,000 carers. There is no doubt of the anger of carers' organisations which were expecting some help and protection from the package.

The Government have completely ignored the needs of the biggest group of people with disabilities in this country —the 4·2 million people of pension age who have disabilities. They are the largest group, but constitute a minority of pensioners, the majority of whom are fit and well. For some reason, the Government have written them off. The package contains nothing—it is as though they had no needs. It gives them no help with the extra cost caused by their sickness and disabilities. The Government seem to have forgotten the pensioners who are completely excluded from any help.

The OPCS survey found that, on average, disabled people are £39 a week worse off than non-disabled people. It said that its figures should be treated with caution because it is difficult to measure the exact costs of a disability. The figures were challenged by other surveys which put the figure for people with severe disabilities as high as £66 a week.

It is obvious that if we want a civilised society which gives equal opportunities for people with disabilities, we must provide additional money to cover the extra costs of the disability so that those people are equal citizens. Disability and poverty should not be linked and should

[Ms. Short]

not prevent people from having the opportunity to move about, participate in social life and be treated with equal dignity.

What we need for a civilised society is set out in Labour's policy review. If I had more time I should describe it in detail. However, it is available and I hope that Conservative Members will read it. The reason why the Labour party has got the policy right and the Government have failed is that we consulted the organisations representing disabled people before we put together our package.

What is most offensive about the Government's proposals on disability is that, having said that people with disabilities must wait until the Government had money, and then having said that they had money, the Government's package finds no new money and introduces cuts in some benefits to fund the package. I noted with care the way in which the Secretary of State described the extra costs and savings of the package. He well knows that, if projected far enough, it is a net minus package. He made that clear when he announced a £1 billion saving by the year 2025.

The Disability Alliance has trawled through the figures and estimates that

"net 'new money' is actually a saving of £20 million.

This estimated saving does not take account of the projected saving of £350 million on the earnings-related addition to Invalidity Benefit. The eventual saving will, therefore, be dramatic.

The above figures"—

the Disability Alliance's figures—

"are based on the Government statements in the October 1989 uprating statement and in The Way Ahead."

There is some possibility that the Select Committee will look into the costings of the package, and I hope that it does.

The Government's package for people with disabilities is clever. We would expect nothing less from the Secretary of State and his team. It appears to do something, but it is a con. It fails, and it fails to spend any extra money on people with disabilities. That is an outrage.

Mr. Tim Smith: Can the hon. Lady say what the costs would be of Labour's package for the disabled?

Ms. Short: We shall provide detailed costings of our entire programme before the next election, which we hope will be sooner rather than later—the work is going on now.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Short: No; the hon. Lady has just come in and has not been listening to the debate.

The second major part of the Bill introduces limited regulation of occupational and private pensions——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Lady made an inadvertent error by saying that the Bill helps 3,000 carers. In fact it helps 30,000, and it would be a pity to leave that wrong on the record.

Ms. Short: I understood that there were 3,000——

Mr. Scott: There are 30,000.

Ms. Short: Good, but unfortunately that means that we can take that number off the total number of people with disabilities. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman).

As I was saying, the Bill introduces limited regulation of occupational and private pensions, based on the February 1989 report of the Occupational Pensions Board. We are all well aware of the Government's general attitude to pensioners. The Social Security Act 1980 deliberately cut the link between state pensions and prices or earnings, whichever were higher—the scheme laid down by the Labour Government in 1974.

As a result, according to figures provided by the Library, single pensioners have lost £13·10 a week and married pensioners £20·70. Those figures are shocking. Conservative Members do not seem to understand that the British economy has grown every year since 1945—it did not start in 1979—and as it grows pensioners will fall further and further behind. As we become better off, they will become relatively poorer. On top of this, the Government have reduced the protection afforded by the state earnings-related pension scheme, which was introduced by the Labour Government with all-party support. There was a more civilised Tory party in 1975.

The effect on low-paid workers—overwhelmingly women—who are not covered by occupational schemes is that they return to poverty in old age. The Secretary of State has not realised yet that two thirds of all pensioners are women and about three quarters of them are forced to claim means-tested benefits. We constitute a majority of pensioners because we live longer, and we are forced to claim means-tested benefits because women are concentrated among low-paid workers and do not enjoy decent pensions. So women have low pay throughout their working lives and re-enter poverty when they become pensioners. Government moves against SERPS have exaggerated this problem. Our policy review commits us to restoring the link with earnings and to restoring and improving SERPS.

The limited regulation of occupational pension schemes in the Bill is largely welcome; we shall come to our detailed criticisms in Committee. We know why such regulation is necessary—because there has been a change in employers' attitudes to pension schemes. They now believe that, faced with a takeover, companies in difficulty can raid the pension fund and take back the money. Conservative Back-Bench Members have reflected that attitude tonight: surpluses exist for companies to take back and do not belong to the pensioners for whom they have been accumulated by agreement with the employers over the years.

This is a matter of enormous importance. The market value of British companies is £500 billion; the market value of pension schemes and pensions in insurance companies is £250 billion. So half the capital in Britain belongs to pension schemes. We need to regulate them more and exert much more democratic control over them to ensure that they are invested so as to benefit not only people's pensions but their regions, children and grandchildren. Detailed proposals are in our policy review and we shall give employees in companies 50-50 control, so that they can control the way in which pension funds are spent.

The third major item in the Bill concerns the new framework for grant-based energy conservation schemes. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr.

Morgan) has already spoken about that and there is no doubt that insulation and energy conservation are the most important steps that we can take to protect the environment and to make heating cheaper for people on low incomes. It is a superb programme and we should firmly embrace and encourage it. We are committed to it in our policy review and welcome the Government's new framework. However, we recognise that they had to introduce it because their disastrous employment training scheme has failed so badly.

We note that once again there is no new money. The £12 million that is available will be taken from the Department of Employment budget. It was already available for this kind of work but was not being taken up because the employment training scheme was incapable of doing the job.

Any reasonable person must conclude that the Bill is mean and duplicitous. It lets down people with disabilities and will take money away from them. It will do nothing to make up for the harm that the Government have done to pensioners and it introduces unfunded measures for energy conservation. I recommend as an alternative framework the policies outlined in Labour's policy review. As I said before, thank heaven the 1980s are over. We look forward to a better future in a fairer Britain in the 1990s under a Labour Government.

9.40 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I wish the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) well with her dreams. I share with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary the blushes at the compliments that the hon. Lady paid us. We learn to be wary of Greeks bearing gifts and we did not expect her subsequent remarks to bear out her compliments.

The hon. Lady spent much time talking about lone parents and homelessness, neither of which is addressed in the Bill. She dramatically oversimplified both those issues. They are matters which have not started in the recent past but have their origins decades or years ago and are immensely complex issues. They are related not simply to social security benefits but to all sorts of social and behavioural changes that have taken place in our society. Some of those changes may be welcomed by the Opposition while they may regret others. The Government are minded to address those matters constructively.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) intervened in the hon. Lady's speech to talk about a constituent. Power is available to local authorities to pay educational maintenance allowances so that young people in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman described can complete their education.

Mr. Allen McKay: The constituent is in receipt of a minor award of £600 a year. According to rules and regulations, that minor award has to run its three-year course before he may receive a major award for university.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman has made the position clear, but when he intervened he did not do so. I frequently encounter cases in which young people of that age are unable to complete their education because of the rules. In each case it is ignored that EMAs are available. If the hon. Gentleman will write to me about details of the case, I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science looks at it.

The hon. Member for Ladywood laid great stress on the argument that there is no new money in the package. I make it absolutely clear that it does contain new money. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made that clear in his opening speech. For every remaining year of this century there will be more money spent as a result of the disability package than there was before the package was announced. There will be £300 million of new money in 1992-93. That cannot be contradicted. The hon. Lady knows that it is true and should not continue to assert that it is not.

The House will know that the Department of Social Security is uniquely fortunate in being able to introduce at least one Bill dealing with social security matters every year. I suppose that all of them share one characteristic —this is about the only thing on which I agreed with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), whose remarks were echoed by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—which is their lack of theme. It is common for social security Bills to include a variety of matters. When I arrived at the Department I was told that social security Bills were normally described as Bills to amend mistakes—the vernacular was slightly different—in former social security Bills.

The Bill addresses some important matters. It is right that we should take a frequent look at social security legislation. The society in which we live is dynamic and changes frequently, and social security provision has to change as well. I welcome the fact that we can regularly examine the pattern of social security policy.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy, is here to listen to the energy aspects of the debate. We have taken on board a measure that the Department of Energy wanted to introduce, rather than introducing a separate Bill to cover that. The details of the scheme will be outlined in regulations introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and the House will have ample opportunities to debate those in due course. There are provisions on tort, on widows and on the recovery of penalties.

Three important subjects are covered in the Bill. First, more protection is afforded to the growing number of people in occupational pension schemes. Secondly, necessary, effective and logical changes are made in the national insurance fund and, thirdly, significant moves of profound long-term importance are made in the balance and structure of benefits for disabled people. I realise that some hon. Members who have taken a careful interest in the fortunes of disabled people and the structure of benefits for them are dissatisfied with what we have achieved, but I hope that the House will be prepared to examine in depth the structure that has been created, which I believe is infinitely preferable to the structure that it will replace in due course.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend confirm that he will have full consultations with the various disability organisations? Is not it important that those discussions should not be soured by talk of cuts from the Opposition, as that is simply untrue? Such talk sours the atmosphere just when we are trying to encourage public opinion to accept the need for greater disability benefits.

Mr. Scott: Now that we have put forward our proposals in the document, I expect my door to be open to disability organisations to come and discuss these matters. We shall need provisions both in this Bill and in a subsequent social security Bill and that will enable all those who are interested in the matter to have their say. I agree with my hon. Friend and, like him, I hope that that will be on the basis that the rules for consultation and discussion will be fair. I hope that it will be recognised that the Government are putting significant extra resources into provision for disabled people. Representatives of the interested organisations can come to talk about the priorities that people should have in these matters.

Ms. Short: Why did not the hon. Gentleman say that before?

Mr. Scott: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, nobody would have wanted us to withhold provisions for the terminally ill or the provision to include deaf and blind people in the provision for mobility allowance or other matters pending prolonged consultation. It took five years for the review of social security to reach the legislation stage. We did not want to wait, so we decided on a three-tier process. The most urgent matters were dealt with and announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in October. Some of the provisions in the Bill set the pattern for the longer term and in a subsequent Bill, to be introduced when there is time in our legislative programme, we shall legislate for the disability allowance and the disability employment credit. That is the right way to tackle the problem.

Mr. McFall: The Minister said that his door had been open. Earlier in the debate, mention was made of a powerful letter from Professor Peter Townsend regarding the human rights of the disabled, and of the fact that the Government have ignored that. Will the Minister's door be open to people such as Professor Townsend to go along and talk about the rights of the disabled—and in particular to those who have been advocating for years that the Government should adopt a definition of poverty so that we all know what people can live on?

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have already met representatives of the Disability Alliance, and I have met representatives of other organisations for the disabled. Anyone who has fairly observed my time as Minister with responsibility for the disabled will know that I always listen to representations with care and understanding—and that is true also of my right hon. Friend. I shall continue to do so, and I hope that there will be fair recognition of the resources that the Government are devoting to the disabled and of the better structure being put in place.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Ladywood when she describes the general position of pensioners in society today. It is not true that they have suffered increasing deprivation or poverty under the present Government. Their overall standard of living has increased by 23 per cent.—twice as fast as that of the population as a whole. The standard of living of pensioners who are totally dependent on state benefits has improved by 25 per cent. —faster than that of pensioners generally. The Government have concentrated help not only on pensioners as a whole but on those wholly dependent on state benefits as well.

Ms. Short: We acknowledge that pensioners not entirely reliant on state pensions have seen their standard of living improve. One reason is that SERPS is beginning to take effect, lifting more and more pensioners away from reliance on state benefit, which is precisely what we intended. Another reason is high interest rates, which the Government hope will be a temporary phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Government cannot hid the fact that they have deliberately cut the standard of living of pensioners dependent on a state pension.

Mr. Scott: That is not true. The hon. Lady and her right hon. and hon. Friends hate the fact that we have taken specific steps to target help at the poorer, older and disabled pensioners. That is why we have been able to increase their standard of living as well. If we were to follow Labour's pattern and spread extra money across the whole range of pensioners, regardless of the capital or other income they might have, we would be unable to help poorer, older or disabled pensioners in the way that we can. Targeted help is the sensible way forward.

We are concerned today not with the general position but with the Bill's provisions for occupational pensions. I am glad that my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), for Beverley (Mr. Cran) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) were able to welcome the provision for an ombudsman. We are still considering with the industry how the costs of that innovation will be managed. However, I give a clear undertaking that the ombudsman will report each year, and that that report will be published.

I acknowledge the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton that, in the past, early leavers' rights were not properly protected. We are moving in the direction of improving on that situation. Too often in the past employers regarded occupational pensions as a golden ball and chain with which to retain employees, rather than given them freedom to move elsewhere.

The point was made that pensions should be made fully inflation-proof. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I agree with that principle and that it is desirable that schemes should, wherever possible, protect not only early leavers but all those in payment against normal rates of inflation. It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Oldham, West to accuse the Government of not going far enough. A Labour Government presided over far higher rates of inflation than have the present Government, but did nothing to protect the rights of those in pension schemes from the consequences. We have provided a minimum base, or springboard, for pension schemes through statute, but we want all schemes to protect members fully against inflation.

Pensioners want to know that, in retirement, they will have security. The hon. Member for Oldham, West nods, but in his opening speech he said that, in exceptional circumstances, a retired person on a pension with the expectation of a certain rate of pension might experience a cut because of exceptional economic circumstances. What sort of security does that give members of occupational pension schemes? I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has thought through the implications of that rather rash statement.

The Labour party, by allowing inflation to reach such a high level, by changing the method of forecasting pensions and the method of calculating the rate of pensions when it took £1 billion from them, and by twice

being unable even to pay the £10 Christmas bonus, altered pensioners' expectations without notice and affected their standard of living. Now the hon. Member for Oldham, West says that pension funds should have the right to cut the rate of pension that people can expect. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that if his promises were implemented and Labour were ever to get back into office, the stock exchange would react in such a way that there would be no surpluses in pension funds—he would be worried about coping with the deficits.

The House will have another, fuller opportunity to discuss disability in a couple of days' time, but I can tell the House that I am prepared to listen to representations on this issue. I must emphasise that the parliamentary process will provide ample opportunity for such representation.

I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton the view that the structure that we are putting in place is one about which we can be confident. I do not share his view about the complexity of the system, however, bearing in mind what will be in place when the next social security Bill is enacted. As is suggested in "The Way Ahead: Benefits For Disabled People", mobility allowance and attendance allowance are to be combined and expanded to form a new disability allowance with common medical and adjudication procedures. The system will be much simpler.

Terminally ill people have been mentioned. I know that the issue is complex and that several hon. Members are concerned about it, but I hope that the House will recognise that we are right to move in the direction of removing them from the six months' waiting period. We are still discussing the implications of the move. We intend that anyone who is given the terminally ill allowance will keep it for life.

Carers have been mentioned. We have introduced a carers premium in the Bill. It should be recognised that, with the extension of attendance allowance, more people will gain invalid care allowance, which will help carers as well. We shall return to this issue. We recognise the important role that carers play.

Under this Government, expenditure on the long-term sick and disabled has gone up by some £370 million a year in real terms, compared with £220 million a year under Labour. The Labour party has attacked us today on the Bill. I hope that the country will recognise that having a social security Bill every year has two advantages. One is that we can observe the changes in society and trim and fine tune the social security system. The second is that we can force the Opposition to face up to the reality of some of these issues. Of course they will criticise us; once in a while they may even propose alternatives. The fact that those alternatives will turn out to be unrealistic and ruinously expensive for the country is something they do not like to think about. They are prepared to spend billions on earnings-linked retirement pensions, billions on disability and billions on SERPS. They will be doing just what Lord Barnett said that they did when they were last in government: they will spend two years' spending money that they have not got.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 217.

Division No. 41] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith

Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamble, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*

Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

SOCIAL SECURITY BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act of the present Session resulting from the Social Security Bill it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses incurred under the Act by a Minister of the Crown;

(b) any sums payable out of money so provided into the National Insurance Fund under the Act;

(c) any increases attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under any other Act; and

(2) the making of payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

Toxic Waste Disposal (Tyneside)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Neville Tretter (Tynemouth): There are at present no toxic waste disposal plants in the north-east region, yet suddenly we are faced with at least three applications for planning approval to construct such sites. One of the proposed plants would be situated at Howden, in the middle of the Tyneside conurbation, surrounded by 1 million people. It is a joint venture by Northumbrian Water and the United States company ITC. That partnership is also putting forward a second, similar proposal for Teesside. The plan is to burn sewage and industrial waste together. It is described as economical, and much is made of the way in which it will consume sewage that is at present dumped by barge at the mouth of the Tyne. About 160,000 tonnes of sewage a year would be consumed, together with 83,000 tonnes of industrial waste. That is a lot of industrial muck to go to Howden which would contain a host of hazardous toxic substances.

It is proposed that that activity should take place in the heart of Tyneside, surrounded by 1 million people. The site would be unacceptably close to centres of population, in the middle of Tyneside with homes and schools nearby. The scheme is also in danger of damaging the regeneration of a wide swathe of Tyneside for which imaginative plans have been prepared by the urban development corporation. Those plans are not just about restoring derelict land; they are also intended to benefit existing adjoining communities. What a contrast that is with the proposals for a large toxic waste plant.

I am well aware of the prevalence of the attitude that has been described so well as NIMBY—not in my backyard. But here we are talking about a site in the backyards of close to 1 million people. It is utterly inappropriate for the purpose suggested and public opinion on Tyneside is wholly against the proposal. A petition was presented to me containing many thousands of names. I put a questionnaire through the door of every household in my constituency and, not surprisingly, only a handful of people replied saying that they were in favour of the scheme.

In its editorial, the Newcastle newspaper *The Journal* described the proposal as being geographically, socially and environmentally the wrong site. The chairman of the Tyne and Wear joint waste disposal committee has said that, in his judgment, the proposal is absolutely appalling and the site is totally unsuitable. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the plans were thrown out on environmental grounds by the urban development corporation as planning authority.

Just before Christmas an appeal was launched. It was a sad Christmas present for Tyneside. A lack of civic responsibility was shown by those who again put forward a proposal that had proved to be so offensive to the local comnunity and that caused such grave public concern. Who is the best judge of the issue? The Government believe that waste disposal matters should be decided by local opinion. Local opinion has spoken with a resounding voice against this proposal.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the same objections—the lack of

[Ms. Joyce Quin]

consultation, the lack of taking people's views into account and the worries about siting such a venture in the middle of a built-up urban area—also apply to the proposed clinical waste incinerator at Wardley, in Gateshead, on Tyneside in my constituency?

Mr. Trotter: It is astonishing that there are presently so many proposals for plants such as these in the urban areas of the north-east. They have suddenly appeared from nowhere. The problem is certainly a serious one for the urban areas of Tyneside and Teesside.

I refer my hon. Friend the Minister to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the Blackpool conference. He said:

"When I make planning decisions, I will always start from the assumption that local communities have an instinctive understanding of what their areas need and how they can best develop. I want local authorities, local communities, to take as many of the decisions about their character and their future as possible."

I commend those views in terms of the proposals for the north-east for toxic waste plants. Surely the best judge of the issue is the local community.

The chief executive of Northumbrian Water confirmed to me that there would be some PCBs—a particularly dangerous substance—in the industrial waste at Howden. He then tried to reassure me by saying that the incinerators would use the latest technology. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that I did not find that reassuring. I was surprised to hear only this afternoon that Northumbrian Water is now not proposing to deal with PCBs there. It is surely no coincidence that that announcement should be made on the day on which I am raising the matter in this debate.

Let us look into the figures. There may be no intention to deal with PCBs at Howden, but 80,000 tonnes of toxic muck will still go to the site every year. Only part of the sewage would be burnt in the toxic waste plant. Two thirds of that which is at present dumped off the mouth of the Tyne would still have to be dumped either in the sea or on land. Many water authorities dispose of their sewage by landfill. Some have no access to the sea. This proposal would leave most of the sewage to be dealt with by other means. Clearly, other solutions are therefore possible.

Only some of the hazardous waste would be fed into the incinerator. Half the 80,000 tonnes would go nowhere near the furnace. It would be taken to Howden and after being chemically treated the 15,000 tonnes left as a residue would be taken away and, presumably, disposed of by landfill somewhere else.

From where are all these nasties to come? One of the arguments put forward in favour of the plant is that it could be used for the burning of waste which is now burnt at sea—an activity which will be prohibited in future. It is surely extraordinary to suggest that, once banned at sea, this activity should instead take place in the middle of our Tyneside community. That it can be put forward as an argument in favour of the scheme is an example of the crassness of some of those arguing in support of the Howden plant. It is perhaps illuminating as an example of how they appear to approach environmental issues.

From where is all the muck to come? Northumbrian Water cannot tell me. The authority cannot say that it will definitely come from within our region. It cannot give an assurance that it will not treat waste from other parts of the country, although, to be fair, it has said that it has no plans to import waste from overseas. The authority cannot say that about waste brought into the region from elsewhere. Northumbrian Water has told me that if local companies did not use the facility, it would find it necessary to take toxic waste from other parts of the country. I suggest that, against that background, the proposal can only be described as somewhat speculative. I remind the House that the same partnership has a similar proposal for a further huge toxic waste plant on Teesside.

Northumbrian Water stresses that this means of sewage disposal would minimise costs. I am sure that the people of Tyneside would willingly pay a little more to have the problem solved in other ways—to think otherwise would show an appalling lack of judgment. It is wholly wrong that such an issue should be decided on other than environmental grounds. Any extra cost of alternative solutions will have to be accepted.

There are some fundamental questions to be asked. What is the need for such massive toxic waste plants in the northern region? What is the scale of the existing problem? From where do the wastes come? What happens to them now? We do not know the answers. I do not know whether Northumbrian Water knows the answer, but certainly I do not. The information has not been made public.

There is great uncertainty, but what is sure is that Howden must be the wrong location for a massive toxic waste plant. There are only three or four toxic waste plants in the United Kingdom. None is in the north-east. The plans for at least three to be constructed in the north-east are astonishing. They envisage a massive increase in the United Kingdom's capacity to dispose of toxic waste. They will be among the largest such plants in Europe. It is hard to understand why the north-east should need so many such plants. I imagine that a great deal of money can be made from operating them. We must ensure that decisions are taken in the interests of the community on environmental grounds rather than for any economic reasons.

I understand that an appeal is now pending. I understand that therefore, in his reply tonight, my hon. Friend the Minister cannot comment on the arguments for or against the proposals. However, I urge him speedily to establish a public inquiry into all three applications. It is essential that the issues are aired publicly and fully. The water authority should have no fear of such an inquiry. It is only right that there should be a full examination of the issues involved.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Does my hon. Friend agreed that, in view of the applications on Tyneside and the four applications on Teesside, the time has come for the Government to decide a national strategy for the placing of toxic waste incinerators? As he rightly says, it is unacceptable for such establishments to be sited in major centres of population. We on Teesside are every bit as worried as the people of Tyneside about the prospect of such plants being sited in our community.

Mr. Trotter: My hon. Friend raises a most interesting point. I am very much in agreement with him. It must be right to have a national plan on an issue such as this. I hope that the Government will take that point on board.

I am, however, worried about the blight hanging over Tyneside as a result of this most unfortunate appeal. I do not believe that there will be a national policy within the

timescale that is necessary if we are to remove as soon as possible the blight caused to the major redevelopment schemes which are planned for next door. Nor must we forget the ongoing fears of the local community.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that there should be a linked inquiry so that all the applications in the north-east can be considered together. We may not obtain a national solution in the timescale that we seek, but perhaps we can at least obtain a regional solution. I hope that my hon. Friend will give serious consideration to that proposal.

I hope that the inquiry will be held as speedily as possible. As I said, it is harmful that in the meantime there should be a blight hanging over our community. If all three applications are considered together, at least we shall establish the genuine requirements of our region and the best way of solving the problems.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does not the hon. Gentleman fear that in some quarters a view is held that the north-east is a soft touch in these matters because the people are not aware of the environmental dangers? Does he agree that that view is entirely mistaken, as he highlighted by revealing the strength of feeling in north Tyneside? Does he accept that there is a great deal of support throughout the north-east region for the campaign being fought by north Tyneside on this issue?

Mr. Trotter: I agree entirely that the matter unites the community throughout Tyneside. I am sure that the same applies to Teesside. That reinforces my argument for a linked inquiry to consider the issue for the region as a whole.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that environmental issues will be paramount in considering the appeal. I am confident that, if that is the case, the decision of the local community on Tyneside, expressed by the urban development corporation in refusing permission, will be upheld. The plans for the plant will end up in the dustbin, as they deserve.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) on securing this debate on such an important topic. Waste disposal is a subject which some people find unattractive. That may be one reason why it has been neglected in past years. We do not make that mistake in the Environmental Protection Bill which is currently before the House. That Bill will contain major reforms to the present framework for control of waste management.

It will always be the case that waste disposal activities have a wide impact on our environment, and proposals for siting such facilities should be carefully considered. This is not the first time that my hon. Friend has raised the matter in Parliament and I pay tribute to him for his skill and persistence in ensuring that his constituents' anxieties are properly considered.

I know that the subject is of great interest to other hon. Members. The hon. Members for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) have already intervened. I am pleased also to see that my hon. Friends the Members for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) are attending the debate. They have been active in promoting the interests of the north-east generally and have not been slow to draw the Department's attention to specific anxieties on this topic.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): So that I, too, may get my name on the record, may I remind the Minister that my constituency is across the river from Tynemouth and borders on the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) at Formby? I support the applications of the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) and of my hon. Friend.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am the first to recognise that the hon. Gentleman is a doughty fighter for the region and I apologise if I inadvertently overlooked his interest in the debate.

I shall start by putting waste management in a wider environmental context. We produce large quantities of household, commercial and industrial waste, perhaps some 80 million to 100 million tonnes a year. Most of it goes to landfill, but we also rely on incineration for some disposal. Only a small proportion of that large total is toxic, perhaps about 2 million tonnes. Such special waste comes under the ambit of the Special Waste Regulations 1980 which ensure close monitoring of movement and disposal under a system of advance notification to waste disposal authorities. The final disposal outlets must be suitably licensed under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Only a limited number of landfill sites are suitable geologically for hazardous or special wastes. We also have only a limited number of high-temperature industrial waste incinerators. To my knowledge, there are four with a total annual capacity of about 80,000 tonnes, so there are substantial pressures of demand on those facilities.

Environmental trends will place additional and increasing burdens on existing facilities and hasten the search for alternatives. For example, Ministers agreed at the 1987 North sea conference that dumping harmful industrial waste at sea should cease and that there should be strict ceilings on the disposal of sewage sludge. Inevitably, such decisions place additional burdens on landfill sites and encourage those concerned with waste disposal to look more closely at alternatives, such as incineration.

It is fair to point out that the north-east region as a whole is a net exporter of waste to other parts of the United Kingdom. Both Cleveland and Tyne and Wear produce more hazardous waste than they can dispose of within their areas. That suggests that there is a demand for additional waste disposal facilities in the region.

Those dilemmas over disposal options for waste generally are highlighted in the Tyne and Wear waste disposal plan, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth will be familiar. The plan was drafted in 1986 to cover a 10 to 15-year period and the final stages of completion are now a matter for the Tyne and Wear authorities, acting through their joint committee on waste disposal. The draft plan notes the increasing public concern about hazardous waste disposal and the pressures arising from the loss of marine disposal outlets and tighter land-based incinerator standards. This could leave some hazardous waste without a viable means of disposal. The plan identifies the need for establishing alternative waste treatment facilities for hazardous waste and for monitoring the effects of these developments. It

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

acknowledges that, without more facilities, the pressure could lead to even greater amounts being exported from the region.

Difficult choices must be made. It is important that the disposal option in any particular case represents the best practical environmental option and that the standards set by the regulatory authorities are the ones that properly protect the environment and embody best domestic and European standards.

Against that background, I well understand that no one likes the prospect of having a waste disposal facility in their neighbourhood, whether it is a landfill site or a new incinerator. I appreciate fully the concerns that have been expressed by Opposition Members and by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth tonight.

A number of applications for waste incinerators have been made in the north-east in the past year and it is for the local planning authority, in the first instance, to determine those individual applications.

Two appeals relating to waste incinerators are now before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. One is from Ocean Environmental Management Ltd. in respect of its proposed incinerator at Seal Sands. The other is from Northumbrian Water with International Technology Europe Ltd. in respect of their proposed incinerator at East Howden in north Tyneside, which is the application that particularly concerns my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth. I understand that a further application by Northumbrian Water and International Technology Europe in respect of an incinerator at Portrack is currently being considered by the Teesside development corporation.

Hon. Members will appreciate that I cannot comment upon the appeals now before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth has put forward the proposition that the appeal cases should be looked at together. I think that can help my hon. Friend.

Although the proposed incinerators are some 40 miles apart, I recognise that there are common aspects involved. Both applicants have referred to the regional need for the facilities that they wish to develop and there is a significant overlap in the waste streams which both incinerators would deal with. Consequently, I am happy to be able to tell my hon. Friend that it is indeed our intention that those cases should be examined at linked public inquiries. Dealing with them in this way would allow issues common to both, such as regional waste treatment capacity, movement of waste and environmental impact, to be dealt with at a plenary session attended by both inspectors and all the participants. All those issues have been raised this evening. Once those matters had been dealt with, the site specific and land use planning issues would be considered at separate, consecutive inquiries. The report of the plenary session and the separate inquiries would be considered together by the Secretary of State in making his decisions.

Mr. Trotter: On behalf of the north-east, I thank my hon. Friend for so readily accepting our proposal for a linked inquiry. I understand the considerable practical difficulties involved, but can he ensure that the utmost speed is shown in establishing that inquiry for the reasons that I outlined earlier?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Should any further appeal be made relating to proposals for similar kinds of installation in the region—one or two have been mentioned tonight—or if my right hon. Friend decides that a particular application should be called in for his decision, it would be possible to include them, too, in the linked inquiry procedure I have described.

In answer to my hon. Friend, he will appreciate that it will take some time to tackle the necessary arrangements to set up those inquiries. We shall press ahead as quickly as possible, and we hope to have the inquiries under way during the latter part of the year. A linked inquiry procedure means, of course, that the final outcome will be delayed until all the applications have been considered. Our aim is to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to make their views known. But I confirm our intention to follow the code of practice for those inquiries set out in annex 2 to the Government's response to the fifth report of the Select Committee on the Environment, 1985-86, which sets out ground rules for ensuring maximum public participation.

I shall be writing to hon. Members, to the planning authorities and to the applicants in the next few days setting out the arrangements in more detail.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

UNITED MEDICAL AND DENTAL SCHOOLS BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall deal with private business first.

BROMLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL (CRYSTAL PALACE) BILL

Considered.

Amendment made.

To be read the Third time.

Sir John Stokes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that a number of the names of those right hon. and hon. Members who wish to ask questions of the Prime Minister have been omitted at the end of the printed list.

Mr. Speaker: That is not in my knowledge, but I shall have the matter looked into.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Community Care

1. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations concerned with community care he has met since the publication of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

20. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations concerned with community care he has met since the publication of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): We regularly meet local authorities, health authorities and voluntary organisations. They all have vital roles to play in the provision of community care.

Mr. Rogers: The Government, in their proposals, and in the answer that the Minister has just given, have rightly emphasised the part that the voluntary organisations can play in this sector. If that is the case, why do not the Government give adequate time to consult those organisations on the proposals contained in the Bill? Can we have an assurance today that the Government will provide enough funds for voluntary organisations fully and properly to carry out their functions?

Mrs. Bottomley: The whole spirit of the proposals, leading on from the original Griffiths report, "Community Care: Agenda for Action", has been on the basis of consultation with voluntary organisations and local authority associations. About 280 representations were made on the original report. Since my right hon. and learned Friend's statement last July, about 100 further representations have been made. Since the publication of the Bill I have been involved with local authority associations and voluntary organisations in carrying forward these important plans. We have made it clear that adequate resources will be available.

Mr. Martlew: Had the Minister held discussions with voluntary organisations, perhaps the future role of hospices in community care would have been raised. Will she explain why hospices in Scotland are funded pound-for-pound by the Scottish Office, yet, despite repeated requests from my hon. Friends and me, the Minister steadfastly refuses to do the same for those in England and Wales? Will she explain to those involved with the Carlisle hospice appeal why they are working so hard to build a hospice in my constituency when nine miles up the road in Scotland the Government provide money? Is it not time that the Government stopped discriminating against the terminally ill in England and Wales?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman may have been drawing attention to the way in which matters have developed in Scotland. One way in which we manage matters is to have some variation between different parts of the country. I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity publicly to pay tribute to the voluntary hospice movement which has been a major force for good. I draw his attention to the announcement that I made shortly before Christmas of a further £8 million for the voluntary hospice movement to be distributed by the regional health authorities. That will greatly add to the financial assistance that they already receive.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that all organisations, with the exception of the Labour party, welcome the Government's proposals for community care, which are largely in line with the Griffiths recommendations? What discussions has my hon. Friend had with the Association of Directors of Social Services, particularly in respect of funding and the timetable for implementation?

Mrs. Bottomley: The proposals offer a major opportunity to improve care in the community, and many people have long looked forward to them. The key is now to make a reality of them. We have held discussions with local authority associations on the ways in which we can work together on projects and in giving guidance and training. I reiterate that we made it clear that adequate resources will be available, taking account of demographic factors. At present, many resources are misspent, without any proper assessment of the necessity, for example, for residential care. The proposals provide an opportunity to ensure that the frail and vulnerable are well cared for in the community.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Has my hon. Friend had any contact with the National Schizophrenia Fellowship,

SANE Concern or allied organisations about the over-rapid closure of pyschiatric hospitals and the placing of their former patients into the community when there are inadequate facilities, and an inadequate number of qualified persons, for looking after them? Sadly, those people are going off medication, sleeping under arches, and in some cases ending up in prison.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend draws attention, rightly and properly, to a particularly vulnerable group. There is general recognition that the great swing to remove people from psychiatric hospitals—in which many of them were quite improperly incarcerated a generation ago—needs tempering. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health has presented proposals for dealing specifically with that needy group.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Is the Minister aware that local authority social services departments are examining local plans for delivering community care? The hon. Lady will be aware of the concern expressed by many voluntary organisations that, in view of their increased responsibilities, local authorities are taking insufficient account of their views in the consultation process leading to publication of community care plans. What guidance are local authorities being given to consult voluntary organisations before publishing such plans?

Mrs. Bottomley: Clearly, we want community care plans to be discussed with voluntary organisations and the users of services, and, above all, with carers—who have so often been overlooked and neglected in the past. We are giving local authorities precise guidance on the importance of preparing their plans properly, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the role of voluntary bodies in community care is perceived to be enormously important. We want a mixed economy of voluntary organisation, local authority, and private and independent provision. We want choice and dignity for the vulnerable.

Psychiatric Care

2. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to provide psychiatric care for homeless people who need such care.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): The responsibility for providing psychiatric services for people who need them rests with district health authorities and local social services authorities. However, the Department is presently exploring what practical steps might be taken to assist such people who are homeless.

Mr. Day: My hon. Friend will be aware of the concern expressed in the House and outside. Will he confirm that Ministers will not approve the closure of any hospital for the mentally ill without first demonstrating that adequate alternative facilities exist? I cite as an example the £3 million project for a mental illness unit at Manchester royal infirmary, which is to start this year.

Mr. Freeman: I confirm my hon. Friend's remarks about the facilities at Manchester royal infirmary, which I visited recently, and which has excellent plans to meet the needs of patients from Cheadle hospital. I confirm that no hospital for long-stay psychiatric patients will be allowed to close until the National Health Service is satisfied that proper facilities exist in the community.

Mr. Frank Field: Although the House welcomes the Minister's last statement, does he accept that over the past 10 years, more than 40,000 long-stay patients have been dumped in the community with nowhere to go? Is he aware that many of them are homeless and are wandering the streets? While we are grateful for the Government's concern, at least as expressed in words, how much new money is being put up front?

Mr. Freeman: There is no question but that some discharge policies by some hospitals were ill-advised by present standards. The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that it is of concern to the House, and to the Government, that some people are now homeless or roofless. We have outlined specific policies so that no one should be discharged from any psychiatric hospital unless a care programme is agreed for the individual. We have also made provision for the year 1991-92 for a specific mental illness grant, to be distributed through the regional health authorities, to help local authorities to improve the quality of social care in the community.

Dame Jill Knight: The House will be pleased to learn of the sums of money that have been allocated to deal with this problem, and to know that specific instructions are being sent to local authorities to deal with the issue. How long will it take before those plans reach the point where they are helping people who have been released from hospital?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend refers to district and regional health authorities' responsibilities, and those are separate from the responsibility of the consultant and the authority in charge of the hospital. I have stressed that no patient should now be discharged without a proper care programme. By April 1991, every district health authority should have a proper care programme for all patients who have been discharged or will be discharged. We will provide additional funds for local authorities to enable them to improve the quality of social care.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Has the Minister seen the report in *The Lancet* on homelessness over Christmas, which says that mentally ill people are now living:

"like feral children . . . scavenging for food"?

Is not that a bitter criticism of the Government's community care policy at a time when *The Sunday Times* has shown—I speak as a trustee of Crisis at Christmas—that there is massive public backing for more humane provision? Is there not now an urgent and compelling case for full implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986?

Mr. Freeman: I read the article in *The Lancet*, but I think that, unfortunately, it was written too early to take account of the Government's new proposals on care for the mentally ill. As for roofless people in our cities who have a history of mental illness, the Government recognise that that is a problem and hope to bring forward proposals to deal with it in due course.

Sir William Clark: Is my hon. Friend aware that mentally ill people in my constituency have been discharged from Cane Hill hospital and put in bed and breakfast accommodation by the local authorities? They

are walking the streets. It is all very well for my hon. Friend to say that that will be fixed in 1991, but what will happen to them between now and then?

Mr. Freeman: We must be careful to distinguish patients who are discharged from hospital properly, because they are psychiatrically and medically cured and have the same rights as other people. I share my hon. Friend's concern about the past discharge policies. We have given all district health authorities due notice that they must make progress within 12 months. It is not possible to reform procedures overnight. We have made substantial progress, and I shall study the example that my hon. Friend has cited and write to him.

Stockport District Health Authority

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about funding for Stockport district health authority.

Mr. Freeman: Stockport district health authority will benefit from the increased cash resources announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretry of State for Health on 14 December last year for the North Western region amounting to £77·8 million, representing a cash increase in resources amounting to 7·21 per cent.

Mr. Bennett: Exactly how much will be received by Stockport, as opposed to North Western region? Is the Minister aware that since 1984 Stockport has lost £1·6 million in real terms, and is now being asked by the region to make cuts of £1·1 million? It has also lost out in capital terms, and the people of Stockport want to know why their health service is doing so badly under the present Government.

Mr. Freeman: I do not agree that Stockport health authority is doing badly under the present Government. North Western regional health authority will shortly make allocations to all the districts, including Stockport, although they have not been announced yet. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health has enabled the region to experience a real growth in resouces this year, especially when we take account of cost-improvement programmes and income generation, and I am sure that that welcome increase will be reflected in the allocation to Stockport.

Mr. Favell: Is my hon. Friend aware of Stockport's application to have its general hospital on one site? Am I right in thinking that what should have been a first-class application has been bungled, and that Stockport should have had a share of the £300 million that is to be used for capital projects over the next three years? Will my hon. Friend come and see the position in Stockport for himself, and will he take it from me that, having done so, he will agree that the hospital should be on one site, not only to prevent inconvenience but to save money and lives?

Mr. Freeman: Owing to sustained pressure from my hon. Friend for me to visit Stockport, I can now tell him that I shall be going there on 30 March. As for the specific project that he mentions, all is not lost. I understand that discussions are continuing between the district and the region, and that the region will have a chance to reconsider later in the year further construction at Stepping Hill hospital for 1993-94.

Park Hospital, Liverpool

4. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the closure of Park hospital, Liverpool.

Mr. Freeman: There are no firm proposals at present to close Park hospital, which is a mental illness hospital. The Liverpool health authority is considering how some of the patients at the hospital may be better cared for at the new acute unit at Broadgreen and other hospitals, and, of course, in the community.

Mr. Parry: Is the Minister aware that Liverpool health authority is currently being lobbied by a committee consisting of women and relatives of patients and all the NHS trade unions? Is he aware that Park hospital has been declared a centre of excellence by the Mental Health Act Commission, and that £2·5 million has recently been spent on it? Selling off such a priceless asset would be a crime against humanity.

Mr. Freeman: I have already said that there are no plans to close Park hospital. As the hon. Gentleman and many of his hon. Friends will know, a formal procedure takes place before the closure of any hospital, or indeed any significant change in the service. In the event of sustained opposition from the community health council, the proposal ultimately comes to Ministers, but in this instance, that has not happened.

Mr. Terry Fields: Surely the Minister must come up to Liverpool, visit Park hospital and see the reality for himself. Staff have been told that four of the seven wards are to close. Some patients will be shunted to Rathbone hospital; others will be dealt with in the private sector and by charities. The least able members of society will be left to fend for themselves, and psychiatric patients will be forced to wander the streets of Liverpool. Despite the nonsense talked by the Minister about there being no diminution of care in the community, old people will clearly be treated despicably by the Government.

Mr. Freeman: I have been to Liverpool six times in the past 12 months, but I have not been to Park hospital, and next time I go there I shall certainly consider doing so.

No patients, elderly or otherwise, will be wandering the streets. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that those patients—and that does not mean all—who can be cared for better in the community, which may mean hostels or their own homes, should be cared for in that way; it is correct and the humanitarian way.

British Medical Association

5. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the British Medical Association; and what subjects were discussed.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I last met representatives of the British Medical Association formally on 18 October 1989 when we had a friendly and constructive discussion about the implementation of our proposals in the White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mr. Watson: Will the Secretary of State draw to the attention of the BMA the fact that in anticipation of changes in GP contracts and changes to the Bill some GPs

are already beginning to strike off their lists patients whom they regard as potentially uneconomic so that far from choice for patients being increased, some patients are losing the choice even to remain with their existing GPs? I know that the Secretary of State does not keep such information, but will he now undertake to do so in order that he can monitor any such changes in GPs' lists and the fate of those patients affected?

Mr. Clarke: I personally have seen no evidence whatever that any such practice is taking place. If any GPs were striking off their lists elderly or chronically sick patients, they would be doing so on a mistaken interpretation of the contract. If they study the new contract for GPs and the proposals in the White Paper, they will see that there is no financial or other incentive to any GP to refuse to accept an elderly or chronically sick patient.

Mr. Viggers: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that many patients, especially elderly people, have been frightened by comments made by some doctors which have fallen short of the level of objectivity and accuracy that one would expect from the profession? Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that no patients will be deprived of the medicines they need and that in particular, the indicative drug budgets are likely to be very helpful in encouraging doctors to prescribe well?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that we welcome the end to such campaigning over recent months. There was certainly no such suggestion at my last meeting with the BMA. It is extremely unfortunate that last summer a great deal of effort was put into concocting inventions about our proposals and then publicising them to patients. I hope that now we can put behind us some of the damage that did to doctor-patient relationships.

Ms. Harman: Will the Secretary of State look into the case of Mrs. Jackson who arrived home from hospital to find on her doormat a letter from the Hillingdon FPC saying that she had been struck off her GP's list because she would require too many expensive night visits? Will the Secretary of State together with the BMA now monitor the growing number of so-called uneconomic patients who, because of the GP contract and the changes in the forthcoming National Health Service and Community Care Bill, are losing the right to stay with their own GPs?

Mr. Clarke: I shall certainly look into that case. I should be extremely grateful if the hon. Lady would pass on to me the evidence that she has to support it. I would strongly disapprove of anybody being struck off on that ground or any other. The only change that the new GPs' contract is making is that doctors who carry out their own night visits, or send a doctor from their own practice, or one who is likely to be known to the patient, will be paid three times as much for those visits as one who uses a deputising service. That encourages a welcome improvement in patient services. If the hon. Lady's allegation turns out to be true, I shall certainly investigate it most closely.

Family Planning

6. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the increase in spending on family planning services over the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Over the past three years for which figures are available, spending for family planning purposes in England has increased from £76·7 million in 1985-86 to £84·2 million in 1987-88. Family planning is an important preventive service which contributes to better maternal and child health and to the stability of family life.

Mr. Stevens: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure we all welcome the increased expenditure on that most important service. Does she agree that family planning plays a vital role in health care? Do the Government intend to continue their financial support for the outstanding Margaret Pyke family planning centre in London?

Mrs. Bottomley: I assure my hon. Friend that we continue to give priority to family planning services and that funding for the Margaret Pyke family planning centre will continue. It is a national centre of training in family planning, training something like 850 doctors and 60 nurses a year. It also does very important work in the prevention of AIDS.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister come clean and tell British women that family planning will suffer under the Bill as health authorities will have an incentive to close clinics, and women will be left with no choice other than their GPs and a much reduced service?

Mrs. Bottomley: The key point about family planning services is that women and men should have a choice of services. Whether they are provided through the family health service, the family practitioner or the district health authority is a decision to be made locally. In recent years, many women have demonstrated that they would rather receive family planning advice from their practitioner than from family planning clinics. That must be a matter for them rather than a diktat from on high.

General Practitioners (Budgets)

7. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to allow general practitioners more control over their own budgets.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The National Health Service and Community Care Bill currently before the House provides for GP practices which volunteer to do so, and which meet the eligibility criteria, to run their own practice funds. This will give them additional freedom to decide how funds are best used in the interests of their patients and, in particular, to influence the way in which hospital treatment is provided. In December I issued a programme to all GPs in England for the scheme, inviting expressions of interest to regional health authorities. I am pleased that there has already been a very encouraging response.

Mr. Walker: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Can he confirm that GP practices that decide to set up their own budgets will have access to up to £32,000 of the management charge? Does not this make nonsense of all the stories that we have heard about GPs having to spend more time on paperwork than with patients?

Mr. Clarke: There will be £32,000 available to reimburse GPs for expenditure that they incur on the management of the practice budgets. They will use that money to obtain information technology, including

software, as well as the staff that they need to make sure that the budget can be run effectively without intrusion on their clinical duties.

Mr. Pike: Will the Secretary of State recognise doctors' genuine worries and patients' concerns about the changes in the Health Service? Today I received from a Mr. Bramald a letter enclosing a letter from his doctor, Dr. Durkin, stating that the change in payment for doctors means that they can no longer afford to keep on their lists people who require more active night calls and weekend calls, and saying that Mr. Bramald and his family were being given 10 days in which to find another doctor. Does this not show the problem, and will the Secretary of State take action to rectify it?

Mr. Clarke: I understand that there are uncertainties among doctors at a time of change, but it is my experience, and that of everybody in the National Health Service, that those uncertainties are diminishing rapidly. GP practice budgets are entirely voluntary, and only GPs who want to take advantage of them will apply to do so. I think that the vast majority of eligible practices will apply.

I will have a look at the letter from Dr. Durkin to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but on the basis of the hon. Gentleman's account I can only say that, under the contract that the doctor has been given, he has no justification for making such statements. I suspect that he is yet another doctor who has been misled by some of the rather over-the-top campaigning that went on last summer about the contract, and that if he looks more closely at the contract he will see that it gives him no encouragement to take such steps against his patients.

Mr. Michael Morris: As all GPs have tight budgets, and inevitably always will do, will my right hon. and learned Friend consider GP practice leaflets? GPs are not allowed to use ordnance survey maps unless, as I understand it, they negotiate directly with the Ordnance Survey. Is not this a case in which my right hon. and learned Friend should knock a few heads together and encourage direct negotiations between the Department of Health and the Ordnance Survey so that GPs may use those maps?

Mr. Clark: GPs must have reasonably tight budgets for their premises and practice expenses, but, as my hon. Friend will know, the amount that has been spent, under this Government, on the improvement of premises and on practices has increased enormously with the huge expansion in the practice staff that GPs employ. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to this problem. I understand the desire of the Ordnance Survey to protect its copyright, but I will look into the possibility of my Department's being able to help to sort out the problem.

Mr. Kennedy: Has the Secretary of State recognised the genuine and legitimate anxiety of patients and general practitioners arising from the changes to the GP service that, in the shape of legislation and contracts, he has forced through this House?

Can he not see that there continues to be legitimate anxiety arising from the peer audit to which GPs are subject, particularly on spending? It makes sense, from the point of view of the Department of Health, only if punitive action is likely to follow supposed or alleged overspending. The injection of that cash element between the family doctor and the patient at the coal face of the Health Service is utter poison for what are supposed to be the principles of the National Health Service.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is muddling a variety of aspects of general practitioners' work. The general practitioners' contract, for which a majority was obtained in the House, will reward general practitioners better than in the past for heavy workload and good performance. That is the point of the contract. The hon. Gentleman is referring to indicative budgets for drugs and prescribing costs, and we have repeatedly made it clear that every patient will be entitled to the drugs which, in the general practitioner's opinion, the patient requires. General practitioners will be subject to penalties under the contract only if they deliberately continue to overprescribe in the face of professional advice that points out their wasteful practices. That is not a serious intrusion into the care of patients.

Mr. Boswell: Has it occurred to my right hon. and learned Friend that the minimum size for practice lists is approximately four or five times the size of the sample drawn by opinion pollsters to represent the population as a whole, so it is highly likely that practice lists will be representative? Will he assure the House that in the event of there being an unusual patient profile, the system will be sufficiently flexible to ensure that general practitioners do not lose out as a result of their introduction?

Mr. Clarke: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. The funds placed at the disposal of each practice will reflect the make up of its patient list. If general practitioners are not satisfied with the sum provided by the regional health authority, they can refuse to proceed with their application for a practice budget.

Disabled Persons

8. **Mr George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

14. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Freeman: We have always made it clear that implementation of the Act depended on identifying and making available the necessary resources without damage to other priority social services. We have already implemented six sections, which include imposing duties on local authorities to assess on request the needs of disabled people, while taking into account the abilities of their carers.

Mr. Howarth: Does the Minister accept that if the consumer control provisions are to have any meaning at all, sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Act should be implemented at the same time as the National Health Service and Community Care Bill?

Mr. Freeman: It would be irresponsible to consider only the administrative costs of implementing sections 1, 2 and 3. We must also look at the underlying resource assumptions for providing the services. We shall be commencing formal consultations with local authorities

on the implications of implementing sections 1, 2 and 3, and other sections not yet implemented, within the next few weeks.

Mr. Loyden: The Minister's answer falls short of giving satisfaction. Is he aware that 40 per cent. of local authorities are not making provision for wheelchair access into rooms and buildings from which disabled people can obtain information, including council agendas, so that they can be treated as citizens equal to non-disabled people? Is it not a disgrace that so long after the Act was passed, disabled people are still being treated by local authorities, encouraged by the Government, as second-class citizens?

Mr. Freeman: The sections of the Act already implemented are clear on the obligations placed on local authorities. They have to provide services within their resources. In the coming financial year, 1990-91, we will provide £31 million through the rate support grant to help local authorities to provide services under the sections of the Act that we have already implemented.

Mr. Hannam: I thank my hon. Friend for the £24 million already allocated this year for the implementation of the Act, but does he accept that if disabled people are to have a reasonable standard of care in the community they should have access to the assessment procedures and the right of appeal? Therefore, will he expedite the implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3?

Mr. Freeman: I assure my hon. Friend that we shall proceed as quickly as possible in our review of sections 1, 2 and 3. The social services inspectorate will be reporting shortly on the success so far in the implementation of the Act.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I welcome my hon. Friend's commitment to early implementation of the sections of the Act that have not yet been implemented, and I am delighted that he is already consulting local government. Does he agree that it is important to rest on a consistent national framework so that all individuals who depend on community care have the same treatment?

Mr. Freeman: I agree with that. The report of the social services inspectorate, which I hope will be published next month, will make that point and comment on the differences in the standards of treatment and, ultimately, their elimination.

Mr Tom Clarke: If the Government are genuinely committed to community care, is it not odd that they do not see this important Act as a framework for involving —*[Interruption.]*—disabled people, their carers and advocates in contributing to the formulation of policy which is important to them? Despite the Government's rhetoric, they have not lifted a finger to implement the remaining sections of the Act since April 1987.

Is the Minister aware that that is being seen not simply as a scandal, but as one of the Government's greatest failures and most mean-minded acts of lethargy, if that is possible, in this Parliament?

Mr. Freeman: It is not mean minded. We have implemented six sections of the Act, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and I have given a commitment about the consultation procedure on the remaining three sections. I share his view that they are important. It would be irresponsible to consider only the administrative costs of implementation and not to make sure that the underlying service provision increases. That requires real resources—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal to the House to listen to both questions and answers.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend will know that Dorset local authorities are keen to pick up their responsibilities under the Act. Is he aware that local government councillors are unhappy about the grant given to local councils to fulfil those responsibilities? They believe that it will not be possible properly to fund implementation of the Act or the community care provisions when they come into force in 1991. Can he comment on whether funds will be transferred to the local authorities?

Mr. Freeman: As my hon. Friend the Minister for Health said, community care provision in 1991-92 will be properly funded.

Children Act

9. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress being made with the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The target date for implementation of the Children Act 1989 is October 1991. We are preparing the regulations, rules of court and guidance documents needed. Plans are also being made for a training and dissemination programme for local social services departments, the courts and other agencies.

Mr. Davies: Why, when the Association of Directors of Social Services warned six months ago that record numbers of children are registered as at risk from abuse or neglect, have the Government chosen to delay implementation of the Act by another six months? Does the Minister realise the difficulties that social services departments have with inadequate staff, training and resources? Why do the Government preach the value of the family when they cannot find the money or the time to do something about the matter?

Mrs. Bottomley: In identifying the serious problems of children at risk, the hon. Gentleman is naive about the implications of the Children Act 1989. It is a complex and important Act which co-ordinates the legislation dealing with the protection of children. It is extremely important to ensure that the necessary training is in place in local authorities and in the courts so that a comprehensive, integrated programme can make headway. In conjunction with other agencies we have embarked on plans to ensure that that programme is put in place as swiftly as possible and in time for implementation in 1991.

Consultants (Training)

10. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made by his Department to encourage the training of consultants in general management aspects of hospital activities.

Mr. Freeman: In December last year I announced in the House the allocation of £1 million for this purpose.

Programmes of training are due to commence in April of this year for 100 consultants from seven National Health Service regions.

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that, aside from the Government committing huge resources to patient services, consultants are playing an increasing part in the management of hospital activities and that training is essential? Does he agree that it would be wise to give general management training to nurses, whose clinical skills are often ahead of their managerial skills?

Mr. Freeman: I shall certainly look at the question of management training for senior nurses. The Government believe that clinical freedom for doctors, which is vital, is perfectly compatible with doctors sharing more responsibility for helping to manage National Health Service resources.

Mr. Robin Cook: While training consultants in management, will the Minister pay some attention to what the consultants are trying to tell him about the future management of their hospitals? Is the Minister aware that there have been a dozen ballots of staff on whether their hospitals should form trusts and that in ever single one the staff have voted to stay in health authority management? Is he further aware that consultants from Plymouth to Aberdeen have recorded votes of 75 per cent. against forming NHS trusts? If the Minister believes in letting local people take local decisions, why does he not try to listen to them and allow them to decide whether their hospitals should opt out?

Mr. Freeman: The Government listen to the medical professions. There is substantial support among consultants for National Health Service trusts. On the point about consultants in management, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming the resource management initiative, which is about getting doctors involved in the management of the Health Service.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Howarth: Does the Prime Minister accept that the rebel cricket tour of South Africa is most certainly a breach of the Gleneagles agreement in spirit and in letter? Does she accept the words of Sebastian Coe, who described the players involved as nothing less than mercenaries? Will the right hon. Lady make contact with those players and tell them to pack their bags and come on home?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport put the Government's views to those cricketers before they went on that tour. We had a duty to seek to persuade them not to go and we tried to persuade them not to go. However, their going is not contrary to the Gleneagles agreement because it is a voluntary agreement. People were free to choose and to make their own decisions, and that is what they did.

Q2. **Sir Julian Ridsdale:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Julian Ridsdale: Is my right hon. Friend aware of how encouraged those who have been organising Expo 90 in Japan have been by the positive help that the Government have recently given to that project? Is my right hon. Friend further aware that Royal Horticultural Society, the horticultural industry and the industrialists who have helped with the project will redouble their efforts to make sure that this important environmental Expo, which will be attended by 40 Asian countries, will be a great success from the British point of view?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in trying to persuade the Government to take part in the Osaka garden festival as part of Expo 90. Both Expo 90 and the garden festival are mainly for the private sector, but the Japanese have been keen that we should take part. In response to my hon. Friend, we have now agreed that there should be official British participation in the garden show. I understand from our Japanese friends that a commissioner-general is required to be in charge of the British participation in the garden show, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will shortly be writing to my hon. Friend to offer him the post of commissioner-general.

Mr. Kinnock: With business bankruptcies increasing and industrial output falling, would the Prime Minister say that her high interest rate policies are having the effect that she intended?

The Prime Minister: Of course, there are always some businesses that go out of business and close down, but we have many new ones starting up. May I point out that in 1978, the last year under Labour, there were 6,000— *[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister must be given a chance to answer.

The Prime Minister: In the last year of the Labour Government, 6,000 more businesses closed than opened. In 1988, after some eight or nine years of Conservative Government, 64,000 more businesses opened than closed.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Lady appears to be interested in references to the past. Does she recall that under her Government there were a record number of business failures—some 22,000—in 1984? Does she further recall that last year there were in excess of 18,000? Is she trying to break her own record?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman heard what I said. The critical test is how many more businesses open and flourish than go out of business. In Labour's last year in office—its most experienced year—some 6,000 more businesses closed than opened. In 1988, 64,000 more businesses opened than closed. In 1989 over 80,000 more

businesses opened than closed. That is a good Tory record, and it shows that the Tories are creating more jobs than ever before.

Mr. Franks: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the hallmark of a free and civilised society is the rule of law? Will she further confirm that the people who have power and authority are subject to that law and that all are equal before the law, no matter how high or how humble? Will she consult her Cabinet colleagues about the apparent assertion by the former Chief Constable of Northern Ireland that a man no longer remains innocent until proven guilty, and the apparent introduction by the chief constable of Greater Manchester of the concept of guilt by association?

Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that no matter what happens in the rest of the world, in these isles justice and freedom from fear prevail?

The Prime Minister: Of course, I confirm that the rule of law and equality before the law are the hallmarks of a civilised society. They form the cornerstone of our society. My hon. Friend feels especially strongly about this matter. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has already made it clear that he does not consider there to be a case for an inquiry. If Mr. Stalker has information that he thinks affects his case, he should make it available to the appropriate authorities as soon as possible. I do not understand why he has delayed doing that.

Q3. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Powell: I warn the Prime Minister that my question has nothing to do with the Labour Government. We all appreciate her sentiments about democracy, which she preaches throughout the world. Is it not time that she considered democracy within her own party? Is it not amazing that within seven or eight weeks of the beginning of this Session of Parliament she was challenged for the leadership of her party? Is it not strange that within a matter of weeks that challenger was deselected in the constituency of Clwyd, North-West?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask about matters relating to the Prime Minister's ministerial responsibility—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer!"] Order. I repeat, the hon. Gentleman must ask a question about the Prime Minister's ministerial responsibility.

Q4. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Although many small businesses support the new business rate in principle, many in Norfolk would like to see a longer phasing-in period. Does the Prime Minister agree that it would be a complete disaster if we adopted for small firms Labour's proposal to give back to local authorities the power to levy punitive business rates?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that it would be disastrous for many businesses in the north if we gave back to Labour the power to levy punitive business rates, which frightened many good businesses away from precisely the towns and cities which needed them. I understand that the north wants the transition period to be as fast as possible because it will gain some £900 million, while the south and midlands wish it to be much slower. We have to consider both. The present transition period is five years, but that is not an absolute figure and it could be extended if need be.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Has the Prime Minister had the opportunity to read in detail the speech in the House last week by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) in which he pointed out that the Government had a clear obligation to treat each constituent part of the United Kingdom with parity? If she endorses that view, will she be encouraging the 35 rebels of last Thursday to do the same this Thursday when similar legislation for Scotland is debated, or will she continue to railroad through legislation which has the support of only 16 per cent. of the Scots?

The Prime Minister: If there were parity for each region of the United Kingdom, Scotland would not do anything like as well as it does. It is treated most generously both in regional issues and in general public expenditure per head.

Q5. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister is she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cash: Has my right hon. Friend noted from the "Newsnight" poll last week that only 15 per cent. of people want more power shifted from Westminster to Brussels? Furthermore, did she note that in his speech to the European Parliament last week Mr. Delors placed a new and positive emphasis on national parliaments? Does she agree that this is a very welcome move not only in the light of our well-tried parliamentary system in Westminster but for the other countries in eastern and western Europe?

The Prime Minister: I welcome each and every recognition of the part that national parliaments play in democratic accountability in the Community. I noted that in the speech, and it was very welcome. Ministers meeting in the Council of Ministers reach decisions, and they are and must remain accountable to their national parliaments. That is how proper democratic control is exercised in the Community and it must continue that way.

Q6. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Prime Minister aware that an ordinary family with a £20,000 mortgage is paying £50 a month more than it was only 18 months ago? Why is she so surprised that her policy of high interest rates leads to claims for higher wage rates?

The Prime Minister: When it comes to wage rates the important thing is to keep an industry competitive. There is no point in taking wage costs way above those of our competitors. The hon. Member will have seen that the average increase in earnings in industry over this time last year is 9·25 per cent. He will also be aware that our unit wage costs are going up much faster than those of our

competitors. If people are concerned to keep their jobs, as I am sure they are, they must have regard to the future competitiveness of industries.

Sir John Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am in favour of the role of women in public and private life? Is she further aware that there is a growing demand for more women in the workplace? Does she agree that, admirable though that is, we must safeguard the institution of marriage and the bringing up of children?

The Prime Minister: Yes. As usual, my hon. Friend puts his finger on the right point. It is vital that we safeguard the institution of family life, and undoubtedly the mother has the most important role in bringing up the children. But we also believe that she, too, must have the chance to work, possibly part time outside the home, or full time in a career, if she wishes, and we try to do our best to accommodate those wishes.

Q7. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: The Prime Minister will be aware that in his last days in office, President Reagan approved legislation to compensate veterans of nuclear tests in the United States who were suffering as a result of being too close to such tests. Does the Prime Minister now agree that British veterans who suffered as a result of being present at Christmas island and elsewhere during the early tests should receive similar compensation? Will she look favourably at the private Bill initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) and give Government support to that measure?

The Prime Minister: The Government are ready to pay appropriate compensation wherever the Crown's legal liability is established and where there is firm evidence to show, on the balance of probabilities, that ex-service men have suffered ill-health as a result of exposure to radiation in the course of their duties as members of the armed forces. In the absence of any such evidence, special compensation arrangements for test veterans could not be justified.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that current legislation allows for the consideration of the award of a war pension if there is reliable evidence of reasonable doubt that harm may be regarded as attributable to service factors.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you to reflect on your decision in respect of the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), who sought to raise the responsibility of the Prime Minister as head of the Conservative party? As the Prime Minister deliberately includes the chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), in the Cabinet, she clearly has, as Prime Minister, responsibility for his activities and his conduct of those matters. As those responsibilities cover what has happened to the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer), should not questions to the Prime Minister about such matters be in order?

Mr. Speaker: The whole House knows the rules about this, and they remain the same for both sides of the House. The Prime Minister must be asked questions within her prime ministerial responsibility, in just the same way as I disallow questions about the Leader of the Opposition's responsibilities for the Labour party. The same rules apply to both sides of the House.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going to challenge that.

Dr. Cunningham: No, Mr. Speaker. I shall certainly not challenge what you said. I wish to be absolutely clear that in future, if Conservative Members raise matters with the Prime Minister or other Ministers about the Labour party —[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—you will rule them out of order before there is any reply from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's memory must be at fault; that has always been my practice.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the Act of Union requires that taxes in the United Kingdom must be the same in Scotland and in England. It would therefore be improper and constitutionally flawed to introduce a tax in Scotland that was different from a tax in England. I use the word "tax" carefully. I am not talking about the community charge; I am talking about tax. As that is so, would it be improper to use Scotland as a guinea pig for a new tax? If it would be, why is the Labour party proceeding down that road?

Mr. Speaker: By the wildest stretch of the imagination that is nothing to do with order in the Chamber. I now call the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) for his daily point of order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the exchanges at Prime Minister's Question Time, you did not seem to be able to call the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer). We understand that sometimes it may be difficult for hon. Members to catch your eye, but as he was mentioned in dispatches, can you do something about this on Thursday?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) will be very grateful for that intervention. I will reflect on it.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The selection of hon. Members to speak in debates, at Question Time or at other times, is very privileged. It seems to me, to many of my hon. Friends and to many outside the House that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) gets more than his fair share—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that that is not a reflection on the Chair. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that the hon. Member for Bolsover is a very regular attender——

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not rise while I am on my feet. The hon. Gentleman knows that the hon. Member for Bolsover is a regular attender in the Chamber, especially at Question Time and in our debates.

Mr. Holt: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What else is there?

Mr. Holt: It is true that the hon. Member for Bolsover is a regular and assiduous Member of the House, and no one would seek to deny that. However, there are Conservative Members who are equally assiduous—and I am one of them. I sit here day after day, seeing favours being given to the hon. Member for Bolsover. From the way in which he is reported nationally, it is clear that he enjoys advantages that are not available to any other hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman believes that he is deprived in any way, I must remind him that no hon. Member can expect to be called much more than about four times a year; it is a question of the arithmetic. In the previous Session, the hon. Gentleman was called no fewer than nine times.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not prepared to take further points on that. I call the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer).

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please will the hon. Gentleman resume his seat? I am not prepared to bandy arguments from the Chair with him.

Mr. Holt: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a point of order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is upset, but will he please restrain himself?

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am deeply reluctant to take further action——

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must contain himself. I am very reluctant to have to take further action. I ask the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends to prevail on him.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman rises once more, I would be very reluctant to take action which the whole House would regret. I am not prepared to hear a further point of order from him on this matter.

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have raised this point of order on other occasions and I would like to raise it again *[Interruption.]* Will you be quiet for a minute? *[Interruption.]* I am trying to raise a point of order. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. Heffer: I am trying to raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker, and it would be a good idea, if from time to time —and this is the very point that I am raising—the House could behave itself. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. Heffer: I have noticed in the past year or two that when hon. Members, particularly on the Opposition side of the House, raise matters which hon. Members on the Government side do not like they immediately begin to shout. I have suggested to you before, Mr. Speaker, that it is the responsibility and the duty of Mr. Speaker and of all of us who believe in democracy to explain to hon. Members, particularly those on the Government Benches, that we are not in the Reichstag—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] —and we are not in the old Soviet when Mr. Brezhnev was there. Is it not time—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say. He is the Back Bencher of the year.

Mr. Heffer: Hon. Members, or certain of them, no longer listen to an argument. They think that the way to deal with an argument is to shout people down. It is about time that they were taught that we are a democracy and that we must continue to be a democracy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Do not let us have a debate on this. The whole House agrees that we listen to each other's arguments here with respect. Very often we hear uncomfortable things or things with which we do not agree, but we listen to them with respect.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: If it is on a totally different matter, I will take Mr. Burns.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I please ask your advice on a very serious matter and seek your guidance on whether the issue that I wish to raise with you should be referred to a Committee of the House to consider?

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, there is an organisation, which purports to be non-party political, called Hospital Alert. It is funded partly by Labour-controlled Hounslow council and partly by the SLD-controlled Richmond and Twickenham council.

Last Thursday night, when I returned to the House befor the vote at 10 o'clock, I found a House of Commons paid envelope on the Members' message board in the Members' Lobby which had come by the Members' internal postal service. Inside the envelope, which contained no identification of the sender, were a number of forms that Hospital Alert is using throughout the country; it gets constituents to sign them and then send them to their Members of Parliament for a reply, or whatever hon. Members wish to do. These were all put together. The senders were then using House of Commons envelopes and the House of Commons internal postal system, at the taxpayers' expense, to distribute them.

This is a matter that should be looked into. A stop should be put to it, as the organisers plan to have throughout February a national campaign to lobby hon. Members. I hope that it will not be done through the House of Commons postal service.

Mr. Speaker: The whole House knows the regulations about the use—

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Further to that point of order. Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: No, there can be no argument about this. The whole House knows that it is not in order to use House of Commons envelopes for circulars. If that is what the hon. Gentleman alleges, the matter should be reported to the Services Committee, which will deal with it.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If on reflection you take the wider action suggested by the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) in his allegation, will you include the use by private companies of the banqueting facilities in the basement to lobby Members of Parliament and have influence on this place? I and many people outside think that that is a far worse crime than the one alleged.

Mr. Speaker: That is also a matter for the Services Committee.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are to have a very important debate today on the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. A great many hon. Members wish to participate. It will take time out of the debate if we have further points of order now, particularly if they are points of order that are not matters for the Chair. If there is anything that is genuinely a matter for the Chair, I shall endeavour to deal with it.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Chair is responsible for the use of language in this House. Earlier the whole House heard the Prime Minister refer to Scotland as a region. Scotland is not a region but a nation. The insult will be noted in Scotland. What influence can you exert on the Prime Minister to get her to use the correct terminology?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for the answers that are given.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We on the Conservative Benches support the Chair, as well you know, no matter from which side the current Speaker comes. Unfortunately, during your term of office you have had to ask hon. Members to leave the Chamber and you have had to preside over their dismissal. Can you confirm that you have never had to order the removal of a Conservative Member from the House or to ask a Conservative Member to leave?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman does not need to ask questions like that. He knows the answer perfectly well.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you care to reflect on the reply that you gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell)? We have a developing constitution. While theoretically the office of Prime Minister is bestowed by the monarch, in practice there is an electoral process; therefore, the Prime Minister is the choice of the governing party. Perhaps I am reading too much into your answer, but surely you are not saying that the electoral process whereby that comes about is not subject to proper questioning in the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Mr. Cryer: Yes, Mr. Speaker. There is a difference. A point was raised about Conservative party organisation. We have heard that that, of course, is not a matter for the Prime Minister. But the chairman of the Conservative party is appointed by the Prime Minister and holds an office paid by the taxpayer. That is not the case with the Labour party. The Labour party chairman is elected and has no place in a Labour Government, nor any position necessarily within Parliament. So the two positions are different——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is giving an explanation. The question that was asked by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) was not about the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; it was about an individual Member, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer). That was why I ruled the question out of order, as I would have ruled out, and have frequently done, as the whole House knows, questions touching upon the responsibilities of the Leader of the Opposition as leader of his party.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Further points of order will take a great deal of time out of the debate. I am bound to have regard for hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate rather than at this time.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Further to the last point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I remind those who have forgotten that Conservative associations are independent of the Conservative party organisation and make their own decisions?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That should be raised as a private Member's motion on party organisation.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No. I have to have regard for the subsequent business. We are under heavy pressure.

BILL PRESENTED

Location of Pornographic Materials

Ms. Dawn Primarolo, supported by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms. Clare Short, Mr. George Howarth, Ms. Harriet Harman, Mr. Frank Doran, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and Mr. Brian Sedgemore, presented a Bill to provide for the licensing of premises for the location of pornographic material; to create an offence of locating pornography on unlicensed premises; to extend the duties of Trading Standards Officers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 2 February and to be printed. [Bill 60.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the three motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Contamination of Feeding Stuff) (England) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 37) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Contamination of Feeding Stuff) (Wales) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 43) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Horticultural Development Council (Amendment) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 9728/89 on veterinary rules be referred to a Standing Committee on European Documents.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Points of Order

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not prepared to take points of order on matters that we have already discussed relating to party organisations.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: What is it?

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the pantomime that we had immediately after Prime Minister's questions, will you advise the House on whether that was televised? If it was, what deductions do you draw, and what lessons can be learnt from it?

Mr. Speaker: The House knows that all our proceedings are televised.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) alleged just now that the chairman of the Conservative party was paid as a Minister of the——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a continuation of points of order. I have already told the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) to choose this as a subject for a private Member's motion and debate it as such.

Protection of Badger Sets

3.52 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the protection of badger setts; and for connected purposes.

Let us talk about something important like badger setts —*[Interruption.]* While hon. Members scurry off to their burrows, I shall delay my speech for a moment.

I get quite depressed at the extent that I have to raise issues in the House and draw attention to the number of times that animals are subjected to cruelty and exploitation. During the past few weeks alone I have had cause to raise the issue of the slaughter of whales by the Japanese in the Antarctic and the threat to the existence of African elephants—a threat which has become much more serious as a result of the Government's recent announcement to allow the 600 tonnes of elephant ivory in Hong Kong to come on to the world market. I recently raised the issue of the use by the Japanese, Taiwanese and South Korean fishing ships of enormous drift nets in the oceans which entrap porpoises, whales and diving birds.

It seems that all around us are greedy, selfish and venal humans exploiting, often to the very edge of extinction, creatures which belong to us all. There seem to be no depths of depravity to which man's cruelty towards other life forms is not prepared to go.

Lest any hon. Member believes that I should better direct the energy of my concern for animals towards humans, I remind him that, in my opinion, the two are entirely compatible. Human and animal rights are merely points on the same continuum. Those who are capable of being cruel to animals are equally capable of being cruel to humans. Respect for life should embrace all life, both human and animal, because the two are inextricably linked.

My concern today is for badger setts. One of the presents that I bought my wife for Christmas was the BBC's tapes of Alan Bennett reading extracts from Kenneth Grahame's wonderful book, "The Wind in the Willows". That tremendously good story was enchantingly told by Alan Bennett. I am sure that all of us who listened to it found it that much more interesting and enchanting because, in the recess, it occupied the slot normally taken up by "Yesterday In Parliament."

Who would not exchange points of order, Prime Minister's Question Time and reporting late-night statutory instruments for hearing about the adventures of Mole, Ratty and Badger. The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is now deep in conversation. It will penetrate to him in a moment that I am speaking about him, because anyone who sees the hon. Member for Crawley here on a Friday in his weekend clothes cannot but think instantly of Mr. Toad. The hon. Member for Crawley will have to read *Hansard* tomorrow to learn of the point that I was making, because I am unable to penetrate the depth of his subconscious.

To judge from the enormous popularity of "The Wind in the Willows"—and I am glad that Mr. Toad is now with us again—anyone could be forgiven for thinking that the entire country loves badgers. The vast majority of people do, but there are sick and perverted members of the population who apparently take pleasure in torturing, maiming and killing badgers for what they call sport. My Bill seeks to extend the protection given under the Badgers Act 1973 to setts.

Unlike many other animals, the badger is not an endangered species. It is estimated that the current badger population is 250,000 at most. It is not a matter of conservation but of protecting the badger against cruelty. There is a great deal of exploitation and baiting of badgers in Yorkshire, and concern is being expressed that that practice is extending to the south. I assure any right hon. or hon. Member who imagines that the people of Newham know little about badger setts that within easy walking distance of my own constituency, one can inspect many excellent setts in Epping forest, in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit).

It is difficult to comprehend how a person can take pleasure from digging out badgers and killing them with a spade or from baiting them with dogs. To me, such people are sick beyond rational appeal, and it is essential that the House ensures that they are treated accordingly.

If I obtain leave to introduce my Bill, I shall seek to give absolute protection to badger setts. Anyone found digging a sett or in the vicinity of one, or having the clear intention or the wherewithal to do so, would on conviction be fined up to £2,000 and would have confiscated all equipment, animals and vehicles in his possession at the time of the offence.

The Bill would also forbid foxhunters from stopping up badger setts. I know that that would gain the interest of the hon. Member for Crawley. Although the badger is currently protected, anyone found digging a sett can deploy the defence that they were merely digging for a fox or were trying to retrieve a lost dog. Since 1985, the onus of proof has shifted from the prosecution to the defence, and cases can be lengthy, complicated and expensive. My Bill seeks to simplify the law and to make it more consistent, by giving badgers and setts the same protection. We are concerned about not only diggers and baiters but developers, who flatten the badgers' homes and bury them alive.

Of the estimated 250,000 badger population, some 9,000 to 10,000 are killed every year because of the venal activities of diggers and baiters. May setts are hundreds of years old, and they desperately merit and deserve our protection. It is monstrous that people should be allowed to dig up setts, disturb or destroy them.

To many of us, the badger symbolises the countryside, and we have, rightly, protected that wonderful and mysterious creature. We must extend that protection to the badger's home, and that is why I seek to introduce my Bill, which I commend to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Peter Hardy, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Dr. David Clark, Ms. Diane Abbott, Mr. Frank Cook, Mrs. Ann Clywd, Mr. Ron Davies, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Alan Meale and Mr. Bob Cryer.

Protection of Badger Setts

Mr. Tony Banks accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for the protection of badger setts; and for connected purposes: And the same was read a First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 February and to be printed. [Bill 61.]

Autumn Statement

3.59 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. John Major): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15th November 1989; welcomes the continuing reduction in the share of national income taken by public expenditure, and the provision of substantial extra resources for priority areas; congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its policies of sound financial discipline and supply side improvement which have been the foundation of record growth of employment, investment, and business formation; and commends the Government's determination to maintain downward pressure on inflation and to bring further improvements in economic performance.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Major: This is probably the last occasion that the House will have to debate the economy before the Budget, which I can now inform the House will be on Tuesday 20 March.

I am grateful that we are aided in the debate by a very comprehensive and helpful report on the Autumn Statement from the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins). The Committee is to be congratulated on the thoroughness and the speed with which it dealt with the comprehensive range of matters covered in the Autumn Statement. I have taken careful note of its recommendations, I am studying them, and I hope that I shall be able to respond in full before the House debates the public expenditure White Paper in a short while.

In its report, the Committee also focused on the broader issues, and I wish to concentrate on those this afternoon. The annual Autumn Statement effectively serves two main purposes. It provides a mid-year forecast of the prospects for the economy, and it gives the opportunity to set out the Government's plans for public spending for the coming three years.

Our general attitude to public spending has not changed one iota since we were first elected. We believe, as do an increasing number of people throughout the world, that an economy in which the state takes and spends an increasing share of the national wealth cannot be successful—nor, by definition, can it be sustained.

Proper control of public spending—tight control—remains central to the Government's economic strategy. It has enabled us to reduce the ratio of public spending to gross domestic product to less than 40 per cent. in recent years. That is nearly 10 percentage points below the level in the mid-1970s and 8 per cent. below the peak in the early 1980s. In the next two years, the ratios will be unchanged from our plans announced last year, and by 1992-93 the ratio is expected to fall still further, to its lowest level since the mid-1960s.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The right hon. Gentleman has said that a policy under which public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product increased year by year, could not be sustained. Does he think that a policy in which it is decreased year by year as a proportion of GDP can be sustained?

Mr. Major: That depends upon the amount of growth in the economy. Provided that growth in public spending is proportionately less than growth in the economy, there will of necessity be a decline in the ratio. That is what has happened in recent years. I shall return to that subject, in terms of the quantum of public expenditure, in a few moments.

The fall in the proportion of national income—the point that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) specifically referred to— has not been at the expense of real growth in spending on priority services. One of the great myths of fashionable opinion in recent years is that we have starved important public services, such as education and health, of funds. However, when more than £1 billion a week is going to social security, over £0·5 billion to the Health Service and nearly £400 million a week to education, that is a hard case for the hon. Gentleman to sustain.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): *rose——*

Mr. Major: In my last speech I gave way on more than 20 occasions. I shall give way in due time, but a large number of right hon. and hon. Members are waiting to speak, so I shall be more stringent with interventions today than normal, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

It is true that we have reduced public spending in a number of areas. In particular, we have returned loss-making companies to profitability and transferred them to the private sector. For example, British Steel was making a loss of £800 million a year in the early 1980s and yet it is now a successful private sector company. Is not that better than keeping it as a public company, drawing £800 million of taxpayers' subsidies and perhaps taking resources that might otherwise have gone to the Health Service? As nationalised industries have improved productivity and profitability, their subsidies have also been reduced. Services have been contracted out at a lower cost to the taxpayer. A number of executive functions within Government Departments have been set up as agencies under the Next Steps initiative. That motivates people within the agency to provide a better service—and to provide it more efficiently—and it promises to be a great success.

Of course, the whole expenditure survey process is essentially about ensuring that we are getting the best possible value for the money that we spend on behalf of the taxpayer. Not least, that means taking as hard a look at pay and running costs as any private sector employer. The private sector meets pay costs out of its own money; the Government meet their pay costs out of other people's money, and we have to balance the taxpayer's interest too. We must also ensure that the money that we provide for public service is spent predominantly on services, and not on unjustified pay increases at the expense of the services for which it was provided in the first instance.

We need to review priorities constantly, and sometimes to change them—for, as an economy grows and prospers, the demands on it necessarily change as well. As output and activity increase, more freight moves around the country; with average real take-home pay over a quarter higher in real terms than it was 10 years ago, more people have cars and wish to use them. As medical science advances, more costly remedies are sought, and, in a society that is experiencing real growth in wealth, the disadvantaged and the elderly should benefit too.

Those are among the reasons—although they are not the only reasons—why spending on the National Health Service has increased by over a third as much again in real terms compared with 1978-79. Between this year and next year, it will grow by a further £2,400 million. With income generation and cost savings, the increase in resources will not be £2·4 billion, but the equivalent of £2,600 million —a 5½ per cent. increase in real terms. A great deal of that money has been provided to finance improvement in services to patients, to allow an additional £200 million for hospital building and other capital spending and to enable the important Health Service reforms to be implemented and thus improve the service that the NHS offers our nation.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Chancellor makes great play of the expenditure on the Health Service. What is the good of investing money on improvements in the Health Service if health authorities—or, in Scotland, health boards—cannot then commission the new facilities? Is the Chancellor aware of the special problem affecting Lothian health board, in my part of the country? A shortfall of £12 million in the current year's budget has led the board to consider closing no fewer than six hospitals. Who is the Chancellor kidding?

Mr. Major: As the hon. Gentleman will know if he studies the position across the entire Health Service, the growth in provision over recent years has been continuing year-on-year in each and every part of the United Kingdom. I welcome that, and the Government have provided the resources necessary to ensure that it continues. That has been our policy, and undoubtedly—by any yardstick that the hon. Gentleman chooses to use—that is continuing and will continue in the future.

There has also been a substantial increase in spending on social security since 1979. Not only that, but we have managed to target that spending better than was the case in the circumstances that we inherited. Spending on services for the elderly has increased by £5 billion in real terms, and spending on the long-term sick and disabled has almost doubled in real terms—again, I am taking account of inflation. This year, we have announced real increases in benefits to help 1·5 million of the less well-off families. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State recently announced changes in benefits for the long-term sick and disabled. When the improvements in that package are fully implemented—that is, by 1993-94 —they will add a further £300 million to expenditure on that group, helping an extra 850,000 people. There is also an additional £250 million over two years for a new initiative to tackle homelessness.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Major: I will give way, but I must tell the House that after that I wish to make some progress.

Mr. Garrett: Does the Chancellor agree that the relative price effect on the National Health Service in the last two expenditure programmes, to which he has referred, is a rise of 10 per cent. or more in costs? To that extent, his "extra funding" for the Health Service is significantly overstated —a point made in the report on the Autumn Statement by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee.

As for pensions and benefits, a higher rate of inflation applies to the expenditure of the very poor on, for instance, food and housing than to the heavier spending of the rest of society on consumer durables. Is not the Chancellor also exaggerating the increase in benefits? Would he care to enlighten the House by giving the true figures?

Mr. Major: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's pessimistic view of what has happened. As relative price indices turn up from time to time, it is certainly true that they go back to the days when we had volume increases in expenditure and lost control of public expenditure. Whatever indices the hon. Gentleman legitimately uses, it is undeniable upon the figures available that there has been a real and genuine increase in what can be purchased by the groups I have mentioned with the resources that the Government have provided.

We recognise no less than do Opposition Members the importance of maintaining and improving the basic infrastructure in Britain in a period of growth. What is more, we have produced the growth in the economy that has enabled us to afford to do so, unlike the 1970s when most capital programmes were cut. For example, there has been a 40 per cent. real increase in spending on motorways and trunk roads, adding nearly 1,000 extra miles. The new plans announced in the Autumn Statement include significant further real increases. Capital spending on roads will increase by about 25 per cent. over the next three years, and capital spending on railways by 75 per cent. in the same period. British Rail has now embarked on the largest programme of capital investment since the change from steam to diesel. Investment in London Underground will increase by £440 million, including the announcement that we will build an extension of the Jubilee line through docklands to Stratford in east London.

None of those improvements would have been possible without a growing and successful economy. Without that we would have faced the cuts in capital expenditure that occurred in the second half of the 1970s.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I certainly appreciate and accept that the Government have pumped a great deal more money into British Rail. Does my right hon. Friend agree that as long as British Rail is in the public sector, the increased efficiency and investment that we all seek will never come about? We must therefore move towards privatising the industry and get British Rail away from the dead hand of state control as quickly as we possibly can.

Mr. Major: I certainly share the medium-term aspirations that my hon. Friend sets out. I very much hope that the new chairman of British Rail will look carefully at ways of improving the commuter service, particularly in the stress areas around London.

The investment in London Underground to which I referred incorporates all the necessary safety elements illustrated in the Fennell report, which I know the House will welcome and will wish to see carried out as speedily as possible.

The growth in the economy during the 1980s has not only financed those increases in expenditure, but has produced material changes in the propects of large numbers of our citizens as 2¾ million new jobs have been created over the past six years. No other nation in Europe can match that rate of job creation. There has been a 40 per cent. increase in business investment in just the past three years. Both those achievements are without precedent for a generation. For eight years there has been

[Mr. Major]

strong and steady growth of output—a clear demonstration of the very much improved supply side response which was the aim, and has been the result, of our policies to reduce direct taxation and Government intervention in industry, and to revive and deregulate the economy.

The supply side of the British economy has performed admirably in recent years. The decline in our share of world trade that had lasted for decades has been stopped. It is now almost certainly in reverse. But even in a faster growing economy, domestic supply has not kept pace with domestic demand over the past couple of years, and that has caused the increase in inflation and a rise in the current account deficit.

With hindsight it is clear that we should have acted earlier to restrain this excessive demand growth. Indeed, we acted on our concerns as early as August 1987, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) raised interest rates by 1 per cent. But that preceded the stock market crash, and the associated risk of recession, shared by Opposition Members, led us, along with all other major nations, to reduce interest rates—certainly, with hindsight, a mistake, but only with hindsight. At the time all the outside commentators agreed that policy loosening was appropriate, as did Opposition Members who were, in fact, urging far greater relaxation of policy. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was in the vanguard in expressing that view —effectively, "Cut interest rates, boost demand." That is what the Opposition wanted at that time.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Did not the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in April 1988, also warn the then Chancellor of the risks of overheating?

Mr. Major: My right hon. Friend tightened policy frequently during the period that the hon. Gentleman has just mentioned. The underlying essence is something that the hon. Gentleman cannot deny. At the time of the stock market crash it was the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends who wanted us to loosen policy far more than we did, and it would have been disastrous had we taken their advice.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in retrospect, it is clear that it was a mistake to shadow the deutschmark and, thus become de facto members of the ERM?

Mr. Major: I think that my hon. Friend is well aware of what happened during that period. I see no purpose in trailing over that matter yet again, and have no intention of doing so.

A moment ago the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) referred to the position in 1988. For his benefit I reiterate that monetary policy was tightened throughout the second half of 1988 by my predecessor, and it has been tightened progressively since then as it has become clear that demand has been resilient and that the inflationary pressures remain.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Gentleman says that his solution was to tighten monetary policy, but was not what happened at the time a relaxation of fiscal policy—in particular, in respect of higher-rate taxpayers?

Mr. Major: Expressly not. I think that if the right hon. Gentleman actually studies what happened subsequently he will find it hard to say that fiscal policy was relaxed, as the public sector debt repayment grew inexorably year after year. If that is a relaxation of fiscal policy, by any yardstick I should be extremely surprised. The reality is that the cut in tax rates that I think the right hon. Gentleman has in mind produced a greater fiscal yield than do the higher rates at which fewer people pay tax.

Just as the problem took some time to develop, and even longer to become obvious, so it is bound to take some time to remedy fully. I have no doubt that the rapid growth of domestic demand has come to an end and that demand is now growing at a much more modest pace. The housing market, which was such an important factor in the upsurge in inflation, has cooled off; retail sales growth in the last year has been very modest indeed; and the trade deficit now shows signs of improvement, with our exports performing exceedingly well, but import growth moderating.

So no one should doubt that interest rates are working. There is evidence aplenty to prove it. But reassuring as those signs are, they simply tell us that we are turning the corner. They certainly do not yet tell us that we are back where we wish to be. That will take time, so I am afraid that there can be no question whatsoever of an early relaxation of policy. Interest rates will remain high for some time to come.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): As a partner in a building company, let me reassure my right hon. Friend that his policies are working.

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what I take to be his endorsement.

The undeniable fact is that in our present circumstances it is right for spending and borrowing to be less attractive and for saving to be more rewarding. I understand that that message will be disappointing to home owners and business men, but it would be even more unfair to them, and to everyone else, to relax policy now and to risk the problem recurring later.

We need inflation to turn down decisively and to be confident that once it has done so it will stay down. No hon. Member wants to see a return to the 1970s and to the untold damage that runaway inflation inflicted on savers, on competitiveness, on families and on the weakest in our society. Lower inflation has been the essential foundation for success in the 1980s. Recently, inflation has risen. First we must bring it down, and then we must keep it down and get it lower still.

So I tell the House in as clear terms as I can that of course I look forward to the day when I can say that interest rates can come down, but I do not see that day as being imminent, and I do not think that it would be wise for anyone to act in the belief that it will be.

Nor is it any part of policy to restrain private spending only to let public spending grow out of control. Tight monetary policy must be supported by tight fiscal policy. Our fiscal stance clearly is tight, with the prospect of clocking up a further substantial surplus again this year, even if it is less of a surplus than once we thought.

The debt repayment this year now looks likely to be somewhat less than the £12½ billion projected at the time of the Autumn Statement. Corporation tax receipts are lower than forecast, possibly—probably even—due in part

to even higher levels of investment than were previously estimated, and local authorities' debt repayment has been lower than expected. None the less, I repeat that there will still be a healthy fiscal surplus this year.

The wider economic outlook for the coming year is for modest growth, with demand at home pretty flat. That is not, I know, the most appealing prospect, but the alternative, which is allowing the British economy to face the coming decade under a serious inflation handicap, would be quite unforgiveable. There are great opportunities for us in the 1990s, but they depend on our not squandering the achievements so hard won in the 1980s.

Those achievements have been considerable by any yardstick. Business investment as a share of national output has reached an all-time high. In fact, since 1980 it has grown faster than in all the other major EC countries, and in the G7 is outpaced only by Japan. Manufacturing investment, too, is at its highest level ever, having grown at an average of 8·5 per cent. a year since the low point in 1983.

Most importantly—this point constantly escapes those who take a never mind the quality, feel the width approach to investment—the quality of British investment is vastly improved. Following the corporation tax reforms of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby, unprofitable investment is no longer favoured by the tax system, and industry is earning a higher rate of return than for 20 years. That point is both true and crucial, and if anyone doubts it they should look at the position in eastern Europe. The starkest lesson of all from eastern European Socialism has been that massive quantities of inefficient investment in heavy industry gets one nowhere. In countries such as Poland and Romania, investment accounted for around one quarter or more of national income, significantly higher than in this country or any other advanced industrial countries. However, we know from the dire economic straits in which those countries find themselves, that the quantum of investment means nothing. It is the efficiency with which resources are used which is crucial for the growth of an economy.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West) *rose*——

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak and I wish to make some more progress.

I regret that the tremendous improvement in investment performance receives little or no welcome from Opposition Members. Clearly, they will call for massive public subsidies to industry, whatever the state of British business. They have warned of bad times around the corner in every year that we have been in office, and I doubt whether their tune will change in the future.

Whether the Opposition can bear to admit it or not —I fear that they cannot—the fact is that British industry enters the 1990s in a vigorous and healthy condition that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. We have come a long way from the 1970s. Then we were at or near the bottom of every league and year after year we were falling further behind.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): The sick man of Europe.

Mr. Major: As my hon. Friend says, the sick man of Europe. That was the result of years of over-regulation, excessive union power, a culture of penal taxation and pervasive subsidy, a bloated and poorly run public sector and year upon year of runaway inflation. We know the legacy that that left at the end of the 1970s.

It has taken us a decade to put all that behind us. Doing so has had a dramatic effect on motivation, as the British economy—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting how little the Opposition like the successes that have been achieved by the Government.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North) *rose*——

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman will listen, he may hear a little more of the successes.

Putting the legacy of the 1970s behind us has had a dramatic effect on motivation. The British economy, which had become a byword for low productivity, has outperformed Germany, France and Italy and the rest of the European Community on productivity growth since 1980. The Opposition dislike the fact that that has been achieved in the past decade.

Not only have British companies become more productive and profitable, there are simply far more of them. That is a point that the Leader of the Opposition failed to notice earlier. Self-employment has shot up and the small business sector has blossomed. Business start-ups have exceeded stops by 27,000 in 1986, 42,000 in 1987 and 64,000 in 1988. Even though interest rates have been in double figures for over 18 months, the growth continues apace. In 1989 Customs figures for VAT registrations—companies do not register for VAT unless they have to —showed that net business creation—that is, start-ups in excess of closures—was up, yet again, by over 25 per cent. compared with the year before, to another record.

That is a dramatic increase by any standards. That increase in the number of new businesses sharply contradicts the crude caricatures of our economic policies that we so frequently hear.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East) *rose*——

Mr. Major: I wish to finish this point.

Far from being divisive, the economic and social changes that we have seen in the 1980s have positively eroded the "them and us" divide. To be an owner, a manager, or a business man is no longer the preserve of one class, one income group or one part of the country. It is now open to everyone. Masses of ordinary people, who once voted Labour, and never will again, have joined the ranks of those who work for themselves or run their own company, own their own home, have their own pension provision or shares. That is a remarkable social change in the past decade. It is the story of the past 10 years. Ownership of capital and financial independence is increasingly becoming the aspiration of, and the reality for, increasing numbers of our fellow citizens.

Of course, there is still a great deal more to be done. That is always the case and that is why we shall need a Conservative Government for many years—to continue to do it. We have still not yet exorcised the inflationary psychology of our economy, which was the curse of the 1970s—*[Interruption.]* I am surprised that the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) finds inflation so funny. Perhaps he is insulated from it, but businesses and people are not. Although he prefers inflationary policies, we do not.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Will the Chancellor give way on that point?

Mr. Major: No. It is precisely because we do not prefer inflationary policies that we shall take action to make sure that we get inflation down. We recognise that we must not fall behind in the effort to match and to beat our overseas competitors. That means that it is essential to keep tight pressure on costs, particularly labour costs, and it means making sure that we maintain investment in fixed assets, innovation and training, as we approach the opportunities and the stiff competition that will come with the single market in Europe in 1992.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us entirely agree with him that one of the great problems facing industry is the wage increases of 10 per cent. or more that are bound to be most damaging? However, does he agree with the Confederation of British Industry that taxes on corporate incomes in this country are about 4 per cent. of GDP, against 2 per cent. in West Germany and 3 per cent. in the EEC as a whole? Does he further agree that if we could get sensible wage increases and a proper basis for corporate taxation, which a Budget should bring about, industry would have a real chance to forge forward?

Mr. Major: I certainly share my hon. Friend's concern about the level of wages and the necessity for them to be affordable unless people are to price themselves out of jobs in a fashion that we would not wish to see them do. On corporate taxation, my hon. Friend knows that the CBI regards the corporate tax reforms that were introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby as a remarkable step forward. The increasing investment and profitability that have followed them have made a remarkable difference to businesses' prospects for the future.

The essence of what happens in business is not what the Government alone can do for business. We recognise that business men know better than Government what they need to do in the interests of their own businesses and I hope that in the months ahead they will have the sense of self-interest to ensure that they do it, in the interests of their own businesses.

Our prospects for the 1990s are excellent provided we stick to sound anti-inflationary policies. Britain has nothing to gain—not now, not ever—by tolerating a high rate of inflation or even a modest rate of inflation. That would be the worst possible thing for everyone—for business, for families, and for the weakest in our society.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Will the Chancellor give way on that point?

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not.

That is the Government's part of the bargain for the 1990s—to take whatever action is necessary to get inflation down. It cannot be done with hopes, nor with lurches in policy. But it can be done by the persistent and consistent use of monetary and fiscal policy, and that is what we shall do. To businesses, I say simply that they should look ahead, beyond the year of slow growth and depressed demand to the tremendous opportunities that exist in the 1990s. Vast new markets are opening up on our doorstep, and the changes of the past 10 years mean that British industry and commerce are better placed than ever before to capture those markets and to seize the opportunities that are open to us.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind. We will bring the economy back on track, as a preparation for prosperity in a decade of promise. The Autumn Statement sets out the policies by which that will be achieved, and I commend it to the House.

4.34 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"declines to approve the Autumn Statement, deplores the continuation of economic policies which have caused a record balance of payments deficit, high inflation and the highest interest rates of the leading industrial nations; and calls for a strategy to promote investment in manufacturing industry and the public services in order to strengthen the economy, improve the efficiency of industry, and enhance the quality of life and opportunities for all citizens in the decade ahead.".

This is the first economic debate in the House in the new decade. Perhaps it is not inappropriate to seek to take stock—as the Chancellor did to some extent—of where we stand in economic terms at the end of the 1980s and to look ahead to the prospects for the 1990s. Today we had a modified version of the hype, exaggeration, self-congratulation, casuistry and complacency that have, over the decade, characterised the Government's presentation of economic policy. Unfortunately, for apologists such as the Chancellor, they have been blown apart by three stark economic facts which no Government apologists or media apparatchik can gainsay and which, significantly, the Chancellor did not mention in his speech.

The first fact is that we have the highest balance of payments deficit in our economic history. Is it not remarkable that the Chancellor can come to the House with the knowledge of such a fact, yet not manage even to mention it in the first economic debate of the decade? The second stark and unavoidable fact is that Britain's rate of inflation is the highest of the major countries in the European Community. Why should we be lectured about the perils of inflation by this Chancellor when we have a worse record than our principal competitors in the Community?

Another stark fact that the Chancellor hardly mentioned is that interest rates, at 15 per cent.—they have increased 11 consecutive times in the past 18 months—are the highest among the leading industrial nations. What a verdict that is on the so-called successful economic policies followed during the 1980s. Because reading previous speeches of Conservative Ministers is as instructive as reading their current ones, I referred back to the corresponding debate last year, when the former Chancellor said that inflation would

"edge up a little over the next few months . . . But then, just as it did in 1985, it will start coming down again. Let there be no doubt about that whatever."—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1989; Vol. 144, c. 1007.]

I remind the House that Conservative Ministers are good at the reassuring game. Whenever any awkward matter comes up, they assure us that things will be all right for the future. I will tell the House what the rate of inflation has been in the subsequent months. In January 1989, when the former Chancellor gave us that confident prediction, it was 7·5 per cent.; in February, it was 7·8 per cent.; in March, 7·9 per cent.; in April, 8 per cent.; in May, 8·3 per cent.; in June, 8·3 per cent.; in July, 8·2 per cent.; in August, 7·3 per cent.; in September, 7·6 per cent.; in October, 7·3 per cent.; in November, 7·7 per cent.; and in December—the last available figures—7·7 per cent.

Anyone can work out that those figures are steadily high —*[Interruption.]* I am reminded by Conservative Members that the former Chancellor may have been predicting that in the careful words that he used. That will not wash. He said that it would come down, but in only two of the 11 months since has it been marginally below; in nine months it has been higher. The underlying rate of inflation that the Government prefer as a criterion—they hope to exclude the mortgage interest effect from the calculation, as though millions of people did not have to suffer the burden of extra mortgage payments—was 5·5 per cent. when the former Chancellor made that optimistic statement. For the past three months the figure has been 6·1 per cent.—the highest that it has been for almost seven years. We end the decade with not much success on the one front to which the Government appear willing to sacrifice all other economic objectives.

I do not think that I am the only hon. Member to sense that feeling of a decade ending and a new one beginning. During the Christmas recess, I was looking at an interesting speech by the Lord President of the Council who, since he has been relieved of some of the cares of his former onerous offices, has taken to giving his observations on the British political and economic scene. In his new year's message to the East Surrey Conservative Association, the Lord President of the Council—whom I think has the habit of giving such communications to the east Surrey Conservatives from time to time—addresses some of those questions. He tells the good folk in the East Surrey Conservative Association that the re-conquest of inflation is a vital condition for progress. It was the word "re-conquest" that attracted my attention. If we have successfully vanquished the dragon of inflation during the 1980s, why do we need to reconquer it? The right hon. and learned Gentleman is very careful with his words.

He went on to give some of his thoughts on how Britain stood in relation to competitor countries, and said:

"Britain enjoys no automatic pilot to prosperity. Much, much more, remains to be done if we are to match the living standards of West Germany, the public facilities of the French"—

I was not quite sure what he meant by "public facilities"; if I thought that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was intending to be witty, I would give him the benefit of the doubt, but I rather doubt that there is a hidden message there, so let us loosely interpret the phrase as meaning public services—

"or the can do entrepreneurial culture of the United States —let alone the low crime rates of Japan."

I think that there are some other features of Japanese society that we might aspire to as well as the low crime rates.

That was an interesting example of how the right hon. and learned Gentleman was beginning to understand that we were falling behind others; that is the coded message there. He has been thinking about his period as Foreign Secretary. He has plenty of time to think about it now and he has been pondering these matters.

Warming to his theme, the right hon. and learned Gentleman then tackled the question of manufacturing industry. It is almost incredible that he of all people should say this, but he said to the people of east Surrey:

"We need equally to conquer the tendency of regarding manufacturing as almost a residual element, a left-over in our economy."

Who on earth created this tendency but the right hon. and learned Gentleman when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, from 1979 to 1983? I feel that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was the most militant of the monetarists, who started this process of the decline of British manufacturing industry.

Then he turned his attention to public services. He said:

"Litter and scruffiness in our public places, and in far too many of our public services, are the breeding ground for delinquency. Poor standards of service are far too widely tolerated . . . Shoddy bus stations or dirty trains or noisy hospitals or cold waiting rooms are unworthy of the nation we aspire to become."

It is very interesting that after these 10 years of marvellous progress these debilitating signs should be all around us, but there we are.

He then went on to reflect further on it, and this will astound the House as well. He said:

"Putting an end to this scruffiness will require public money, of course . . ."

There is something going on in the brain of the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

But behind all this persiflage, this circumlocution, this coded language, what is the message which some of the east Surrey Conservatives may or may not have been able to detect? I will put it simply to them and help any members of the East Surrey Conservative Association who still remain puzzled. What he is saying is very simply this. First, the battle against inflation has been lost; secondly, other countries which we were supposed to have surpassed are doing better than we are; thirdly, manufacturing industry is, after all, very important; and, fourthly, our public services are in a shocking and disgraceful condition.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that in his excellent speech the Lord President of the Council also talked about the need for wage restraint, which the Opposition parties seem to be doing little to encourage? Does he not agree with the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), Opposition Chairman of the Social Services Committee, that the Labour party's policy on wage bargaining and giving a minimum wage would cost 400,000 jobs and add 4·4 per cent. to industry's costs? How would that help industry? He should at least be honest and say what his policy is instead of knocking other people. What would he do?

Mr. Smith: I am quite happy to tell the hon. Gentleman, and I will do so. In the course of my speech I shall offer some suggestions for amendments to Government policy that come from the considerations of the Opposition. I must gently remonstrate with the hon. Gentleman. One is entitled to mock even people as great as the Lord President of the Council, particularly when they are giving us such useful messages. I am trying to help the House, as I am trying to help the people of east Surrey, to decipher the true meaning behind the somewhat Delphic statements, because these indicate a very important change.

An attempt is now being made to rewrite recent history. We heard the Chancellor of the Exchequer have a stab at it in his speech today. "Not everything is perfect," is now the line; "there have been some mistakes along the way." I think that there is a tendency to seek to bury the last Chancellor's with him. I noticed that first when the new Chancellor was asked whether inflation would be his judge and jury. He said, "These are not my words." It was almost a case of "Don't watch my lips as far as this is concerned." It is now said that mistakes were made, but hon. Members will notice that most mistakes fall within the period of

[Mr. Smith]

office of the departed Chancellor. I do not think that will do, however, because the present Chancellor of the Exchequer was an enthusiastic participant, as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in the development of a great many of these policies. He was as guilty as any of the hype, the exaggeration, the gross inflation of the Government's alleged achievements.

Perhaps the best example came during that period of intense excitement which convulsed the Conservative party at about the time of the March 1988 Budget. Then they were telling us that Britain's economic miracle had become the outstanding reality of the decade, if not of the century. The right hon. Gentleman, opening the debate on 26 April 1988 on the Finance (No. 2) Bill, said that the Government's strategy had

"without doubt transformed the British economy.

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear hear".] I am glad that I take the House with me, but I wonder if I shall get as ready assent for the next proposition to which the present Chancellor of the Exchequer drew attention. He said:

"During the 1960s we praised and envied the German economic miracle. In the 1980s the position has been precisely reversed."—[*Official Report*, 26 April 1988; Vol. 132, c. 214.]

I notice that there is not quite so much baying from Government Members and that is an extremely wise position for them to adopt, because they may have noticed —it was reported in the financial news in *The Guardian* today—the report by Herr Haussmann, the German economics Minister, on the state of the West German industry: 3 per cent. growth predicted next year, 2·5 per cent. inflation, 7 per cent. rise in personal disposable income, 6·5 per cent. rise in consumer spending and, perhaps most important of all, a huge trade surplus last year of 148 billion deutschmarks, which in sterling terms is just over £50 billion.

What on earth do hon. Gentlemen mean when they talk about our having somehow surpassed the German economic miracle? The previous Chancellor did it as well. He said that Japan still had an economic miracle, but Germany's was in the past. Here we have facts that cannot be gainsaid and the present Chancellor, like the former Chancellor, should apologise for ever having dreamt of such fantastic ways of expressing the Government's policies, because the facts do not fit the hype.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept, however, that the German economy began from a start point far in advance of that of the British economy? The point is essentially that the Government, through their 10 years of office, have had to revitalise the economy, so deeply damaged by the Labour party, which had no interest in real investment.

Mr. Smith: I thought that the hon. Gentleman intended to chide me and give me facts to substantiate the notion of an economic miracle, but he departed from that. He said that the West Germans started from a better position at the beginning of the decade. For decades, the West Germans have been following consistently policies that have given long-term support to their manufacturing sector and have built up good public services. They have been following that path consistently, and the key to it —as I shall point out when I have an opportunity to proceed with my speech—has been investment. If we have a lesson to learn from West Germany, it is the crucial importance of that factor.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider it to be entirely without significance that the British economy, whether measured from 1980 or 1979, has grown faster than that of Germany, whereas in the 1970s it grew more slowly? Does he regard that as a point of interest?

Mr. Smith: During one part of the decade we had a spurt for growth which is coming to a halt, and we shall have a repeat of the stop-go policies. If there has been a successful decade and if we have been better than the West Germans—that is the burden of what the Chief Secretary and his colleagues have been saying—why do we have a record balance of payments deficit of well over £20 billion while they have a trade surplus of £50 billion?

The Government cannot wriggle out of that. They made an absurd and ridiculous claim and, now that the facts are revealed, they will not even admit that they made such a claim. The hype and over-exaggeration has come back to haunt them, and so it should because they should never have attempted to mislead the public in that way.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): In addition to explaining the conundrum of the miracle, will my right hon. and learned Friend answer a question that I would have asked the Chancellor had he permitted me to intervene in his speech? The Chancellor claimed twice that our share of world trade had risen inexorably in the last few years. But in that time our balance of trade surplus of £4 billion has grown to a deficit of £20 billion. Does that mean, in the logic of the Chancellor, that the better we do in world trade, the bigger our trade deficit will become?

Mr. Smith: I too have been puzzled by some of the Chancellor's claims. In the early part of the decade, our share of world trade, by volume or value, dropped. It may have stabilised in recent years, and I am not certain where it is headed—*[Interruption.]*—and it may be at a lower level than when the Conservatives came to power. But I get the feeling, which I am sure others will have got, that a desperate attempt is being made by Conservative Members to clutch at a few straws that are about. But the major facts are there and cannot be gainsaid.

A major reason why the Federal Republic of West Germany has had consistent success is the importance that that country gives to investment in manufacturing and to public services, particularly education and training. The West Germans have by far and away the best record in the European Community on education and training, and that has stood them in excellent stead. We failed to invest in education and training in the 1980s, and we have inadequate ambitions for the 1990s.

Mr. John Townend: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the attitude of education and universities to industry in Germany is far better than it is in England? Indeed, Sir Peter Parker said that, when he was at Oxford and Cambridge, he was the only one of his year going into manufacturing industry. He said that if more encouragement was given for people to go into manufacturing industry, rather than into the social services, the professions or the City, we would do much better.

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will give him some detailed statistics on that. Perhaps the crucial difference between Germany and Britain is that the attitude of the Government there is different both to education and industry, and they encourage both to work together to improve the quality of the staff employed in West German industry.

Concern is being expressed by British industry about the level of investment. The CBI felt moved to submit a memorandum to the National Economic Development Council about what it saw as the real problem of investment now. I remind Conservative Members that this is at the end of this so-called fabulous decade. The CBI says:

"it is no exaggeration to state that the United Kingdom economy is at a crossroads. The twin problems of price inflation and a serious deficit on the current account of the balance of payments must be tackled, without tipping the economy into recession and against the background of a painfully low level of personal savings, which account for no more than 4 per cent. of personal disposable income, down from 13 per cent. in 1980."

One gets the feeling that the CBI does not believe that it has been the most fabulous decade of the century. It goes on:

"If the objectives of reducing inflation and the current account deficit are clear"—

and the Chancellor said nothing about an ambition of eliminating the current account deficit; indeed, I do not think he even mentioned it—

"so is the economic priority for 1990. It can be summed up in one word: investment."

The CBI goes on to express its concern:

"Yet all the indicators suggest that business investment, particularly in plant and machinery, is set to level off in the two years ahead and is in danger of falling back . . . it is investment—in new plant, in training and in new products and services—which is the key, not just to economic growth but to growth without inflation."

The CBI draws attention to what it calls "a worrying investment gap" between Britain and our principal competitors, and points out that fixed investment in 1988, the boom year, in Japan was £3,699 a head; in the United States, £3,234; in France, £3,190; in West Germany, £2,946; and in the United Kingdom, £2,318, the bottom of the league for fixed investment in the best year that one could take for the Government. The CBI says:

"The threat to investment is, therefore, the most significant feature of the current economic situation."

Mr. Major *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman wishes to address that point, so I willingly give way to him.

Mr. Major: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying much about investment—the underlying propositions about the importance of investment are understood as well on these Benches as on the Opposition Benches —may I ask him to remind the House which European country had the greatest growth in investment throughout the 1980s? Was it not this country?

Mr. Smith: I was about to deal precisely with that point —*[Interruption.]*—because it is a misleading way of presenting economic statistics. The Chancellor claims that the Government have a successful record of investment. The Government always define it as business investment. They constantly say, as the Chancellor just said, "Do not worry about it; we have a good record." One wonders why the CBI does not think that.

I drew attention previously to an important article by Mr. Andrew Glyn in the *Financial Times* on 8 November of last year. That was recently picked up by Mr. Edward Streator, president of the American Chamber of Commerce (United Kingdom), who, many hon. Members will recall, was a former distinguished Minister at the United States embassy in London and a former United States ambassador to OECD. He, too, noticed the importance of that article and the difference between business and manufacturing investment. Ambassador Streator said:

"I would refer to the work done by Andrew Glyn of Oxford, who pointed out recently the stark contrast between material production where investment was still below the level of 1979 in 1988 and the services sector where the level of investment has practically doubled. In terms of business investment, gross fixed capital stock for agriculture and industry"—

and most of it is for industry—

"actually declined 8·4 per cent. between 1979 and 1988, while it increased 93·1 per cent. . . . in the same period for services."

He endorsed Mr. Glyn's conclusion:

"It would be a fantasy to believe that finance and business services can take over from manufacturing and generate the foreign exchange necessary to pay the import bill."

I hope that we all agree with that. That is the distinction. Manufacturing investment has languished, although overall business investment may have increased.

I will put that in starker terms for the benefit of the Chancellor, because he counts as business expenditure even expenditure on a car park outside a leisure centre or a metro shopping centre which has been built on the former site of a manufacturing enterprise. That is going on all over the country. Most of my hon. Friends have constituencies in which once there were productive engineering companies, but they have been knocked down, the sites have been cleared, and now leisure centres or large shopping complexes are being built. The Government say that such investment is as good as or perhaps even better than the previous investment. The crucial difference is that, when we had a bigger manufacturing sector, we made goods and sold them abroad. Now we have shops that import the goods that other people make, and we buy them.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, as he has given way many times. He will accept that the Ford Motor Company is one company that has invested heavily in the United Kingdom, with record investment currently under way. What advice, therefore, does he have for the tens of thousands of Ford workers who are being balloted at present on their wage agreement? Would he urge them to accept the wages on offer or to go for an ever-inflationary, higher wage increase?

Mr. Smith: I shall not give way again to Conservative Members. The hon. Gentleman's question was not relevant to the points that we were discussing. I shall leave the settlement of the industrial relations dispute between the Ford management and the workers to the negotiations in which they are engaged. I must remind the hon. Gentleman—because I do not think that he was here at the time—that in the latter months of the previous Government there was an economic debate in which the Opposition took what I can only call a highly irresponsible attitude to the situation at Ford. I shall not, therefore, take lectures on responsibility from the Conservative party.

[Mr. Smith]

We know what the Government could do about investment. I must tell the House about the Autumn Statements—not only this one, but the public expenditure programme of the past decade. In the period 1978-88, in real terms, industrial research and development was cut by 30 per cent., regional development by 72 per cent. and export promotion by 81 per cent. How can a country with a massive trade and balance of payments deficit cut export promotion support for British exporters? The result is that as export markets open up in the Soviet Union and throughout eastern Europe, British companies could not be worse placed in relation to their competitors in the European Community. Year after year, the Government have cut back their support, especially for smaller businesses which have difficulty in maintaining an export service and an export initiative. Once again, the result is that, in the new trade routes which will open up in eastern Europe, Britain will be left at the back of the queue because of the activities of this Government.

Most bizarre of all in this Autumn Statement is the fact that expenditure on training is to be cut for the year to come by £110 million. If that was not enough, it is to be cut for the next year by £220 million. One of the Chancellor's elusive devices is to talk about priority areas in public expenditure. He selects some items of expenditure as priorities and he says that, although he is prudent about public expenditure, we can see how much more he is spending in the priority areas. If there are priority areas, it follows, as night follows day, that there are non-priority areas. Training is clearly a major non-priority area for the Government.

We have a crisis in training which does not seem to have penetrated the Chancellor's mind; he scarcely mentioned it once in his speech today. In case it is thought that I am seized by a sense of exaggeration to criticise the Conservative party, I shall quote from objective commentators on these matters. Perhaps I should not say "objective commentators", because I shall quote from the proceedings at a conference of the Institute for Economic Affairs. I do not claim that the conference was objective, but it is interesting to consider what was said, as described in the *Financial Times* on 15 January 1990. The article said:

"Mr. David Lomax, group economic adviser for the National Westminster Bank, spoke for many at last week's IEA conference in describing the standard of vocational training and education up to school-leaving age in the UK as 'appalling' and the Government's performance on education and training as 'execrable'. Another speaker, Mr. Walter Eltis, director general of the National Economic Development Office, pointed out that 90 per cent. of 16 and 17-year-olds in Japan and the US are in full-time education. In Britain this applies to less than 50 per cent. of 16-year-olds and only about 30 per cent. of 17-year-olds".

I hope that the Government will take account of the fact that he also cited research showing that

"an upgrading of 1 per cent. of the labour force from unskilled to skilled can boost productivity by about 2 per cent."

The work of Professor Sig Prais for the National Institute of Economic and Social Research is possibly even more interesting. He went through a number of issues of industrial importance and looked at the training record of parts of British industry. In an article on 11 January, he pointed out:

"The essential difference between Britain and Germany lies. . . in the proportions with intermediate qualifications, such as apprenticeships, City and Guilds certificates, or. . .secretarial qualifications. He pointed out that 60 per cent. of the German workforce had such qualifications, compared with only 30 per cent. in the UK."

He then went through various areas in which we are losing out. He mentioned kitchen furniture in which, as we all know, British industry is losing out. He mentioned clothing manufacture, and I hope that the Chancellor will pay a little attention to this. The professor found that in clothing manufacture 80 per cent. of German machinists had completed two or three-year examined courses. In the United Kingdom plants, the survey did not come across a single machinist with such a qualification. If we do not train our people, and especially our young people, what chance do we have of competing against the country with the best education and training record in the European Community, if not the world?

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I must get on. I have given way frequently.

The case for training is unassailable. When we cause people to be trained effectively, we do not create only an important economic asset. The difference between a successful and an unsuccessful economy is the investment in human resources—in training our people so that they can beat the competition. The Chancellor might also reflect—and this aspect is mentioned far too little—that an intelligent anti-inflationary policy would release labour bottlenecks by training people, reskilling them and upgrading their skills so that unnecessary inflationary impulses did not come from that sector.

Perhaps most importantly, the case for training is one of personal opportunity and of giving our young people the opportunity that young people in other countries already have. I know that the Government always say that we should look at the increase in jobs over a particular period. However, many of those jobs are part time and low skilled—what the former Chancellor of the Exchequer once called "low-tech, no-tech" jobs, which he thought were quite suitable for our young people. Young people in other countries are having their minds stretched, their ambitions enlarged, their skills developed and their personal happiness increased at the same time as their economy is being strengthened while our Government do nothing.

It is no wonder that we heard on the radio this morning from the chief inspector of education in Bedfordshire about the shambles in which the schools in his area find themselves. We can go right through the infrastructure and find examples of the Government's neglect. In the past decade, they have persistently been indifferent to the manufacturing sector and have persistently neglected the public services.

Most disturbing of all, as we consider the development of our economy at the end of the decade, is the feeling that we are adrift and that the Government do not seem to have any policy or strategy in crucial areas of economic interest. What is the Government's exchange rate policy? Has fighting finally ceased between No. 10 and No. 11? Is it true, as the former Chancellor told us, that the Conservative party would never be a party of devaluation, or is it true that the rather more surreptitious policy of the present Chancellor is to allow the pound to slide gently downwards?

What is the Government's strategy on inflation? How can they have a sensible counter-inflationary strategy when they have interest rate increases which provoke mortgage increases and are bound to be reflected in wage claims? They have also let loose a series of Government-caused price increases in the economy from electricity, transport and water through to other areas. What is their strategy to promote investment and to deal with the investment gap, to which the CBI rightly draws attention? Is there still a medium-term financial strategy? Those who study the history of the Conservative party must have been curious about the fact that medium-term financial strategy, which was the rock on which Conservative economic policy was based, was not even mentioned in the Chancellor's speech. I suspect that we no longer have an MTFS—a medium-term financial strategy—but an STES—a short-term electoral strategy.

What the Chancellor hopes to do is somehow to get by until the next election, stagger through the months ahead, in the hope that when she blows the whistle for the next election—and he hopes desperately that this will be the case—the economy will not appear in too unfavourable a light. That is what Government economic policy is all about. What the Chancellor said in his evidence to the Select Committee was very revealing, the Select Committee which once again gave us such an interesting report. Sometimes it is in the evidence rather than in the conclusions of our colleagues who sit on the Committee that one finds the interesting nuggets of information. The most interesting to me was when the Chancellor described—and he volunteered this; he was not led into it—managing the British economy as "surfboarding on a fairly heavy sea".

It is revealing that the Chancellor sees himself as a surfboarder. All Chancellors have some sort of image of themselves. The lately departed Chancellor, although a former naval person, seemed to think from time to time that he was an aviator: we were treated to his notions of soft and hard landings. Unfortunately, he took some advice from the Opposition and left the plane rather hurriedly. His predecessor had a slightly different image. One sometimes wondered whether he knew if he was the shepherd or a member of the flock—alive or dead—but his image was much less dynamic.

Now we have a surfboarding Chancellor. In his mind's eye he is a sort of bronzed figure in Bermuda shorts, riding the waves, practising to take on all comers at the next Commonwealth Finance Ministers' conference. But is not the reality also revealed by that imagery? Surfboarders are not much in control of the essential elements; they are at the mercy of winds, waves and hidden currents. That is what is happening now. The Chancellor is moving from wave to wave, not sure if he is heading for the beach or the rocks and in perpetual danger of suffering what surfboarders call a "wipeout". In his case, I suppose I might say—and I ask the forgiveness of the House in advance—it is a major wipeout.

That is no way to run an economy, either in imagination or in reality. We end the 1980s disorganised, uncertain, confused, not knowing what the Government's policy is—and I speak for the nation because it is a worried, perplexed and disturbed nation. That is one of the things from which Ministers seem, at their peril, to be happily insulated. They believe that variations in public opinion are merely temporary and that all will come right, as it did—did it not?—in 1985: inflation came down and they went on to win the election, and it will all happen again.

Ministers are in for a very rude awakening because the people are beginning to realise that things have gone badly wrong in the British economy, and that we are slipping behind our prinicipal competitors, particularly as we face the challenges of 1992. They know, despite the hype, that the Government have been responsible for some major mistakes in the 1980s, and they know that those who made the mistakes should not be given the responsibility for guiding our affairs in the 1990s.

5.13 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): At the beginning of his speech, the shadow Chancellor told us that he would give us some indication of Labour party policy. My right hon. and hon. Friends may feel that they have waited in vain for some such revelation, so we must adopt the approach of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and see what coded message we can divine from his speech.

The core element of the right hon. Gentleman's speech was the reference to ambassador Streator's remarks. If we take that, the coded message is very clear: the next Labour Government would reintroduce a selective employment tax. Apart from that, we gained very little idea about what the Labour party might do in the present economic situation.

As this is the first occasion when the Autumn Statement debate has been televised, I begin by thanking my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for his commercial for the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report. The report is a serious contribution to this debate and, as has already been pointed out, in many ways the evidence contained in it is as important as its conclusions.

The report deals with public expenditure and with general economic aspects of the Autumn Statement. The first matter, part I of our report, is probably best debated when we consider the White Paper, so I shall concentrate on the general economic aspects of the problem. I stress once again that the report of the Committee was unanimous and that its conclusions deserve careful consideration. In many ways the evidence of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was the heart of the matter. He analysed in considerable depth the causes of our present problems while at the same time fully accepting collective responsibility for the policies pursued by his predecessor. We would expect that of him.

That said, however, we now face serious problems of inflation and the balance of payments, although it is important not to underestimate the achievements of the economy under the previous Chancellor's guidance, not least the reductions in taxation, the substantial increase in living standards, the massive and unprecedented reduction in the national debt and, as my right hon. Friend rightly pointed out, the huge increases in priority areas of spending such as the National Health Service.

Nevertheless, we must analyse why many of these problems face us again. Opposition Members seem not to understand that we must fight a constant war against inflation, rather than winning a battle and that being the end of the matter. There are lessons to be learnt from the experience of the past two years, and the Committee's report seeks to show that.

Mr. Beith *rose*——

Mr. Higgins: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be brief, because I believe that Privy Councillors should speak only for a maximum of 12 minutes.

Mr. Beith: The right hon. Gentleman will have to work on the language of his ministerial colleagues, who still talk about "exorcising" inflation. If one exorcises something, it has gone for good. Is there no difference between the way he views this matter and the way they view it?

Mr. Higgins: It is a difference of rhetoric rather than of substance.

As I was saying, there are some lessons to be learnt. First, it is absolutely essential to improve our economic statistics. This is a constant burden that successive Chancellors have faced and the measures now being taken should help in that respect. Secondly, the forecasts in the past two years have been seriously misleading in underestimating the extent of the upturn in the economy; there is also some danger that they are now underestimating the downturn, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will take this into careful account.

Over the past 10 years, however, we have progressed fairly steadily from very simple monetarism to a degree of pragmatism, and I hope that when my right hon. Friend comes to make his Budget speech he will set out clearly his analysis of policy and what he believes should be done. I have always believed that the right approach is an eclectic one that takes into account the views of those who may be described as monetarists and the views of those who may very loosely be described as Keynesians. There is some danger that we shall underestimate the importance of the money supply in the present approach to economic policy.

As the chief economic adviser to the Treasury said, the recent totally unprecedented fall in the savings ratio combined with an unprecedented rise in the investment ratio has caused serious problems. My right hon. Friend's approach to the rate of interest must be supported because it is right. At the same time, however, there is some confusion when we talk of monetary policy. At present, there is a concentration on the price of money—the interest rate—and insufficient attention is devoted to the quantity of money. The report tries to bring out that point. I have serious doubts whether the present approach to funding policy and control of the money supply is right. Of course, it is much easier when one has a budget surplus to deal with the problem by a policy of fully funding than it is with a budget deficit, when one must fund the deficit by borrowing from the non-bank sector.

I commend strongly to the Chancellor the important passages in our report, particularly paragraphs 83 and 87, where we urge him to consider the whole issue of funding policy. The present policy is to sell bills to buy gilts, and the opportunity for controlling the broader monetary aggregates is being ignored. I hope that he will consider the matter carefully before he delivers his Budget in a few weeks' time. That is one lesson that we must learn from the experience of the past couple of years.

The other problem—wage settlements—has only recently reasserted itself as a problem. It is wrong to say, as those with a simplified monetarist approach do, that so long as we control money supply we need not worry about wage settlements. I have gone through various cycles of so-called incomes policy, opposing successive Labour Governments who went from no incomes policy at all to the most rigorous statutory policy and then, on the Government side, promoting everything from no incomes policy to a statutory incomes policy.

As the subject is coming up again, it is important to remember the lessons of the past, and in particular the very dangerous doctrine associated with the idea of productivity and comparability. Of course, overall there is a relationship between productivity and wages. That relationship may or may not be inflationary, but it is dangerous to argue, as I sought to point out at Prime Minister's Question Time a few days ago, that if productivity in a firm increases, it necessarily justifies a comparable wage increase. The relationship is not automatic. It depends also on what is happening on the demand side of that company's output and what it can charge for its products.

If a relationship is established and if other firms decide to award comparable wage increases, that is unquestionably inflationary. There is an important distinction to be made. In the private sector the Government set the framework and private negotiators for unions and employers must work out the answer. They must bear in mind the effect that those wage settlements will have and the repercussions on unemployment of comparable wage settlements. I hope that the trade union movement will remember the lessons of 1979-80; over the past 10 years trade unions seem to have realised what was happening.

Despite my right hon. Friend's determination to bring inflation under control, and despite the fiscal and monetary policies that he is adopting, inflationary wage settlements will have a most serious effect on unemployment. It is the impact of those settlements, not the Government's policy, which needs to be taken into account and where the fault will lie if that unfortunate position arises.

That is what is happening in the private sector. In the public sector, as my right hon. Friend implied in his speech, the Government have a responsibility to adopt a sensible pay policy because that has a direct impact, first, on the size of the budget surplus or deficit and, secondly, on the distribution of resources between pay and services and physical resources. It would be a total abnegation of Government responsibility not to take a serious attitude to inflationary pay settlements in the public sector.

Finally, I want to say a word about the balance of payments referred to in depth in the Committee's report. Although I recognise, as the Committee does, that this is a matter of serious concern, I believe that the measures that the Chancellor has already taken on fiscal and monetary policy will be adequate to put the balance of payments right, though not immediately. If the Government try to correct the imbalance hurriedly, the cost will be too high, as our concluding paragraph says. Over time the position will improve.

As to foreign confidence, the trend in the balance of payments is vital, both on the import side where one can see clearly that domestic demand is declining—which is likely to have an effect on imports—and externally on exports, where the fall in the exchange rate has been helpful. I believe that it is adequate to put the matter right. We may be reasonably certain that my right hon. Friend's policies will succeed.

I had a concluding passage about surfboarding, to which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has already referred. It was a memorable phrase. I do

not think that undercurrents are important in surfboarding, nor does it follow that a surfboarder does not know the direction in which he should go, or can go. It may be necessary from time to time to tack. To go straight into the wind may be a mistake, but I believe that my right hon. Friend's skill will be adequate to get us home safely to port.

5.25 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) is to be congratulated, as always, on the work that he does in bringing certain matters before the House following actions by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and others responsible for the economy. I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman about the importance of money supply, but that will come as no surprise to him. I noted that the Chancellor did not deal with that in discussing monetary policy, nor did he mention the balance of payments, to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) referred in his splendid speech.

On this occasion I am prepared to be generous to the Chancellor. These are early days. He is the first Chancellor of the Exchequer of this Government without responsibility for a largely blameworthy past. Of course, he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, but that is not the same as having responsibility for so many economic decisions that were taken while he was at the Treasury. Some of the nonsenses of monetarism cannot be laid at his door. I had hoped that we might speak less of those today, but the right hon. Member for Worthing brought up a murky past which reminds us of the certainties that the Government once had.

I am prepared to accept the limited responsibility of the Chancellor of the Exchequer for those matters and, even more important, for the squandering of North sea oil, the only real chance the Government had to do valuable things which they failed to do. At that time there was a belief, breathtaking in its naivety, that pay demands had nothing to do with inflation—a view that even the Prime Minister does not share now. We had the associated nonsense that doubling VAT would have no effect on prices, which was effectively disproved when the RPI went up to 21·9 per cent. in May 1980. When the Government talk about their splendid record on prices they should remember that the RPI was 21·9 per cent. in May 1980, a year after they took office. So there is something to be said against the Government on inflation, even at a time when they thought they had it completely right.

Rises in inflation under the Labour Government were a consequence of the quintupling of oil prices when virtually all our oil was imported. The 21·9 per cent. inflation under this Government was entirely home-manufactured. It was brought about by a Government who, to quote a phrase, did not understand sixth form economics. Clever as they are, they are the modern equivalent of the wisest fools in Christendom. I always think that a country pays a heavy price for trying to teach parties how to govern. They subsequently regret the commitments that they enter into without the benefits of a Civil Service machine; and the country regrets them even more.

In this regard I must applaud my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) for not promising more than they can deliver and for laying the foundation for a responsible and reforming economic policy. The Government have had 10 years and it is sad that they have not learnt all that much.

In the famous Financial Statement and Budget Report of 1980, the Red Book, the Government mentioned some of the problems that they faced. In it they disclosed their medium-term financial strategy. The book is a prized possession of mine and bears the signature of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). In it he states:

"high nominal interest rates are a deterrent to investment."

That is what we have now. He continued:

"If interest rates are to be brought down to acceptable levels the PSBR must be substantially reduced as a proportion of GDP over the next few years."

However, the PSBR is now negative: we have a PSDR. Does that mean that there is no problem about high interest rates any more? Of course there is.

Not only did the Government get it wrong, but they got it diametrically wrong. That was their mistake and they continued with it year after year. Those of us who repeatedly attempted to bore the House knew that it was crucial to get that message across. We have finally done so because the new Chancellor of the Exchequer did not even mention that subject. We applaud him for that. The monetarist nonsense and its consequences have been scrapped, but unfortunately we now have the poll tax, the one-club activity and the scorning of the big balance of payments deficit. All those remain. However, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has no black marks against him yet. He may be regarded as tardy, but if that were shown to be a consequence of well-laid plans we might be persuaded that the results were worth waiting for. He is on trial; that is not a bad position for him to be in. When he presents the Budget we shall know how to assess his activities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has an abominable inheritance: inflation, a balance of payments deficit and decaying public services. All those exist while everyone is fighting for the ear of the Chancellor. We must hope that he has realised that there is only one way out of the crisis, which has been held in abeyance for 10 years. The crisis did not come about until the advantages of North sea oil had been squandered and the country was once again forced to look the same recurring problems in the face. This sad aspect is like that in one of the stories of the brothers Grimm. The good fairy gave us the oil and the wicked fairy made us abuse it.

Abuse is probably the right word. We are now near the time when we can seriously question whether it might have been better not to have had North sea oil. France, Germany, Italy and Japan had no oil and prospered in the 1980s. If we had not had the oil we might have been forced to realise earlier the reality facing us. That cushion enabled the Government to ignore the pleas of our companies which shed a quarter of our manufacturing industry—one third in my constituency. Those included small and medium-tech firms which were forced to close by the 17 per cent. interest rates and a pound worth $2·40. We faced such disaster in the first two years of the Government. My town lost a great deal of its manufacturing industry and suffered unemployment levels such as no one expected.

What is the Chancellor to do? First, and most importantly, he must show that he is in charge of economic policy. He must be more than just a tenant of his next door

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landlady. To do the minimum to demonstrate that, he must engage her prejudices head on. Any increase in mortgage relief will write him off completely. For too long we have entertained nonsense about absurd encouragement of overpriced housing. We tax almost anything. Anyone living in expensive accommodation is not only free from tax but receives a subsidy to go for a larger and better dwelling. Industry cannot get the finance it should because the investing public realise that unnecessarily expensive housing is the best investment of all. There is no schedule A tax to pay on imputed rents, no capital gains tax on main residences, mortgage relief and now the poll tax. Can anything more be given?

If from No. 10 we hear the word that there should be an increase in the limit in mortgage tax relief, we shall know that the right hon. Gentleman's effective Chancellorship is coming to an end. Future economists will conclude that we have some obsessional neurosis about this and I am not sure that they will be entirely wrong. That is what the Chancellor should not do, but what should he do? He must take action to reduce the bonanza of tax-free pension schemes for the well-to-do. That will earn him the appreciation of those who call out for the minimum of fiscal sense. Assistance for industry and training will earn him essential bonus points. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East was quite right to put this matter at the centre of his urgent call for action.

Ten years ago in Stockport and Tameside—I am associated with the two areas because they are linked—there were 20,000 skilled working engineers. Last year, there were 5,000. We have created that shortage of skills. It was created by people who retired early and will not go back to work. The Chancellor can do something about this. He may not recall this but he can learn about it: at the beginning of the war the same skill shortages existed and, in an emergency exercise, the Government set up a Government training scheme. People were paid to take a six-month course to learn basic engineering skills.

I was then an apprentice and I remember seeing such people. We scorned them because they did not have the skills that we thought that we had. However, they did a useful job and, as time went by, they were able to replace some of the skills of the other people. I am not saying that that is a model, but it is an example of what could, and needs, to be done if we are serious about this problem.

I have one other plea for the Chancellor's Budget. Setting capital allowances at 25 per cent. is unreal. If I buy a machine tool costing £1,000, the Inland Revenue will say that it has depreciated to £750 at the end of the first year. The assumption is that I can readily sell the machine tool, which I bought at £1,000, for £750 at the end of a year. That is absurd. Few machine tools can be sold on the open market for that price. If the dealer's margin is generous, it cannot be sold the following week at that price.

I urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer to look at the trade press to see how much secondhand machinery fetches. In a company which needs to be not too distant from the technological frontier, it is right that it should not be disadvantaged in that way. There should be some incentive for such an investment rather than the reverse. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East said, there is no discrimination between the capital allowances given for this essential investment and those for fancy city offices They are both given in precisely the same quantitative amounts.

Service industry, to which the Government were so deeply wedded, rests on the back of manufacturing industry. Financial markets follow industrial success. The service industry is no more use on its own than is the practice of taking in each other's washing. The City of London was created from a successful economy and so was New York. Tokyo and Frankfurt are rising on the strengths of their manufacturing industry. They will pose severe problems to London.

The trouble is that through most of this century this country's financial activities have been considered as more important than its industrial operations. That led Winston Churchill to ask that finance be less proud and industry more content. Of course, we need the constraining function of proper financial management. As a country, we have superb accountants, but not many good, and certainly not many adequately-rewarded, engineers. We have the snaffle and the bit—well structured and hand-tooled they are, but where is the bloody horse? The inadequacy of our training and education to provide the motive power for such people is a shaming indictment of our time.

The trouble is that the same financial activities have led the rush to London, even of our manufacturing industry. Out of the top 100 companies in Britain, 95 have their headquarters in London. Some years ago I compared that with the city of New York, the financial centre of the United States, where 29 out of the top 100 companies had their headquarters based. Companies such as 3M, Boeing, Ford, IBM and Du Pont are all geographically spread around and give value to the rest of the country. In Germany, companies such as Mercedes, Bauer and Siemens are all provincially based, giving strength to the rest of the country. In Britain, even Scotch Whisky has its headquarters in London. That leads to a centripetal effect and has consequences for our regional policy and activities.

The squeeze on credit, which started 17 or 18 months ago, is painfully slow. Society is different today. More people have capital on which they earn increasing dividends or interest, and they are not so likely to reduce their newly-accustomed standard of living. That was the case for credit controls or tax increases, and that is the case for the restoration of the investment income surcharge. It was absurd to abolish it.

Historically, it existed because it was held that capital was more secure than earned wages—but that is not so true today, when the justification for the surcharge is different. The cost of working has increased and will continue to do so. People are obliged to spend substantial sums of money on travelling to work. It is no longer a case of living just along the road from the mill or the factory. The cost of meals taken at work is also a burden, for today a sandwich often costs as much as a meal did in the past. Working clothes also must be paid for.

None of those expenses is allowable against income tax. That may have been all right when people worked at the factory bench in their old clothes, but not today. There is a real cost involved in the process of earning a living, for which the Inland Revenue does not allow. I appreciate full well the problems of opening the floodgate of the allowances to set off against tax, but in the past it operated

on the basis that there is a cost involved in earning a living, whereas if one only sits at home and receives dividends or interest, no such cost arises.

The major task confronting the Chancellor of the Exchequer is to ensure that the economy is restored to a non-inflationary trend. He has a task ahead in respect of the balance of payments deficit, and he can be effective only if he does something for manufacturing industry. The level of assistance that it is given will be of supreme importance.

5.41 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I have followed the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) on many previous occasions, but I do not recollect him advocating before an investment income surcharge. I thought the present problem is one of a shortage of personal savings. I ask the House to consider what the likely impact of an investment income surcharge would be on the propensity of private individuals to save, and I imagine that such a surcharge would not be recommended by members of the Labour Front Bench.

I noticed during the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) that he was, as always, short on specifics when it came to taxation. He has some very worthy ambitions in respect of training and education, with which I entirely concur. However, he is not quite so forthcoming in explaining how that extra expenditure will be met. He fails to give sufficient credit to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the measures already taken by the Government and for the vast increase in expenditure that has occurred.

Every potential Labour Government have the problem of paying for the large increase in public expenditure that a Socialist programme necessarily involves. The hon. and learned Gentleman may disagree, but the fact remains that if such expenditure is to be incurred, and if we are to follow the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in thinking that state pensions should increase in line with earnings as well as with prices, large sums of money will inevitably have to be raised by borrowing—which would of necessity mean higher interest rates. That is when the problems invariably begin, with the International Monetary Fund being called in before long.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne spoke of the importance of manufacturing industry, and I do not dissent from that. However, page 53 of the Autumn Statement shows that over the past decade manufacturing productivity in the United Kingdom increased by 5¼ per cent.—and a conveniently adjacent column reveals that the decade before that recorded the lowest increase in manufacturing output per head. That suggests that, while manufacturing investment is important, one should not ignore the rapid and considerable improvements in manufacturing output per head over the past 10 years, which I hope will continue.

Perhaps it is wrong to draw too much of a distinction between business investment and manufacturing investment. Again, I follow the remarks of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne concerning North sea oil.

Labour always keeps very quiet about the way in which this country's overseas assets have been built up over the past 10 years. British business has now invested £90,000 million overseas, which is the largest single amount invested by any country, not excluding Japan or the United States. Manufacturing companies such as GKN now produce rather more in the United States than they do in this country, while companies such as Ford, with substantial operations in the rest of the European Community, spread their investment between one country and another. It is unrealistic to suppose that Britain can become the engine room of western Europe or play a large part in world manufacturing capacity.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many people think that Britain is the 51st state of America? The reality is that investment by British companies in America is well in excess of investment by American companies in Britain.

Sir Peter Hordern: I agree entirely. It would be perverse always to look backwards and to think of ourselves as an individual nation intent on manufacturing production. That is not the reality of the situation as we move towards the end of the 1990s and the turn of the century. We must follow Adam Smith's adage about the division of labour in manufacturing.

The Opposition naturally picked on some of the more inconvenient parts of the Government's economic record, such as the balance of payments deficit and inflation. Inflation is the single most important issue confronting the Government, whose policy has always been very clear—that it should be tackled by monetary means, which I think is right. However, the figures have not been entirely convenient, and the measure of monetary aggregates has seemed to vary from one year to the next. I do not know the latest fashion, but I notice that little M0 still occupies quite an important place—as does M4, which is the broader measure.

I assumed that after 18 months or two years of expansion and of whatever monetary aggregate was in favour at the time, inflation would follow. Happily, during 1985, when there was a rapid expansion of M4 of about 15 per cent., inflation mercifully fell to little more than 4 per cent. at the time of the 1987 general election. However, I do not so disregard the increase in monetary aggregate as to think that it has no effect. The increase recently in both M0 and M4 is a cause for considerable concern. We cannot continue that way, and if it was not for the fact that bank lending for the latest quarter shows signs of slowing by comparison with the previous quarter—and, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, retail expenditure is decreasing—there would be cause for more alarm than there is.

However, I do not believe that monetary policy in the sense of measurement of monetary aggregates is enough. Interest rates must remain the main weapon, but even they are not sufficient to deal with the situation, for we also need to ensure that the exchange rate does not go down too far against other currencies. That is presenting difficulties because in the past year the deutschmark has appreciated by some 16 per cent. against sterling.

Much of our manufacturing industry is devoted to components, and it takes place in different countries in Europe. For example, the other day, I was talking to someone who works for the Ford Motor Company, and he told me that they manufacture the engines for all the Ford 2 litre cars in West Germany. The price of those engines is some 16 per cent. cheaper than it was a year ago. Ford has

[Sir Peter Hordern]

no incentive to keep down wage increases. It knows that it can well afford to pay at least 10 per cent. more because the cost of producing the engines has gone down.

More and more companies which trade within the European Community—as most of them now do—will find that a declining exchange rate makes it more difficult to restrain wage claims than it would be if the exchange rate were kept constant.

Trade with western Europe and the European Community accounts for 51 per cent. of British imports. Therefore, we cannot be oblivious to what the exchange rate should be, nor can we say that we should leave it to the market. We cannot pursue that option.

The 16 per cent. movement in the deutschmark against sterling has meant that Ford can afford to pay more and so can other companies which manufacture and export to the European Community. The public sector regards the private sector as a benchmark for its own wage claims but whereas Ford may be able to pay 10 per cent. more in wages, the public sector certainly cannot. Therefore, I impress upon my right hon. Friend the Chancellor the absolute importance of making it clear to everybody that—

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The hon. Gentleman, as a Member of Parliament working in the public sector, is getting a rise of more than 10 per cent.

Sir Peter Hordern: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. If we are to be judged by other parts of the public sector in relation to the reports of the Review Body on Top Salaries, we would be regarded as the worst negotiators in the public sector, and I say that without fear of contradiction.

I do not wish to be sidetracked, and I shall return to the question of where the market leads. Some people have the idea that one cannot buck the market but, as I said a moment ago, because Britain has investments of £90,000 million abroad, a finance director of a major company has to study his firm's assets every day, and it is his duty to protect them. Trade and business today consist of finance directors protecting their firms' overseas assets. If sterling were pegged to the deutschmark—as I think it should be—that work would not exist for finance managers.

The market does not force us to have a flexible exchange rate policy. If we had a firm exchange rate policy, aligning sterling with the deutschmark, and took the necessary measures, there would be no need for all the business in the foreign exchange markets that is taking place now. If we are to overcome inflation and to improve the markets, an exchange rate policy is very important.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne was talking about the Labour Government's bad luck when the oil price quintupled. It must be hard for the Opposition to accept this, but the oil reserves in the North sea have been helpful, because they enabled Britain to invest £90,000 million abroad, which gives us a considerable cushion. We can urge people who work in the United States and elsewhere to work harder on our behalf. I see nothing wrong with that.

The prospects for economic advance as a result of the recent events in eastern Europe will inconvenience the Opposition even more. The events in eastern Europe are momentous. In 1989 750,000 people moved from the East to West Germany—they were ethnic Germans. West Germany was faced with the consequences of an acute shortage of skilled labour, but it is probable that there will now be a considerable increase in production and economic growth in West Germany this year. West Germany's economy grew by 4 per cent. last year. At a press conference on 11 January, Herr Kohl said that it was in the interests of Europe as a whole that the European Community continued to develop as a model of an association of free nations. I think that that commends itself to all hon. Members.

An association of free nations would mean that there would be free movement of people, capital, goods and services within Europe. The European Community plans to make considerable investment by means of loans and grants to the countries of eastern Europe, but if the European Community got rid of the common agricultural policy it would do much more good for the people of eastern Europe. Eastern Europe is primarily an agricultural community, and that would encourage it to increase its production of agricultural produce. It would be able to get higher prices for the goods and increase productivity, and that would do more good than all the money the Community could give. I believe that that should and will happen.

Eastern Europe will resemble America at the beginning of the American industrial revolution, in the 1830s, when there was a similar vast movement of population, because people moved across the Atlantic to the United States. Western Europe will experience a similar increase in economic growth as the United States did at that time.

The future of the British economy is bright because its manufacturing and service industries are enmeshed with the economies of the other countries in the European Community.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for all that he is doing. If he keeps a tight control of public expenditure and keeps interest rates high for as long as necessary, which I understand to be his policy, he will have my wholehearted support.

5.57 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): If I could have brought some of my constituents, or some of the people who are now packed like sardines on the Underground, into the Chamber to listen to the Chancellor's opening remarks describing the Government's success, they might have asked sharper questions than many hon. Members tend to ask. They would want to know why, if the economy is such a success, we have such squalid and declining public services. If it is such a success, why are the lowest-paid workers being told that it is irresponsible of them to seek a small share of the success that the country is supposed to be enjoying? If this is success, why have home owners, who have struggled to get on the ladder of home ownership, been so heavily penalised for so long by high interest rates? If this is success, what is failure like? I think that those people would have critical words to say about the measurement of success implicit in the Chancellor's earlier remarks.

The Chancellor could direct our attention to some successes, but in key respects, which affect the lives of ordinary people in Britain, that success is not a reality—the down side is the reality.

The Autumn Statement refers to the Government's commitment to reduce public expenditure year by year as a proportion of what the nation produces. That policy has not been achieved this year, but it continues to be the Government's policy. When I challenged the Chancellor earlier today, he said that that policy was sustainable because we will have so much growth that the amount of money realised by the declining proportion of national production would be sufficient to maintain and perhaps improve public services. If we do achieve that continual growth, we should expect some improvement in our public services rather than a standstill or even a decline.

The doctrine of a perpetual reduction in the proportion of public expenditure is one that various members of the Government clearly find difficult. Whenever an Autumn Statement is presented and the Government issue their various comments and press releases, the next day's papers are confused about whether the Government have said that they are cutting public expenditure and doing very well, or that they are increasing expenditure on important services and doing very well. That, it seems, is not surprising: it is instructive to examine what some Departments have to say.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee examined the pronouncements of the Department of Employment, whose expenditure is being reduced because the Government believe that if fewer people are employed less training will be needed. Nothing could be further from the truth: skill training is desperately needed in the present circumstances. The Department, far from saying in its press statements how successful it has been in cutting public expenditure, tries to pretend that it is increasing that expenditure. Its argument is, "If we compare the figures with those of 1979, it is clear that we are doing very well." The Government's objectives seem to be somewhat confused; we had better clear that up so that we can get down to establishing what Departments such as the Department of Employment should actually be spending.

Analysis of the figures of other Departments is also instructive. The Department of Transport waxed lyrical about its increased spending on London's public transport, but that has amounted merely to permission for the extension of the Jubilee line: no expenditure has been allowed for the two lines across London which everyone who studies London's transport problem knows to be essential. The Department of Trade and Industry, I note, has cut export promotion and regional expenditure.

Examination of the relative price effect is even more instructive: although the relatively lower inflation rate in the cost of defence materials has meant a gain for the Ministry of Defence, there has been no renegotiation and no clawing back of that money. Conversely, no allowance has been made for the high rate of inflation affecting the commodities that the Department of Health has to buy, and that has had a significant effect on the NHS spending figures.

The Government claim to be increasing NHS resources by 5·5 per cent. Let us consider that figure in detail. First, it falls to 4·9 per cent. if cost improvements—the money resulting from savings and income generation within the NHS, about which there is considerable doubt—are excluded. There should be an incentive for those who make such savings to do better than the Government's published overall figures, but that incentive will not be there if the cost improvements—some of which seem to have been counted more than once—can only comply directly with those figures.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): Why exclude them?

Mr. Beith: The Financial Secretary to the Treasury is intervening from a sedentary position. I am trying to deal with the arguments as I go along, but if he wishes to speak I will give way.

If the cost of the NHS review and the policies arising from it is excluded—as seems perfectly sensible in the measurement of overall Health Service expenditure—the real increase is brought down to 3·7 per cent., a figure calculated through the use of the GDP deflator, which is widely considered to be lower than the inflation rate within the NHS. The Department's own figures suggest that the inflation rate in the hospital services is 10·5 per cent., and the rate in the family practitioner services 10·3 per cent. The actual real-terms increase in NHS expenditure may be as low as 1·5 or 2 per cent., a figure that may not be sufficient to account for demographic changes which, as everyone recognises, place additional demands on the service. I am not saying that the Government have not made an extra effort this year to find more funds for the NHS. Nevertheless, they must not claim that the NHS is suddenly in a position greatly to improve the quality of its service by means of the Government's funding, given the background against which the figures are set.

As well as the impact of the Autumn Statement on the public services, we must look at what the statement says and at what has happened to the general conduct of the economy since it was issued. The position has certainly not improved overall: we still have high inflation, high interest rates and a large trade deficit. Exports are growing more quickly—which is a welcome sign—and they will benefit from the depreciation of the pound over the past year but, as the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) pointed out, there is a reverse side to that.

The progress made so far has still not removed the basic danger posed by our large trade deficit. Even one bad set of trade figures can put pressure on sterling, and thus either increase the inflationary pressures in the economy or trigger a further base rate rise. Every time a bad set of trade figures emerges, a waiting game ensues to see whether the Chancellor will have to increase the base rate again to stem a flow from sterling. This week's trade figures, for which we are now waiting, have already prompted nervousness.

According to this week's figures, manufacturing output appears to be declining to an alarming and unexpected degree, while the figures for bankruptcies and liquidations again show a high rate of increase. The inflation rate is the worst since 1982. If I wished to hire an exorcist, I would not hire members of the present Government, for the job of an exorcist is to get rid of something once and for all. Year after year, the Government have promised the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that in three years' time inflation will be down to 3 per cent., but they have never achieved that objective, which has seemed to recede further as each three-year period has gone by.

There can be no reason to expect the realisation even of the Autumn Statement forecast of a 5·75 per cent. inflation rate, especially in view of the alarming money supply and bank lending figures and the depreciation in sterling. The

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Treasury model predicts that a 5 per cent. fall in sterling will add 4 per cent. to the retail prices index over a four-year period. Sterling has risen slightly since the beginning of the year, but that will not make much difference to a depreciation as large as that of the past 12 months.

The Government are clearly worried about the impact of wage inflation. Inflation in average earnings is now running at over 9·25 per cent. and the prospect of double-figure wage inflation is in sight. The pressure on wages is increased by rising mortgage interest rates. It is no use for the Government to say continually that those rates have nothing to do with inflation and should not be included in the retail prices index; the fact remains that high mortgage rates and heavy expenditure on buying a home are factors that fuel wage demands, and it is hardly surprising that people ask for larger pay increases to cope with those effects. The Government must recognise the reverse side of their interest rate policy.

There is also the effect of the own-goal inflation referred to by the CBI. Privatisation price increases for water and electricity have been very high: in my constituency, the price of water has increased by more than 18 per cent. this year. Furthermore, waiting to hit the people who are seeking reasonable wage increases to meet those costs is the threat of the poll tax.

When the Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales meets in the spring, it will have to face the fact that most farm workers will expect to have to pay about £600 a year out of their taxed income that they have never had to pay before. Hitherto they have lived in rent and rate-free accommodation, but now they will have to pay poll tax for themselves and their wives. Will the board ensure that they receive an increase of £600 a year to meet that cost, or will the Government say that it is irresponsible for these workers to be allowed to retain even the low living standards that they have enjoyed for the past year? The Government face a dilemma of their own making because of the impact of the poll tax on that section of the community, but the effect on many other sections will also be powerful.

No one still believes what the Government say about inflation. They say that they want a high pound to prevent import prices from rising, and to force employers to be tough in wage negotiations, but then they let the pound fall and plead with the employers to be tough. As other hon. Members have pointed out, those employers can obtain the benefit of the depreciation in sterling through the prices that they obtain for their goods overseas.

As part of their medium-term financial strategy, the Government say that they intend to bring MO under control, but when MO rises to well above its target range after a year of high interest rates they do not push up interest rates further. Of course, we should all be alarmed if they did, but where does that leave the strategy and the policies that were based on it?

What has happened to the Government's incomes policy? The two aspects of the Government's incomes policy were a high pound and high unemployment. Thankfully, unemployment has fallen, although it may now start to rise again. Those were the two elements by which the Government sought to contain inflation, but neither will do so any longer. The Government will have to look elsewhere for a credible framework for an anti-inflation policy.

We have argued, as have other hon. Gentlemen who have taken part in the debate, that a better framework for an anti-inflation strategy would be found if Britain joined the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. But we know who we are up against. We are not up against the Chancellor, who has said that he has been in favour of it for a long time. We are up against the Prime Minister's prejudices. The Prime Minister hates the idea of the Government who she heads being inhibited in any way. She adopts exactly the same attitude in her opposition to the previous Chancellor's proposal that there should be a more independent central bank. It was instructive to hear what the Prime Minister said about that. She was opposed to it because she believed that the bank must be under the control of Parliament.

Who here believes that the day-to-day operations of the Bank of England are under the control of Parliament? The Bank of England is under the influence of the Government of the day in a way that cannot be held accountable to Parliament. We do not know what conversations the Chancellor has with the governor, or what was said or to what extent the governor's actions follow from the Chancellor's advice. That is one of the most closely guarded secrets of Government. What is really at stake is the Prime Minister's desire not to be inhibited even from doing things which officially she opposes, such as debauching the currency. She hangs on to the freedom to do things which she says Governments should not do. The Prime Minister's prejudices stand in the way of providing a firm anchor for the anti-inflation policy.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): The hon. Gentleman suggests that we should join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. Have not the Government made it clear that we will not join until two major EEC countries have the same rules for exchange controls or the lack of exchange controls that are proposed? Would that not be the right time to join? If the economy is as bad as the hon. Gentleman is suggesting, it would be quite wrong to join the European monetary system with some countries obeying some rules and some countries obeying others.

Mr. Beith: The condition that the hon. Gentleman has advanced is well on the way to being satisfied and would be satisfied pretty quickly if Britain announced that it would join on that condition only. The hon. Gentleman has overlooked another condition, which is that our inflation rate must be close to that of our competitors. On present figures I see no prospect of that. It is the Prime Minister's way of buying as much time as she wants. She will be able to say for a long time that that condition is not satisfied because she knows that she will not meet even her Government's targets for dealing with inflation.

The Government should be seeking that anti-inflationary framework and taking the opportunity that it provides to invest in the long-term health of the economy —in training, education and transport—and to make other structural changes in the British economy that are necessary to drive inflation out of our system. The Government should be looking more closely at opportunities to extend profit-related pay if they want to ensure that the wage bargaining process is informed by

companies' productivity and profitability. There is a case for a national mechanism so that we can discuss and agree on what would be a reasonable increase for the economy, and a mechanism to ensure that firms which achieve high productivity can pass on that benefit to their employees and their employees can reasonably negotiate for it.

There can be no prospect of a giveway Budget this year. The Government must take the opportunity to deal with some of the anomalies such as high-rate mortgage tax relief and the payment of tax relief at the top rate to those least in need of subsidy. The Government should tackle some of the remaining anomalies in the national insurance system and take steps to encourage savings. Those factors must be part of the Chancellor's Budget considerations in the next couple of months.

The Chancellor is the ultimate pragmatist. He is not a monetarist. His evidence to the Select Committee made it clear that he is in no way attached to monetarist theories. Monetarism is out; the medium-term financial strategy is out; and the idea of an independent central bank even in Britain, let alone as part of the new European model, is excluded—if not by the Chancellor, very firmly by the Prime Minister. The EMS is still a long way off. It is surfboarding, but this surfboard has a back-seat driver —the Prime Minister. The Chancellor's pragmatism may be attractive to those who are unhappy with some of the dogma that has dominated recent economic policy, but in the absence of any other anchor for an anti-inflation policy, it gives no prospect that some of the fundamental weaknesses of the British economy will be corrected under the present Government.

6.15 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spent some time trying to disprove the Government's increase in expenditure on the National Health Service. Suffice it to say that since 1979 expenditure on the National Health Service has increased by about 45 per cent. in real terms and the number of people whom it employs has increased by 77,000. The hon. Gentleman cannot make such accusations when the facts belie what he says.

The hon. Gentleman said that his party's answer was to join the EMS—as though that were the panacea for all our ills. I should like to know how the hon. Gentleman or the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) would pay for the policies that they put forward were they ever to form a Government.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East spent much time discussing our manufacturing industry. Not once did he say that during the 1960s many trade unions were responsible for pricing their members out of jobs. Shipbuilding and steel became uncompetitive. Of course, the manufacturing base will shrink if we do not remain competitive. That is one of the main reasons why we start from a low manufacturing base.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) that, having listened to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, one would think that selective employment tax was coming back, possibly in company with the national insurance surcharge.

I am sure that more than 9 million shareholders will take no comfort from the fact that if the party represented by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) were ever to form a Government, the investment surcharge would be reimposed. He spoke about capital allowances, but they were traded off by reducing corporation tax. We have one of the lowest rates of corporation tax in the Common Market.

Mr. Sheldon: Surely the hon. Gentleman recalls that there was a minimum level before investment surcharge was levied on a person's income tax. It did not start from the first £1 of income tax. The hon. Gentleman must realise that nothing like 9 million people would be affected.

Sir William Clark: I am sure that that will be a comfort to some shareholders. However, I do not think that it will encourage savings.

We could use a straight line 25 per cent. reduction for capital allowances, but I agree with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that inflation is enemy number one. Last week there was a flurry in the City, the media and the press because of fears that the inflation rate was going up. It is affecting our economy and it is certainly affecting the value of the pound. We take our economic pulse too often and we say what it will be before we have taken it. That is why we get all the flurry. Hon. Members will recall that last week people forecast that inflation would go up to 7·9 per cent. but, in fact, it remained at 7·7 per cent. Indeed, if one discounts the mortgage interest element, it was 6·1 per cent. and there was no change at all.

Opposition Members should pay tribute to the fact that the economy has underlying strength. Over the last 10 years the average family's standard of living, in real terms, has gone up by nearly one third, and the income of the pensioner has gone up by nearly one quarter. That is not a bad record. Of course, it could be better, but the position is much better than it was before 1979. Unemployment is down, the number of jobs is up, growth is up, investment is up, and manufacturing output is 12 per cent. higher than it was in 1979. Consequently, it is wrong to write off our manufacturing base. In fact, the manufacturing base is building up. Take, for example, foreign investment. There has been massive Japanese investment in the motor car industry. Opposition Members should realise that a time element is involved. From the initial stages of setting up a factory it may take two or three years—possibly less—for cars to come off the production line. The fact that we attracted investment last year does not mean that cars will come off the production line in the immediate future, but they will be produced in due course.

I am delighted with the remark of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that public expenditure is under very strict control. When the present Government came to power public expenditure represented 44·5 per cent. of gross domestic product; this year it will be 39 per cent. Despite the fact that the proportion has gone down, more and more money is being spent on the Health Service, transport and education. The simple reason is that the economy is growing. Opposition Members may shake their heads, but they should look at the facts and the statistics. They will see that, in real terms, more and more money is being spent on those services. Anybody who does not believe that will not believe anything.

Of course, we have a balance of payments problem, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor admitted it only this afternoon. With hindsight, one sees that it was a mistake to relax interest rates at the beginning of 1988. But if I had known yesterday what I know today I would be a

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millionaire many times over. There is strength in the economy, and our surplus this year will be £12 billion or thereabouts.

The statistics show that imports have flattened out and that in the past three months exports have increased by 7 per cent. Of course, we must do better, but there has been an increase in exports. As a result of the budget surplus the Government have been able, over the past three years, to repay some £30,000 million of the national debt. In interest charges alone that has resulted in a saving of about £3 billion to £5 billion per year, which is the equivalent of 2p or 3p in the pound on the standard rate of income tax. That is not just for one year, but for year after year. Such is the achievement of this Government.

Obviously the national debt is a burden, but the burden is being reduced, and I hope that the Treasury team is taking into account the fact that, as the national debt is reduced, problems arise, particularly in relation to the national savings movement. If the national debt were paid off, there would be no national savings and no gilts market. This is something that needs a lot of forward thought. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned savings. I agree with him—this is something that I hope my right hon. Friend will take on board—that, as a result of the Chancellor's policy, those without money who want to spend have to borrow. But the Chancellor has made it far too expensive to borrow and, as a result, consumer demand has come down. Retail spending in December was up slightly, although not as much as in previous years, but I do not think that one can use that for purposes of comparison. One must wait for the January figures because high street sales, which are normally held in January, were brought forward to December. By making borrowing too expensive my right hon. Friend has prevented people from spending.

But an awful lot of people in this country have money and do not need to borrow. Those people are spending. I am thinking in particular of people earnings between £20,000 and £35,000 a year—probably middle-aged people whose children are off their hands and whose mortgages are manageable. Such people have quite a lot of money to spend. My right hon. Friend has introduced personal equity plans, which are an extremely good idea, but to the average person PEPs are not enough of an incentive. Suppose that an average person puts £1,000 into PEPs. He or she is exempt from income tax on dividend. On £1,000 the dividend would be about £60 a year—about 6 per cent. Thus, the tax saving would be £15. What about capital gains tax? In that case, because of the £5,000 exemption limit, no capital gains tax has to be paid anyway.

I am not decrying PEPs altogether, but my right hon. Friend should adopt a more radical approach. He should introduce a system whereby a person could enter into a contractual saving arrangement and have the amount of money involved taken off the amount of his taxable income. That should not be beyond the wit of the Inland Revenue. A person saving, say, £1,000 a year would pay £250 less in tax, but £750 would come out of the consumer spending market. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider that suggestion.

Many right hon. and hon. Members have said that interest rates are high. The base rate is 15 per cent., and one would be lucky to be able to borrow at 17 or 18 per cent. Interest rates are high enough, and I urge my right hon. Friend not to increase them further. The market in the deutschmark and the dollar is fairly stable at the moment, and we all know what a burden interest rates are for industry.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will examine capital gains tax. I realise that since 5 April 1982 we have had indexation and that it has been a great help. But a capital gains tax rate of 40 per cent. is locking up the market. Many people do not and will not change their stocks, and they are locked in. Capital gains tax should at least be reduced to the standard rate, if not abolished.

There is a great move to entice married women back to work, and one pressure that will build up as a consequence is to provide créches in the workplace. If one enjoys that perk it has to be entered on a form P11D and the employee is surcharged according to what the perk is worth. That applies to everybody earning more than £8,500 a year and it places a tremendous burden on industry. The figure of £8,500 per annum was fixed in April 1979, but it is time that we allowed employers to provide a créche without the employee having to pay tax.

At this time of the year, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor receives advice from all quarters. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said that there must be a reduction in taxation, but I remind hon. Members that the separate treatment of husband and wife for tax purposes will cost the Exchequer about £1·25 billion. If there are to be any tax cuts, I would plead, as I have in the past, that we should concentrate on thresholds. A single man can earn only £53 a week before he starts paying 25p in the pound to the Exchequer and a married man can earn only £84 a week.

This will be my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's first Budget. His forecast was accurate when he said in the last quarter of 1989 that inflation would be about 7·5 per cent. If I were my right hon. Friend, I would ignore some of the siren voices that we have heard from the Opposition Benches suggesting an increase in expenditure here and an increase there. He should keep a tight control on public expenditure and ignore requests for an increase. All my right hon. and hon. Friends will wish my right hon. Friend well in his first Budget.

6.32 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) on his skilful work in getting all the members of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, with their broad range of views, to agree on a single report. That is a great achievement and it is one which he repeats, with customary skill, at least twice a year. He is not present at the moment, but I am sure that he will be back.

Our report, which is being debated with the motion today, is of considerable value to the House. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said, its importance lies not so much in its conclusions—conclusions go to the heart of the debate about economic policy on which one is unlikely to achieve a consensus—as in the wide range and depth of our investigative hearings and the accuracy and quality of our economic analysis. I want to look at both those points.

The Select Committee procedure allows Members to put questions at length and in depth to the Chancellor and his advisers in a way that is often not possible on the Floor

of the House, and that gives us a great advantage. For example, at our hearing on 4 December, the Chancellor had to admit that the balance of payments did matter. He also accepted that the deficit was caused not merely by an increase in investment goods but by a surge of consumer goods. That was something that he had not previously admitted on the Floor of the House, but he did so in answer to a series of questions from a number of Members.

The Chancellor revealed as much by his evasions as by his direct replies. We have already heard from the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about his neglect of monetarism, but there is also the shift in exchange rate policy. In autumn 1988, the previous Chancellor lectured us about the need for a stronger exchange rate as a counter-inflationary discipline. This December, the present Chancellor was a good deal less emphatic when he said:

"It is worthwhile to have a firm exchange rate to bear down on inflation with all the other elements of monetary and fiscal policy as well."

He went on:

"As to the judgment as to what is or is not a firm exchange rate, that is a matter which one has to consider as and when necessary".

Now we all know what the Government exchange rate policy is.

It is not only the hearings that are valuable; it is the analysis underlying our report. Thanks mainly to our advisers, the Select Committee's track record has been a good deal better than that of the Treasury. In the spring of 1988, when the then Chancellor was boasting all over the world about the British economic miracle, we warned about the excessive growth in consumer credit, the impact of tax cuts in the Budget and the dangers of overheating. So we have not just spoken with hindsight; we said it then.

In our April 1988 report, we expressed disappointment about the failure to bring down inflation. We were concerned about the balance of payments. Presciently we said:

"we consider that uncertainties over domestic demand growth and the continuing capacity of the United Kingdom economy to respond, and over the likely growth of the international economy suggest that careful monitoring of the state of the current account will be needed."

We can say that again. We went on:

"Clearly there would be risks if the balance of payments deficit continues to rise."

But the Chancellor said that all was under control.

In view of the Select Committee's relatively good track record, it is well worth considering what we have to say this year about the British economy's prospects. We remain sceptical about the Government's ability to bring down the inflation rate. Commenting on the Treasury's forecast of 3 per cent. inflation by 1992—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said that the Treasury always forecasts 3 per cent. three years ahead—we note that

"Repetition in the face of failure has not added credibility to this forecast."

We underline the significance of the huge current account deficit. As we point out, it has already been responsible for a substantial 10·5 per cent. depreciation, a rise in base rates—the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) has already pointed out the impact of that—and a loss of official reserves. It also puts the exchange rate very much at the mercy of market sentiment, as the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) pointed out.

Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East, in his excellent speech, the Committee is rightly worried about the supply side. In our report, we note with concern the £17 million deficit in manufacturing and we wonder whether British industry is any longer capable of supplying the range of goods that people want to buy in domestic markets and abroad. Sadly, we have not yet replaced the 20 per cent. of manufacturing capacity that we lost in the deep recession of 1979-82.

We also remain extremely sceptical about the theory put forward by the Government's chief economic adviser that our balance of payments deficit is, in some way, self-correcting. We explicitly warn that the process of adjustment will not be painless. As we say, it could even lead to a recession—a recession induced by high interest rates.

The new element in the Select Committee's analysis is our warning about the danger of recession, with all that that could mean for output, investment and employment. To sum up our message in simple terms, we warn about the risk of stagflation—that is, the danger of a relatively high rate of inflation combined with a stagnant economy. That is how the position looks at present.

Mr. Hanley: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will take this opportunity to explain his party's policy to counter inflation, something which all of his hon. Friends have refused to do.

Mr. Radice: I was coming to that. If the hon. Gentleman listens patiently, he will hear.

The real question that faces the House—although it faces both the Opposition and the Government, it is more urgent that the Government face it—is how to bring an unbalanced economy back into equilibrium without endangering our long-term economic prospects. We have the difficult task of slowing down the economy, reducing inflation and shifting resources from imports to exports without clobbering output and investment, undermining productive potential and increasing unemployment.

It is already clear that the Government's over-reliance on high interest rates has damaging side effects. As we can see only too clearly in our constituencies, high interest rates are influencing the current wage round. That is not a theoretical concept or a matter of how the retail prices index is calculated, as the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), used to say. It is a simple matter of bread and butter. If the Government increase interest rates, the cost of mortgages inevitably rises. Given the almost universal use of mortgages in Britain to finance house purchase, that inevitably feeds into the cost of living and so into pay bargaining. That is one of the unpleasant side effects. The other is the impact on investment.

Already there are signs that the welcome investment boom of the past two years is dying away. Faced by contracting domestic demand and the high cost of borrowing, about which we have heard from people who should know, investors—particularly small businesses—put off investment decisions. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is well aware of that. If we are to reduce inflationary expectations and improve the prospects for investment, it is essential to bring down interest rates as soon as possible. That is why we need a new policy initiative.

Many of us accept that we should join the exchange rate mechanism. No one argues that membership is a panacea. However, at this stage of the economic cycle, it would give

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us several crucial advantages. That brings me to the question that the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) asked. The experience of several other countries which are members of the ERM, particularly France, shows that membership provides a useful counter-inflationary discipline. If business men and trades union negotiators are assured that there will be currency stability, there is less incentive for inflationary pay increases. To that extent, membership is counter-inflationary.

At the same time, membership of the ERM would allow Britain to bring down its interest rates. There is little doubt that one of the prices that we have paid for an independent monetary policy has been higher interest rates than those of our European competitors.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East said, if we joined the ERM at a competitive rate it would also help on the balance of payments side. As several hon. Members have said, the Prime Minister has imposed conditions on our entry into the ERM. It is clear that she is unwilling to join. She has even persuaded Treasury Ministers who ought to know better that we cannot join the ERM until our inflation rate improves. The trouble with that is that it is a chicken-and-egg argument. The Prime Minister says that we cannot join the ERM until our inflation rate comes down, but until we join it our inflationary prospects are unlikely to improve. We are in a cleft stick.

I fear that under present policies we shall continue to stagger along with inflation which is higher than that of our competitors, a record balance of payments deficit and higher interest rates than most of our competitors. We shall be very much the sick man of Europe, as was said earlier, and I believe that we need a change of policy.

Mr. Hanley: As we were at the end of the 1970s.

Mr. Radice: I am afraid that the same is true at the end of the 1980s. That is why we need a change of policy. If we are to square our present inflationary circle, keep investment up and bring the economy back into balance without harming our productive potential—as we are doing now—our early entry into the ERM is entirely necessary.

6.45 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I enjoyed the analysis of the economy which the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) has just given, but I hope that he will forgive me if I do not respond to his remarks. Instead, I should like to refer to the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). The right hon. and learned Gentleman enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a formidable debater, and his performance this afternoon was characteristically entertaining. However, it suffered from the same omissions as were apparent from his speeches in the four or five debates on the economy that we have had since the summer recess.

We all understand why the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not wish to refer to the record of the Government of which he was a member. I trust that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will not accept any strictures on inflation from a member of a Government who even in their best year could not reduce inflation to the present rate, which we regard as unacceptably high.

What I found more significant in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech was his reluctance to say anything about his party's policy. He may be reticent because he does not believe that he will ever have the chance to put those policies into practice. Whatever the reason, it may be instructive to the House to explore Labour policy more deeply.

During the debates on the economy before Christmas the right hon. and learned Gentleman made great play of his enthusiasm for entering the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. Try as we would, my hon. Friends and I could not tease out of him any clue about the right level of sterling for entry into the ERM. I now understand why he was so reluctant to or could not answer that straightforward question—it was his adherence to what I might call a traditional Labour party source of advice. In October the right hon. and learned Gentleman told my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson):

> "He should listen, . . . to the advice that he received from . . . the annual conference of the Trades Union Congress."

That remark was a timely reminder of who would run the British economy if the Labour party ever returned to power. The right hon. and learned Gentleman deserves the gratitude of the House and the country for giving with such candour and courage an early and open warning of his dependence on his party's paymasters.

Unfortunately, the annual conference of the Trades Union Congress did not appear to have a clear view about the ERM. At TUC conferences motions and debates about crucial matters such as lesbian rights and reform of the blasphemy laws are perfectly routine, and I am sure that the House will be relieved to know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has such a valuable source of advice on those topics. However, the TUC conference does not appear to have a clear view on our entry into the ERM.

In 1988 the annual conference of the TUC staged a debate on Europe which was opened by no less a personage than the President of the European Commission. Thereafter, the comrades did not make a single reference to the exchange rate mechanism in the entire debate, nor did the motion that they were debating refer to the exchange rate mechanism. I am sorry to say that the verbatim transcript of the proceedings of the 1989 TUC annual conference has not yet reached the Library, but I dare say that that is a source of some relief to the Labour Front Bench. However, I have scrutinised the daily reports in the *Financial Times*, a newspaper that can be relied upon to cover any reference to the exchange rate mechanism given that in September of last year it was such a topic of controversy——

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is not often that I get to my feet on a point of order, but I have scoured the pages of the Order Paper and have read the Orders of the Day and the notices of motions. Although the topic before us is fairly wide-ranging, covering the Government's economic policy and the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, in the past five minutes, since the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) has been on

his feet, all that I have heard has been an exposure of Labour policy—as he sees it—and of the TUC policy, but no reference to what is on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) is in order. He has not been on his feet for more than five minutes and no doubt he is deploying his case.

Mr. Yeo: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, because that is exactly what I am trying to do. The majority of hon. Members who have spoken have referred to the exchange rate mechanism. I am merely trying to tease out of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East a little more about his attitude to this important and highly relevant subject.

Once again, it seems that in 1989 the delegates at the TUC's annual conference did not have the exchange rate mechanism at the top of the agenda——

Mr. John Smith: That is not true.

Mr. Yeo: I am prepared to give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman on this.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is clearly in need of some education. I do not know what he reads or how he gets his information, but I advise him that I was at that TUC conference as an observer of an interesting debate on the exchange rate mechanism. The conference passed a resolution that Britain should join the ERM. That is a fact. Will the hon. Gentleman now proceed on the basis of facts rather than on these ridiculous surmises, all of which are wrong?

Mr. Yeo: On the contrary, the surmises were based on the assumptions that I have set out clearly. In 1988 I studied the verbatim transcript of the TUC proceedings. In 1989 I was forced to rely on newspaper accounts, which I have scrutinised——

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Mr. Yeo: I can tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that unfortunately the *Financial Times* did not carry any reference to the debate to which he refers during the whole week of the TUC conference——

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. What about other newspapers?

Mr. Yeo: All right, I am happy to acknowledge that there was a debate and I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for pointing it out. I am glad for his sake that he has a source of instruction on which he can act on this crucial subject because, under pressure from my hon. Friends, the best that he could come up with on the exchange rate mechanism in our debate last October was that entry to the ERM will be effected

"at the right and appropriate rate for the success for British industry."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1989; Vol. 158, c. 684-85.]

That piece of waffle could easily have come straight from the lips from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Smith: It is not waffle.

Mr. Yeo: Another aspect of Labour party policy is its enthusiasm for an industrial strategy for manufacturing industry, which is another subject on which we have heard a great deal this afternoon. If that phrase means anything, it presumably means that the Labour party favours increased investment. The question that we must ask is, where will that investment come from? Not from the poor old private investor, I fear, whose plight under a future Labour Government would be even worse than under previous Labour Governments. Under Labour, individual investors would find their capital gains taxed at income tax rates of up to 59 per cent.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman has been referring to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East and to what he said about the exchange rate. I remind the hon. Gentleman that when the Chancellor appeared before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, he said, on exchange rates:

"As to the judgment as to what is or is not a firm exchange rate, that is a matter which one has to consider as and when necessary".

I repeat that that was what the Chancellor said. It is clear, is it not?

Mr. Yeo: The Chancellor has made his support for entry into the exchange rate mechanism under the proper conditions perfectly clear to hon. Members and to the public at large. I fully support his views. I hope that with the skilfully managed depreciation of the pound over the past three months, we have now arrived at a level for sterling that is appropriate for British entry into the exchange rate mechanism. That is my view.

The Labour party proposes that the individual investor should also lose his current modest annual exemption for capital gains, or that at the very least it would be substantially reduced. The income that individuals receive from their investments in manufacturing industry would in future be subject to an extra deduction, which would be equivalent to the deduction of national insurance contributions on earnings. Launching a double-barrelled attack on investors' income and capital gains is hardly the best way to promote investment in manufacturing industry. Indeed, there are only two possible explanations for this attack. The first is that it was launched on the advice of the TUC. The second is that the Labour party is looking forward to a return to the bad old days when men in Whitehall found how difficult it was to pick industrial winners, at great cost to the taxpayer and the country.

The final aspect of the Opposition's policy that is relevant to the debate——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have been listening carefully. I have a suspicion that the hon. Gentleman's case would have been admirable last Friday, but he must now relate his remarks to the Autumn Statement and to the Opposition's amendment.

Mr. Yeo: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for that guidance. Obviously, I am concerned to relate my remarks closely to the subject under debate, but since the Autumn Statement is the document that shows the balance between revenue and expenditure, any proposals to alter the revenue-raising taxation of this country are relevant to a discussion of the Autumn Statement.

It is clear that the Labour party is desperate to raise the rate of personal income tax. We understand that the top rate would be increased to 59 per cent. and that between that and the existing basic rate of 25 per cent. would be other rates, higher than 25 per cent. Many taxpayers who are currently paying a rate of 25 per cent. would pay substantially more in taxation.

Equally damaging is Labour's pledge to abolish the upper earnings limit on employees' national insurance

[Mr. Yeo]

contributions. That would hit hard and indiscriminately at everyone earning £325 per week or more—a figure that is not much above the rate of average male industrial earnings, if overtime is taken into account.

Let me turn—no doubt to your relief, Mr. Speaker, —to the Autumn Statement, three features of which, unfortunately, have not received the attention that they deserve. The first and most important feature of this year's Autumn Statement is that public spending is rising in real terms. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said at the start of the debate, substantial extra sums of taxpayers' money are being allocated to health, transport and higher education, to name but three of the areas that are receiving additional resources. That increase in spending is wholly welcome. I am sure that there is overwhelming public support for applying a share of the nation's growing wealth to improving the quality of vital public services.

However, there is nothing new about that trend. Since the Government came to power, public spending has risen by 16 per cent. in real terms—a fact which, like so many others, contradicts the beloved Left-wing myth of Government cuts. Furthermore, while there is plenty of room for debate about how far Government decisions can affect the rate of inflation, economic growth or productivity, there can be no doubt that one aspect of the economy that is exclusively under the Government's control is the amount of public expenditure.

This year's Autumn Statement is a further confirmation of the Government's clear and deliberate intention to improve and expand public services. The second feature of the Autumn Statement is that that increase in spending is soundly financed. From time to time in the past, this country has suffered from Governments who have embarked on spending sprees paid for by borrowing. It is only a few years since the nation's debts were spiralling upwards at such a dizzy rate that the British Chancellor had to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund as though Britain was some third-rate, debt-ridden banana republic.

Today there is a different and happier story to tell as the whole of this year's public expenditure will be covered by revenues received from taxation. Indeed, those revenues will be sufficient to repay a substantial amount of the very debt that this Government and this generation of taxpayers inherited from their irresponsible and profligate predecessors. Repayment of debt lightens the burden on future generations so that resources that might have had to be used to pay interest become available to train more teachers, to pay more doctors and so on. That sound basis for the expansion of public services and expenditure also deserves a warm welcome.

The, third, equally welcome, feature of the Autumn Statement is that it shows that the proportion of the nation's wealth being consumed by Government spending is now down to under 39 per cent.—the lowest level for more than two decades. That is one measure of the admittedly gradual progress that the Government are making to get off people's backs.

Those three central features of the Autumn Statement —more spending, soundly financed spending, and a smaller state grab of the country's production—are worth spelling out because in recent economic debates, and even today, they have tended to be overlooked. The fact that that treble has been secured at a time of steady falling personal and corporate tax rates makes the achievement all the more remarkable.

In the 1970s, the economic decision-making process was one of agonising between whether we should cut spending or raise taxes. In the early 1980s, that changed to a choice between whether to increase spending or to cut taxes. Even if 1990 has to be a year without any cuts in taxation, I am confident that later in the decade we can look forward to higher spending and lower taxes. For that reason, I commend the Autumn Statement to the House.

7.3 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): I wish briefly to talk about the Autumn Statement. Therefore, I shall not be following the remarks of the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) as for much of the time I could not understand the points that he was making. It was as though he was rehearsing an address to the Primrose League in some village hall this weekend, and trying to frighten the good ladies with tales of Socialism—red in tooth and claw—that is about to come over the horizon in his part of Suffolk.

The main point of interest in the Autumn Statement was the Government's forecast for 1990. Although every year is one of transition, clearly the Chancellor forecast a change in our economic performance for next year. Therefore, it is right that we should examine the credibility of some of those forecasts. All Chancellors are haunted by their forecasts within a few years, but I expect this Chancellor to have a nasty turn this mid-summer.

What struck me most about the public expenditure part of the Autumn Statement was the inadequate allowance for the relative price effect in the National Health Service —the tendency for Health Service costs, as a result of the high level of staff in total costs, new medical equipment, and the rising costs of drugs, to rise faster than the retail prices index. In the Select Committee on the Treasury and the Civil Service report it was pointed out that in 1988-89 cost inflation in the National Health Service was well above the RPI, at about 10 per cent. When the Chief Secretary gave evidence on that question to the Committee, he said:

> "When you take account of income generation and cost improvements in the National Health Service, we will see an increase in patient care and quality of service".

That does not seem to be much of an offer. He therefore assumed that unquantified revenues—because they cannot be quantified yet—and cost cutting, also unquantified, would come to the rescue of underfunding. I thought that to be a dubious assumption, and so did the Committee, which concluded:

> "Because of the high inflation of Health Service costs the increases may not allow the improvement of services that the published figures imply."

In the public expenditure White Paper, which will be published in the near future, we should look for real evidence of increased output from the NHS as a result of the so-called increased inputs, which are clearly exaggerated as a result of the relative price effect. The Chief Secretary and I have been interested in improving the output figures from public expenditure programmes for a long time. They have improved, but the crucial point when this year's National Health Service programmes are presented is to show the extent to which revenues and cost cutting have made a contribution to the improvement to service. At the end of the day, we must show what the

outputs were, what happened to the waiting lists, the number of operations carried out and the relative costs. We want more sophisticated output indicators to test the validity of what the Chief Secretary alleges will be the increase in Health Service performance.

As I tried to point out to the Chancellor during his speech, that is not the only area where there is a differential cost. The Low Pay Unit points out that when the retail prices index rises by 7 per cent., the cost of living for pensioners, those on benefits and those earning low pay is about 10 per cent. because they have a different pattern of expenditure. Therefore, benefits that relate only to the retail prices index and not earnings—as they were under a Labour Government—continually chip away at their standard of living. The basic things that those people buy, such as housing, food and clothing, rise in price relatively quickly compared with the pattern of expenditure of the middle class.

In his economic forecast, the Chancellor modestly said that 1990 would be a less easy year. However, table 2·12 in the summary of economic prospects shows zero growth for 1990. In anywhere else in the world that would be a recession. The United States Treasury description of a recession is nil growth in two consecutive quarters. We have a forecast of virtually nil growth in four consecutive quarters.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) pointed out that we have the phenomenon of a dramatic fall in inflation in three years' time. That is like pursuing the Holy Grail or the Hound of the Baskervilles across the Grimpen Mire—it is always slightly out of reach. For the past six years the Government's medium-term forecasts have each forecast inflation at 3 per cent. in three years' time. The outturn has usually been 7 per cent. or more. As those forecasts have never been achieved, I am not sure why the Government bother to make them. In 1985, the forecast for 1988 was 3 per cent., but the result was 7 per cent. In 1986, the forecast for 1989 was 3 per cent., but it was 7 per cent. This year's Autumn Statement leads us to believe that inflation will fall from 7·7 per cent. in 1989 to 5·5 per cent. in 1990 and to the magic figure of 3 per cent. in 1991.

In December 1989, inflation was 7·7 per cent.—the highest figure since 1982. That was characterised by what the CBI called a series of inflationary own goals. The CBI quoted as inflationary "own goals" the poll tax, the business rate, the level of income tax and the continuing forcing up of utility prices—above all, gas, electricity and telecommunication prices, in order to stuff those companies for privatisation and enable them to make a return to their shareholders.

As the Treasury and Civil Service Committee said,

"repetition in the face of failure has not added credibility to this forecast."

That, I think, is a very modest all-party way of putting total disbelief in this chimera of the 3 per cent. inflation rate which is continually vanishing over the horizon.

We also have a forecast of a dramatic improvement in the balance of payments deficit from over £20 billion—I think the outturn was getting on for £22 billion in 1989—to £15 billion in 1990. Presumably this is a result of nil growth. If there is nil growth in the economy, imports are that much less and therefore the balance of payments deficit improves, but it is a tough way of improving the balance of payments deficit for those on low pay. Even at this level, it is still 2·75 per cent. of GDP, which will be the largest relative balance of payments deficit in the Western world.

We have had a running dispute during these years of mounting trade deficits as to whether it matters. It used to matter a great deal. Then, when balance of payments deficits began to get into double figures in billions every year, Government spokespersons said that it did not matter anyway as it was funded by capital inflows, and it would be all right on the night.

I liked some of the remarks of the chief economic adviser to the Treasury on this matter. He said—modestly, I thought—that no one is ever comfortable with a deficit this size. He said that under pressure, I am told. He also said that, given a choice between this deficit and a smaller one, he would choose a smaller one. I found that very reassuring from somebody paid to advise the Chancellor on economic policy. He then said that he expected the deficit to be self-correcting. He is no doubt right, in that deficits of this order are unsustainable in the long term, but the question is with what kind of cataclysm it will correct itself. We have dropped the term "soft landing" nowadays, I understand. We simply hope that——

Mr. Radice: That we will land at all.

Mr. Garrett: As my hon. Friend says, we simply hope that we shall make land.

One of the advisers to the Treasury Committee has said that if it proves self-correcting

"it may only be because the private sector eventually reacts very abruptly—leading to a recession as companies slash investment, employment and stocks."

The truth of the matter is that investment is falling and certainly industry is rapidly destocking at the moment. So some would say that the recession is well under way already. There was an increase in business failures of 10 per cent. in 1989, and the regional figures are quite interesting: an increase of 17 per cent. in the south-east, 18 per cent. in the DTI's east region and 22 per cent. in the east midlands. What this tells me is that all those new and under-capitalised companies that have sprung up in the enterprise society in the relatively prosperous regions have been hit by interest rates and have gone out of business; and, of course, shortly they will be hit by the unified business rate. In those regions, the increase in that rate will be exceptionally high, as we know.

In Norwich, a 160-year-old clothing company, the last remnant of our clothing industry in the city of Norwich, has recently gone out of business, making 450 people redundant—people whose skills are not easy to utilise nowadays in that city. The owners actually quoted high interest rates as the reason for their going out of business.

Mr. Roger King: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned that businesses have failed and he has laid the blame on high interest rates. Clearly he has never run a small business, because a business can fail for a vatiety of reasons—the wrong product, the wrong quality, the wrong many things. So he cannot say specifically that interest rates have caused the problem. He also commented on the situation in Norwich, where, as I understand it, there is almost full employment and companies such as Norwich Union are taking people from the schools into their business because they are so short of staff. While it is a tragedy for any business to close, manufacturing and the commercial sector constantly regenerate themselves.

Mr. Garrett: I have run several small businesses, and quite successfully. I was saying that the reason for the collapse of that particular business was given by its owners as high interest rates. I did not pick that out of the air; it was what the employees were told, and those employees are now redundant. Of course, small companies go out of business for a variety of reasons. I suppose that bad management is the usual one. But what we are discussing now is the high level of interest rates in relatively small under-capitalised companies which have embarked on business with a relatively high level of debt, as many such businesses do, as the hon. Gentleman should know.

Since I first represented it the city of Norwich has been transformed from a manufacturing city to one which is largely based on financial services and retailing. I am not saying that there is anything specifically wrong with that, but it gives a very unbalanced local labour market if people with manufacturing skills cannot find jobs, as in the case of the machinists from the clothing company I cited. We want a balanced economy in the city I represent, just as we want it in this country. The loss of our footwear industry and of much of our electrical, manufacturing and engineering industry has been disastrous. It is true that Norwich Union is offering school leavers jobs, and that is all to the good, but it leads to an unbalanced local labour market and economy.

In the area I represent we see failures and redundancies spreading, as they usually do at the beginning of a recession, throughout the building and double-glazing industries and, lately, in retailing, as interest rates bite harder and the property market dries up. So we are getting into, first, low growth, then no growth and then recession.

I do not see any vision in this Autumn Statement, any looking ahead of the kind referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). We do not see any long-term strategy, and it seems to me to be the duty of a Government to produce a long-term strategy for those things that only the Government can deal with—research and development, education and training, communications infrastructure and transport. For example, the share investment in GDP in Britain is below the EEC average, at 18 per cent. compared with 20 per cent., and it is falling further. The share of manufacturing investment in GDP has fallen by a quarter in the past decade. Our expenditure on research and development per employed person is well below EEC levels, and Government expenditure on civil research and development is also lower. We have seen the closure of a number of very important sources of civil research and development in this country—in the food industry, for example—in recent months.

In the last decade expenditure on education and science as a percentage of GDP has fallen and we are a poorly educated and trained nation compared with our competitors. We have half the number of 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education and training—35 per cent.—that there are in France and Japan. We have half the number of school leavers reaching university entrance level that are doing so in France and Germany. There is a whole series of studies by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research which shows the damage done to our industry by the lack of training of shop floor workers and supervisors; and of course the Government have announced further cuts in education and training for 1991-92. It always surprises me that the Conservative party seems to think of education and training as some kind of burden on the economy rather than as an investment which provides the wealth of the future.

When I went to school we had textbooks. At the schools my children have gone to they have work sheets, which are substitutes for textbooks, simply run off by the teacher and handed round the class. They do not have books. That is the result of progressive cuts in education. About 29 per cent. of our schools need major refurbishment because they are not up to the physical standards required.

The Autumn Statement is really a statement of hope that we are not yet tipping over into recession, whereas the Government's figures show that we are well into one. They admit their mistakes of last year when tax cuts fuelled an import boom, but simply hope that interest rates will choke off demand when it looks as if the adjustment is already leading to rising numbers of bankruptcies and mortgage foreclosures. The Government are not laying the foundation in investment, research and development, education, training, transport and communications that we need if we are to be competitive in 1992 and the following years.

7.20 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Listening to the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) makes me believe that the Government are achieving a better balance in the economy. East Anglia has been a prosperous part of the country and has boomed. I come from the north, where we have suffered restructuring and many problems, yet there are no signs of recession there.

The city of Hull, which borders my constituency—some of the eastern suburbs are in my area—is booming in a way that it has not boomed for 25 years. Enormous development is taking place there, not only in retail and leisure but in manufacturing, and since the ending of the national dock labour scheme the port is beginning to take off. The container terminal that was left idle is once more working and an extra 1 million tonnes of goods will be going through the port next year.

I always listen with interest and respect to the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) when he addresses the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. He speaks with the erudition and moderation that one would expect of a Wykehamist, so when my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) asked him to say what changes in economic policy the Labour party would make, I waited for the answer with bated breath. It appeared that his only change of policy would be to join the ERM now. I found that intriguing because his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor, has always been careful not to say that. He will join it only when the time is right.

Mr. John Smith: I would not wish to claim credit for having a policy which said I would join when the time was right. The hon. Gentleman has it wrong because that is the Government line. I have explained that we would join on the basis of the four conditions that I set out fully in our debate on the subject. I am concerned for the hon. Gentleman's political good health. He should sort out the difference between the Government and the Opposition because that is basic to our debates.

Mr. Townend: I am past the time when I need bother about my political good health, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman may appreciate as my speech proceeds.

This year's Autumn Statement shows how successful the Government have been in controlling public expenditure since 1985-86. Table 1.1 shows that expenditure in 1985-86, at 1988-89 prices, was £188·7 billion and that in the current year, at constant prices, it is below that. In the same period, the percentage of GDP going on public expenditure fell from 45·3 to 38·3 per cent.

That has been a remarkable achievement. It is the lowest level of Government spending since Lord Wilson of Rievaulx was in office in 1967. The Government are to be congratulated on that magnificent achievement, and particularly the Chancellor for his work when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

I detect, if not a change in policy, a slight easing of Treasury control. That worries me, for the Government are proposing a real increase in spending next year in general Government expenditure of £4·3 billion, and £3·8 billion in the following year. The GDP percentage is set to rise for the first time since 1984-85 by 0·25 per cent., and in the following year it is projected to fall by only 0·25 per cent.

Those figures disguise the true increase in departmental spending. As table 1.12 shows, the real increase next year is £8·7 billion, excluding privatisation, and the figure is that high because of the reduction in debt interest. That is worrying because there is always pressure on the Treasury from the spending Departments and I get the feeling that that pressure is beginning to have some success. That is dangerous for the Government because for every extra £1 billion expenditure, there is less opportunity for a £1 billion reduction in the tax burden on industry and business or the individual.

Expenditure in the current year on the EEC has doubled, from £1 billion to £2 billion. However, many people in this country would take the view that the benefit to the United Kingdom from the Common Market has doubled in the last year.

Overseas aid has increased to £1·7 billion. That expenditure contributes directly to our balance of payments deficit. Without doubt, whatever one's feelings —one has a feeling of compassion for many of the countries involved—much of that aid is wasted by incompetent, Left-wing Governments who are inefficient and are causing much of their nation's poverty. In many cases, they have been trying in vain to implement Socialist-Marxist policies, copying eastern Europe, when such policies are now clearly seen to have failed and are being rejected.

Expenditure on the arts has gone up to almost £0·5 billion. I am not opposed to expenditure on the arts, but I am worried by the fact that a high percentage of it is spent in the south-east of England and benefits upper-middle class yuppies. Little of it is spent in the north of England to benefit my constituents. We need a change of emphasis in that expenditure.

Opposition Members will welcome the fact that spending on social security is going up by £2 billion, over 10 per cent. I am surprised that the increase is so high because, with the consistent reduction in unemployment month on month, one would have thought that there would have been some saving.

The cost to the nation of broken marriages and one-parent families is increasing annually, so I welcome the Government statement that greater efforts will be made to make fathers accept their responsibility for children in families whom they have deserted. I hope that they will be pursued relentlessly. That should result in future savings to the Treasury.

Expenditure in Scotland, Ireland and Wales is raised automatically in line with the so-called Barnett formula. Whereas other spending Ministers must justify their budgets to the Treasury, the Secretaries of State for those three countries get their cash automatically. That does not seem fair on the other Secretaries of State or on the English.

The Barnett formula was fixed in 1978 and was based principally on population. Since 1978, the population of Scotland has fallen whereas the population of England has risen. The last year for which I have been able to obtain figures is 1987-88, but for identifiable expenditure per head of the population the figure in that year was £2,676 for Scotland and only £2,063 for England, a difference of more than 25 per cent. That is unfair on the English and especially unfair on the northern English. who have all the problems of Scotland and are, in many ways, less affluent and so need more public expenditure.

I have heard it said that we spend more per head on health in Scotland because the Scots suffer from poorer health. It is right and proper to ask why that should be so. If it is because they spend a lower proportion of their income on housing and a higher proportion on alcohol and tobacco than the English do, we have a right to ask why the English should have to finance the excesses of the Scots. Similarly, is it right that expenditure per pupil should be higher in secondary schools in Scotland than in England? Without doubt, people in England are beginning to feel increasingly dissatisfied with the Barnett formula. They think that it should be scrapped and that there should be equity between the three kingdoms of the Union.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that any increase in public expenditure should go principally to improving services, such as health and education, and not to excessive wage claims. One problem in our economy is that we still have a tendency to increase pay faster than do our competitors. The latest figures show that, despite increases in productivity, our unit labour costs are now rising faster than those of our European competitors. If that continues, it will undermine our competitive position and it will take us longer to reduce our balance of payments deficit to an acceptable level.

It is no good the Government exhorting the private sector to keep settlements down. Exhortation never works. When I hear the Goverment making such exhortations, I believe that it is the first step to an incomes policy, and we all know that that never works. The Government should refrain from interfering in private sector wage negotiations, but should make it clear that they will not let the pound fall to accommodate excessive wage increases. There is no doubt that the fall in the value of the pound before Christmas enabled many of our manufacturers to accommodate higher wage increases than would otherwise have been the case.

The Government should also make it clear that the higher the wage increases, the longer it will be necessary to keep interest rates high. They can set an example in the public sector, where they are the employer— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The House is an institution which should show great tolerance. I will not allow running commentaries from sedentary positions when an hon. Member is trying to express himself.

Mr. Townend: Regrettably, after 10 years in government, pay bargaining in the public sector is still in a bit of a shambles. There has been little reform and the Government have failed to play their part in bringing about a more flexible labour market, which is necessary if our economy is to compete on equal terms with our major competitors, who have market economies. Much of our public sector is still highly unionised, restrictive practices are still rife and pay bargaining is carried out nationally. Local productivity deals are virtually impossible in many areas. National settlements do not take account of the great regional differences in the labour markets. In the past, only a small proportion of public sector wage increases have been paid for by increases in productivity, unlike the position in the private sector.

We made a serious mistake last summer when we encouraged British Rail to go for regional pay bargaining and then, when the workers went on strike and the commuters were caught in traffic jams, gave the nod for British Rail to give an 8·5 per cent. inflationary settlement. I am convinced that that settlement played a significant part in the ambulance workers' dispute. In addition, had the Government scrapped central pay bargaining, we should not have an ambulance workers' dispute because pay and productivity would be negotiated piecemeal by local managers.

The balance of payments deficit is another problem that the Government face. We should examine the problem in a little more detail than the Opposition do. The biggest element is the deficit of about £6 billion in motor vehicles. Our motor industry was devastated, not by high interest rates or Government policy, but by the activities of militant trade unions, which were out of control. Restrictive practices, over-manning, and a refusal to accept new technology meant that the British public and our friends abroad stopped buying British cars. We did not produce cars of the right quality, at the right price and when they were wanted. There were cases in which, as a result of union pressure, there was no proper quality checking and quality controllers were told that they should reject only so many cars per shift. Cars went out although they had not been checked properly, so the public found that they were not reliable and bought foreign cars. There were also inter-union disputes in which the unions destroyed themselves.

Today, the British motor car industry is rising like a phoenix from the ashes although, regrettably, that is not because of Ford or British Leyland, but because of the Japanese investment which has been encouraged by the atmosphere that has been brought about by the Government. Nissan will increase production to 400,000 units a year, Toyota will produce 200,000 cars a year and Honda will produce 200,000 a year. With Datsun, the Japanese will reconquer our home market and use this country as a launch pad for Europe—and we all know that the EC is petrified of Japanese industry in Europe. All this will take time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) said. I am convinced that over the next four or five years it will have an important impact in reducing the deficit.

I support my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his main aim of bringing down inflation. I have every confidence in him. When inflation is brought down to 3 per cent. and when we are able to use the surplus that we have built up by our own good housekeeping by giving it back to the British people, to whom it belongs, that will be the launch pad for another election victory.

7.37 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I am sorry that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not in his place at the moment and I am also sorry for the Chancellor. He seems to be having an unfortunate baptism, in view of the way he entered the job and the state of the shop left for him by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). The Chancellor told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that running the economy was rather like being on a surfboard in high seas. Once again, one must feel sorry for a person who has crashed on to the rocks in consecutive economic indicators and who lies gasping on the beach only to find that when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) comes along, he kicks sand in his face. That is heaping indignity upon indignity and perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend should be a little more sympathetic in future when dealing with the Chancellor. He needs all the assistance that he can get, having been left by the previous Chancellor, as is now evident, with the debris to clear up.

There were many rumours and explanations about why the former Chancellor left as he did, but it is clear that he, unlike anybody else, had access to all the background documents and papers for the forecasts for this coming year and the year after. He decided to get out while he could still get the directorships that are being bandied about in the Sunday papers, and a decent contract for his memoirs; and he left his former deputy to clear up the mess. One cannot but feel sympathy for a man who, after all, is very reasonable and nice—prone to certain lapses in judgment, such as supporting Chelsea football club, but by and large quite an honourable person. He has been given a task that he will find very difficult to perform.

One of the harder aspects of the job is that the Chancellor will not be allowed to get on with it, to formulate his own ideas and use his own initiative to carve a way forward. Just when he thinks that it is safe to go back into the water on his surfboard, the phone will ring, and it will be No. 10. Every time he moves vaguely forward on something like the exchange rate mechanism there will be someone on the Front Bench coughing gently at his side.

When the Chancellor looks at the implications of higher wage settlements for inflation, he cannot buck the market. We need to ensure that people are paid at the rate necessary to make enterprises work. When he moves away, as he has, from out-and-out monetarism he finds that there is a gentle reminder—perhaps not Sir Alan Walters but certainly a gentle reminder—that monetary indicators continue to exercise a profound influence.

Some of the ancient pharisees of the Conservative party —the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins)—have contributed to the debate. Rather like guarding the gospels, they referred to those ancient times of M4 and, when that did not work or was inappropriate, M3. Now we are on MO—that is apparently the fashionable one. If

in doubt, get the "M" correct and that will justify one's monetary stance. The Chancellor does not believe that, and his beachboys on the Front Bench do not believe that. Unfortunately, soon he will be told that, whether he believes it or not, that is the way things must go.

The same argument could apply to public investment. There was a lot of rhetoric about the importance of public investment in the interview that the Chancellor gave to the *Financial Times*. The reality is slightly different: No. 10 believes that, wherever possible, private investment should take the place of public. In my area that dogma is highly destructive. The east midlands as a whole and Nottingham in particular will suffer because we are not in British Rail's plan for a link through London to the Channel tunnel.

Perhaps under a Labour Government such investment will be forthcoming. Everyone in my region realises that it is essential. It will not come through the private sector but only through the public, and it is folly to imagine that we should have only private investment when all our major continental and G7 competitors are pouring money into the infrastructure and the railway network. In France, for example, every last chicken shack appears to be on an electrified line; in Germany two brand-new north-south routes are being built; in Spain they are ripping up the gauge completely and replacing it. Yet we say in this cheese-paring manner that we are not prepared to invest £95 million to electrify the line to connect our region with the Channel tunnel. That is madness when the CBI, the TUC, chambers of commerce and members of all political parties in my region are united in believing that, for such a small sum, there could be a tremendous economic pay-off in the long run.

Mr. Hanley: Does not the hon. Gentleman welcome the relocation of the Civil Service? Up to 4,000 civil servants will move to Nottingham in the near future. Is that not a large public investment?

Mr. Allen: I thank the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) for his intervention. I welcome those jobs coming to Nottingham and I hope that they will be encouraged. I hope, too, that public sector bodies will co-operate and that the Government and the Minister for the Civil Service will make sure that there is no long and protracted struggle, but that British Rail, the land-owners and the unit concerned, the Inland Revenue, will talk together so that members of all parties are not forced to exert pressure to achieve that welcome move.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will my hon. Friend confirm that when the present Government came to office in 1979 one of the first things they did was to scrap Government dispersal from London? Eight years later, they did a massive U-turn and decided, in view of labour market pressures in the south-east, that it would be a good idea to disperse Civil Service jobs to the regions, and they decided to resuscitate the programme undertaken by the previous Labour Government under which various jobs were sent to the regions.

Mr. Allen: I accept my hon. Friend's point. His work on relocation and in trying to get a proper distribution of jobs is well known. I am a little more magnanimous than he; if the Government are beginning to realise the efficacy of relocation, they may start to drop some of the rhetoric in other areas and operate a more realistic economic industrial and relocation policy.

We must support the Chancellor in his undoubted battles with No. 10 as he begins to creep back towards what is almost a neo-Keynesian position, if we read between the lines. On the public investment side, such moves are to be welcomed for their beneficial effects for all our constituents. Relocation is one of the things mentioned in a budget that I had the privilege of putting together for Nottingham; we are making a budget submission, and relocation is one of the things that we emphasise strongly. I hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will make sure that their alternative Budget strikes a chord with the public and is not formulated purely on an arid fiscal basis. There are areas where we can seize the initiative, and even if the Government choose to accept those initiatives they are things that we would commend.

I think particularly of the reference by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark), although expressed in grudging terms, to child care and workplace nurseries. Demographic, if not moral and social, reasons for getting women back to work underline the need for the Chancellor to make considerable progress in encouraging child care and workplace nurseries that are beneficial to employers, to the parents concerned and to the children. That is one area where the Government can win some political kudos as well as doing the right thing, and I hope that we would welcome it.

Progress could also be made in giving a green tinge to the Budget. I welcome what the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) did on lead-free petrol, and I hope that the success of that experiment will lead to other ventures, notably tax incentives on energy conservation, and additional incentives to ensure, for example, that coal-fired power stations are brought into a comprehensive scheme to reduce acid rain. One area that might be somewhat controversial would be to reconsider the abolition of the road fund licence and the collecting of revenue through the duty on fuel. This and other matters would benefit from further consideration and they might attract greater cross-party support than some of the more strident views that Opposition Members need to put forward and win on industrial policy.

The more I visit people and places in my constituency, the more I share the view of many hon. Members that there is a developing consensus—what I call a "manufacturing alliance". Very recently in the east midlands the CBI published a document containing five or six major areas of economic and industrial thought on education, training, land availability, infrastructure, transport and encouraging manufacturing investment, any of which could have been written by my hon. Friends on the Front Bench in an alternative Budget. That consensus extends across almost all Opposition parties. It certainly extends through the CBI, the TUC, chambers of commerce and other bodies. There is room for measures acceptable to a large percentage of the electorate. I hope that the Chancellor will accept that there would be great support for him in the no doubt private but none the less serious battles that he will have in asserting his independence from No. 10 Downing street.

The main starting point of the budget produced for Nottingham is education and training. It is a cliché worth repeating that our future is invested in young people. Unless they have adequate training and education, all our future economic and industrial strategies are worthless. A number of initiatives could be taken, but above all we need

[Mr. Allen]

the political will to invest money in education and training. If the will is there, ways will be found to ensure that all 16 to 18-year-olds who want to stay at school or take further training can do so, so that we may have the same standards of training as our major competitors. That is not an over-ambitious aspiration. All that we ask is that we are as capable of delivering economically as our key competitors.

Another point that should be mentioned is the incentives that are necessary for manufacturing industry. Recently all hon. Members received a briefing from the CBI which sets out three key proposals. We may disagree with the percentages of capital allowances or whether there should be a return to the indexation of allowances, but there is room for progress in building an engine of investment for the economic revival that we need.

Not only do we conduct less research and development than our main competitors, but the emphasis is on defence rather than civilian activities. Without making the macro-political point about the future of the nation and its defences, may I point out that no other nation twists its research and development expenditure as we do. Sir Trevor Holdsworth, in his address to the CBI annual conference, said that some of that expenditure should be redirected. It is recognised nationally that current policy perverts the effort that we are trying to put into longer term investment. Once again, the Chancellor might address that matter in his Budget statement.

One item that the Chancellor will not address and with which we shall have to deal when we come to power is the flow of capital and money across the computer screens of the world. We will address it as a nation state. The United States, Japan and countries in the rest of Europe are also prey to major fluctuations of capital in the world. Whatever economic strategies may be agreed in the European Community, globally or nationally, they can be washed away by major capital flows. It is not an easy question and I do not pretend that there are easy answers. Perhaps one way to provide the answers is to co-operate with other nation states and discuss how we can affect the speed of the flows and their volume. Whether that means building on the institutional arrangements that we already have or whether we need to start looking at other transglobal institutions is a matter that needs more thought than I can give it here.

Mr. Morgan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the truly appalling measure of the country's current economic uncompetitiveness is the figure produced by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research in the past few weeks in its study of the size of our current account deficit, plus the non-bank capital inflows required to finance that debt, plus the net capital outflows for long-term investment abroad, which now amount to 9·8 per cent. of our gross national product?

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. I join him in pressing Labour Front Bench spokesmen to use some of their valuable time to put the message over clearly and simply, although not on a partisan or party political basis because it affects all parties and all national economies. There is room for international co-operation.

There is more to be said, particularly on whether we should return to a non-allowance personal tax structure, where income tax could be reduced dramatically and certain benefits increased dramatically, so eliminating the poverty trap. My right hon. and hon. Friends need to put together a comprehensive package which the electorate will understand. In the meantime, there will be another year or two years of this Government. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will do everything possible to ensure that the battle, assuming that the Chancellor is the person we think he is, is fought hard. I hope that he, rather than the occupant of No. 10, will be victorious.

7.56 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): A considerable part of the debate has been concerned with inflation. That is not surprising as it is our principal economic problem. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor placed considerable emphasis on the need to continue to bear down on inflation. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) told us that inflation had not been vanquished, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) went on to enlighten him that inflation could not be defeated once and for all but required continuing and constant vigilance.

Several Opposition Members have referred to that part of the Committee's report in which we draw attention to the way in which, in succeeding Autumn Statements from 1984, the target for inflation has always been 3 per cent. in the third year. The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) was a little ungenerous in suggesting that the target had never been met. It was met in 1986, but only in that year. If the 3 per cent. target three years out in this year's Autumn Statement is to have any chance of achievement and, if having been achieved, that control of inflation is to be sustained for longer than in the past, we must seek to identify the causes of current inflation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing recommended that we should adopt a pragmatic approach rather than seeking to be purists of either the monetarist or the Keynesian school. I agree with him. I do not believe that the economy behaves precisely in the same way as any economic theory suggests it should, or that the real economy responds in the way of an economic model. I think that our current problems are primarily monetary.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in giving evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee about the Autumn Statement of 1989, acknowledged that monetary policy had been too lax during the summer of 1988. In paragraph 54 we report that the then Chancellor said:

"we relaxed monetary policy . . . at precisely the moment that we should have made it a little more severe".

I make no criticism of the relaxation of monetary policy which took place in the aftermath of the stock exchange crash of 1987. That policy was pursued by monetary authorities around the world. It is possible to say with hindsight that perhaps that injection of liquidity was unnecessary because we now know that no disaster occurred. However, had the authorities not made it clear that they were prepared to make liquidity available to prevent the collapse of any of the great financial houses, we might have had more trouble in the economy than actually occurred.

Therefore, I make no criticism of that policy decision which was pursued in this country, as in all the other major financial centres. The error was to continue the lax monetary policy after the 1988 Budget, by which time it

was becoming perfectly clear that no damage had been sustained in the economy as a consequence of the stock exchange collapse in October 1987.

The Treasury Committee's report contains a paragraph which could have explained this event most eloquently, but alas it was one of the paragraphs which did not gain support of a majority of the Committee members. However, its message is important. In that missing link to the argument we said that:

"in early 1988, the previous Chancellor forced interest rates down to curb the upward pressures on sterling. Interest rates were thus falling when they should have gone up. In our view, a great deal of the policy error over this two-year period can be attributed to the excessive weight placed on tacit exchange rate targeting. The result was that too little attention was paid to the inflation warning signalled by the extent of domestic credit and growth of the broader monetary aggregates. This error has clear implications for the future conduct of policy."

The major error in policy which exacerbated the inflationary pressures already there as a result of lax monetary policy was the decision that we should behave as though we were members of the exchange rate mechanism even though we were not. It seems that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby had in mind a parity of three deutschmarks to the pound. Through the summer of 1988 he strove to prevent sterling from rising above that parity. In that attempt, interest rates went down to a low point of 7·5 per cent.

The attempt failed because the reaction of the market is often perverse and the sight of the Chancellor confident in his ability to refuse interest rates produced greater confidence in the value of sterling. While policy was trying to reduce parity with the deutschmark, sentiment was driving it up. That period of continuing reductions in interest rates stimulated an extra £40 billion worth of borrowing. That £40 billion borrowed in the credit expansion makes the £4 billion of tax remissions in the 1988 Budget pale into insignificance.

We have heard reiterated today the argument that the tax reductions in the Budget fuelled a great consumer spending spree which led to our inflationary and balance of payments problems. Not a bit of it. The £4 billion worth of injected demand did not have those undesirable effects, but the 7·5 per cent. interest rate and the extra £40 billion worth of credit did. The experience of those inglorious summer months of 1988 should serve as a warning to all those who are enthusiastic for our early membership of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

The claimed benefits of full membership that have been reiterated today are stable exchange rates and lower inflation, coupled with lower interest rates. I am sure that when the Confederation of British Industry and other business representatives urge upon us membership of the ERM, and when the TUC urges that policy—as one of my hon. Friends said earlier—they are looking for stability in exchange rates. They are certainly hoping for lower inflation and interest rates, but early membership does not act as a panacea. It is not an instant solution to current inflation problems, as the hon. Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) suggested earlier.

There is a failure to recognise that the exchange rate mechanism with sterling in it would be a different animal from the exchange rate mechanism as it is at present. As it exists today, ERM is basically a deutschmark area. The deutschmark is the only heavy currency in the system and the only one traded internationally to any significant extent. All the other member currencies are pegged to the value of the deutschmark and, therefore, the system can confer some stability in parities. The outcome would be very different if there were, within the system, two currencies, both of which were traded internationally to a significant extent, as are the deutschmark and the pound sterling today.

Therefore, there would not be the same stability in parities between the European currencies and externally if sterling were in the system, as exists now while sterling remains out of it. Whatever we within the European Community might decide should be the parity between the pound and the deutschmark, if it appeared to be out of line with underlying realities as perceived by the market and because people trade dollars and yen for deutschmark and pound, the pressures would build up from that international trading and we would be unable to hold a parity which had been agreed in the European Council of Finance Ministers.

Let us suppose that we had joined the exchange rate mechanism during 1988, perhaps during the summer when the former Chancellor was trying to hold down sterling. There would still be the same inflationary pressures within the British economy because we would already have had that period of fairly lax control of money supply. As market sentiment sought to push up the value of the pound, we would have had to make the same policy response as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby did when he shadowed the deutschmark—reduce interest rates in an attempt to cap the rise in the value of the pound sterling.

There is no reason to suppose that if we had been in the system the effect on the British economy of reducing interest rates to a low point of 7·5 per cent. would have been any different from the effects that we can assess now, looking back with the benefit of hindsight. At other times, the pound would come under downward pressure, as it has during recent months. With a commitment to a fixed parity we would have no option but to raise interest rates to try to maintain that parity.

Since he took office, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has successfully steered us through some fairly rough seas, as he described his attempt to manage the economy. He guided us through periods when the pound was under pressure but without increasing interest rates above 15 per cent. Had Britain been firmly committed to a fixed parity, my right hon. Friend would have been unable to steer us through those rough seas. In recent weeks, the pound has recovered and is now up to 88·1 or 88·2 on the trade weighted index. That has been achieved without interest rates being increased to 15 or 16 per cent., or even to 17 per cent.

Maintaining a fixed parity would take precedence over every other aspect of monetary policy, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor would not have the flexibility that he has now. He was right to resist a further increase in interest rates, because they are high enough to curb the growth of money supply and to exert the downward pressure on inflation. Any further tightening could lead to an over-tight policy, which would enhance the fears of recession that have been voiced today, mostly by Opposition Members. We have a tight monetary policy that is set by reference to monetary conditions in the British economy and not by reference so much to the pound's external parity, which is how it should be.

[Mr. John Watts]

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor put his finger on the problem of managing the economy with low interest rates when he referred to the psychology of inflation. I understand him to mean that too many people will still have vivid memories of inflation running at 20 per cent. or higher. I believe that inflation of 26·9 per cent. was the pinnacle achieved by the last Labour Government.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Although I do not agree with every point that the hon. Gentleman makes, he has presented a number of sensible arguments—but his speech is now becoming very partisan. Perhaps he will remind the House of the highest rate of inflation reached under the present Administration.

Mr. Watts: The figure quoted earlier, if it was correct, suggested that the highest inflation seen under the present Government was 21 per cent. That was the consequence of the inflationary pressures that built up in 1978-79, during the death throes of the last Labour Government. In the same way, we are now experiencing the effects of the inflationary pressures that built up in late 1987 and 1988.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Richard Ryder): It may be helpful to my hon. Friend to be reminded that the average inflation under the last Labour Government was 15½ per cent., compared with 7½ per cent. today. What was good enough for Labour—inflation of 15½ per cent.—is not good enough for us.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend reinforces my point about the national psychology of inflation. Because inflation of 15, 20 or 25 per cent. might at one time have seemed normal for our economy, when it falls to 4 or 5 per cent., most people stop worrying about it.

The same is true of the price of money. Because we have long been accustomed to high interest rates as a consequence of high inflation—over the past decade, interest rates have on average been on the wrong side of 11 per cent.—we are not yet attuned to running our economy at an interest rate of 7½ per cent., as we did in June 1988. Until business men and the man or woman in the street are worried about inflation of only 4 per cent. or even 3 per cent., the Government will not be able to conduct the economy on an even keel when interest rates are much below 10 per cent. That psychology must change before there can be low interest rates consistent with lower inflation.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right to set interest rates that meet the requirements of domestic monetary policy. If that policy is set tightly enough to bear down on inflation, there will be no need to worry about the parity of sterling. If holders of sterling are confident that it provides a stable store of value, there will be less speculative pressure on the pound. Of course there will be short-term pressures, but not long-term pressures of the kind seen when inflationary expectations are high.

If a choice must be made between using interest rates to control money supply or using them to fix the exchange rate, I have no doubt that they should be set by reference to the needs of money supply. If economic policy moves in the right direction, there will be no conflict between tight control of money supply and maintaining a firm exchange rate.

If I have any advice for my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench, it is to progress slowly towards full membership of the European monetary system. The exchange rate mechanism is not the anti-inflationary panacea that its enthusiasts choose to believe it is, and we should not contemplate the major step in economic policy that adoption of the ERM represents merely to establish our European credentials, whether for the benefit of Members of the European Parliament or for our partners in the Community. In the months ahead, and in preparing his first Budget, the most important task for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is to control money supply so that inflation is not accommodated.

8.16 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): A measure of hypocrisy has been evident in tonight's debate, especially in the speeches of Conservative Members. Many of them argued that the public sector wages bill should be kept down, whereas their own wage increases will be reflected in their bank balances next week. Government Members also work in the public sector and are enjoying wage increases of 10 per cent. or more. Others are entitled to ask for the same 10 per cent. that we are receiving.

Now that the Government have made a right mess of the economy, all of a sudden they want to blame the workers—miners, dockers, car workers and ambulance staff. They are the people who are, according to Conservative Members, to blame for all the mess by asking for big pay rises. There should be less hypocrisy and more honesty on the Tory Benches.

Some of the richest people in the country were awarded overnight tax cuts of as much as £5,000 per year under the former Chancellor's penultimate Budget. Those tax cuts were totally imposed. Right hon. and hon. Members may recall Budget day in 1988, when the sitting was suspended for 15 minutes because of the response to the news that the Chancellor had spent that much money on the rich. No fewer than 780,000 of the richest members of the population received that money, not the workers. I remind the House that the rich received £20 billion of taxpayers' money, not the workers. Tory Members should refrain from attacking the workers and from blaming them for the mess that the former Chancellor created.

At the same time, the poor were subjected to benefit cuts. That is what you gave the working people and the unemployed in the north-east, Scotland and Wales. Since the Government came to power in 1979 there have been 60,000 bankruptcies, and 170,000 firms have gone to the wall. Since 1979, 100,000 families have had to sell their homes because they could not afford the mortgage. That is your economic miracle.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I dislike stopping the hon. Member, but he is taking my name in vain. I know that he has a lot of good material that he wants to use, so would he refer to the House through the Chair?

Mr. Campbell: I shall try to refrain from using the word "you". I have a habit of doing that. I think that I am back on the pedestal at the miners' meeting. Those home owners were not to blame, it was you—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry, I am only joking Madam Deputy Speaker—it was the Conservative Government.

Since the Government came to power poverty has increased—9 million people in Britain, including some 2

million children, are living below the poverty line and that has happened since 1979. That is 17 per cent. of the population and it represents an increase of 55 per cent. since 1979. Do not blame the Opposition for Britain's ills, because the Conservative record is there and it is atrocious. The Conservatives must study the problem and put it right.

What have the pensioners got from the Government and their so-called miracle? In the early days of the Tory Government, the link between pensions and earnings was scrapped. Had it not been scrapped, a single person would have had £11 a week more in his pension today, and a married couple would have had £18 a week more. They have been done by the Tory Government, just as the unemployed and those who have suffered from cuts in social security have been done.

As I said before, it is no good blaming the workers. That is what the Chancellor has tried to do, and I shall not let him forget it. That is what the Government are trying to do with the ambulance men. They are picking on the union, trying to take it out and to blame it for all the ills that the Government have caused.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the link between pensions and earnings. I wonder whether his memory stretches back far enough to recall that the link was first established by a Labour Government because inflation was running at 26 per cent. and earnings at only 15 per cent. It was a way of abating the costs of increasing pensions which would otherwise have fallen upon that Government. They did it to cut spending on pensions.

Mr. Campbell: I do not care what the last Labour Government did. It is what we do in the future that counts. There will be a pledge in our manifesto to restore the link between pensions and earnings, and I shall be here to support it. I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman will be.

Dr. Marek: The House should remember that in 1979 the old age pension for a married couple, as a percentage of average earnings, was about 44 per cent. and it is now about 32 or 33 per cent. My figures may be slightly out, but it is clear that pensioners have become considerably poorer in the past 10 years under this Government.

Mr. Campbell: I agree. That is the point that I am trying to make. Pensioners are worse off under this Government. One can tell that by meeting them and speaking to them. An old lady whom I know likes to smoke, but when I went to see her on a Tuesday she did not have a pack of tabs in the house. That was unusual for her. Some hon. Members may say that she should not smoke at her age, but she cannot afford to do so until she receives her pension. When pensioners are in that state—when they cannot afford to buy a packet of cigarettes until they get their pension—it is a disgrace. The Government should consider pensioners' needs more often.

The wages council is another scapegoat for the Tories. It will be scrapped because the Tories want a low wage economy. That is already happening. Low wages are being paid throughout the north-east, and that is why one or two firms are moving there from the south. One business man told me a few months ago that he was coming north because of the low wages. The minimum wage is non-existent. We are the only European country that does not have a minimum wage, and we should consider that. If there is a minimum wage, firms can plan a long way ahead, and perhaps we would not get the liquidations that I have mentioned on other occasions. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about redundancies?"] I have been made redundant and I know all about that.

Let us have a decent minimum wage in Britain, as they have in Europe and America. Child benefit has not been touched on in this great Autumn Statement. Let us restore the cuts of £1·70 to every child under the age of 16, and give child benefit back to the women of Britain. Let us stop these means-tested benefits—the so-called social funds. Every good constituency Member of Parliament must have dealt with means testing and know of cases where people have been turned down for loans and grants although their plight is desperate poverty.

Let us have a major reform of the tax system. Every time the Budget is mentioned, the Government lob millions to the rich and nothing to the poor. Let us have a proper reform of the tax system. If you will not look at it, I am sure that Opposition Members will. We will reform it in our best traditions of making things fair and equal for everyone. We want a fair and just approach to the economy. That is what working people are asking for and what we have not had from the Government. It is your fault——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hate to remind the hon. Member again, but he must not burden me with those responsibilities.

Mr. Campbell: I will not, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that you are fighting on our side.

The north-east has not seen any great strides during the so-called economic miracle. Some building is going on in my part of the world, but unfortunately it consists of three large supermarkets, and not factories. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nissan."] Nissan came a long time ago. I am talking about what has happened since the so-called economic miracle, which was the last Budget but one.

The north is in the throes of increasing unemployment, and that is well documented. When the south gets a cold, the north gets pneumonia. I ask the Government to take account of the north-east when they consider the regions. I doubt that they will do so, but I take this opportunity to make the request.

8.29 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Until the contribution of the hon. Member for Notttingham, North (Mr. Allen) I thought that I had only one thing in common with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—both our fathers had worked in the circus—but I now discover that there is a great sympathy between us, as we both support Chelsea football club.

This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. I should like to summarise some of the good news that we have heard—for not everything is as miserable as the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) tends to suggest. The hon. Gentleman must remember one important fact: hon. Members can promise all the money in the world to all the people whom they think will get them elected, but they must be able to run the economy in a way that will sustain those increases in public expenditure.

When the Labour party was in government, the economy collapsed completely. Conservative Members can trot out the cuts that they made time after time: hospitals suffered cuts of 30 per cent.; the railways were

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

cut; pensions were cut; everything was cut. Those cuts were the result of a Labour economy. The first necessity is a sustainable economy: the party in power must be able to create the wealth which, according to the hon. Gentleman, should be spread so much more widely.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: That is a fair point, but should not the £2 billion provided in the last Budget but one have been spread out more equally and fairly, rather than going to the rich? Should not more have been spent on social security benefits such as pensions?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is typical of the many —I do not disparage them—who do not understand exactly why tax cuts occur. When they visit the supermarket to which the hon. Gentleman referred, they see that the manager reduces the price of goods that he wants to sell. Just as a sale in a store attracts purchasers, a reduction in the amount of tax that is taken out of the economy will generate money in that economy, and will increase the number of jobs.

What the hon. Gentleman is really saying is that there should be redundancies, because that is exactly what would follow the policy that he advocates. Instead of viewing tax cuts as a percentage—as numbers—he should look at the results of those cuts, which will show him an entirely different picture. He will see that taxation revenues have increased because tax cuts have led to a new enterprise culture. He will also see a reduction in unemployment, and a dramatic increase in the total revenues into the Exchequer.

It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should say that the rich have received the tax cuts. That is not true. Ordinary men and women—teachers married to nurses, for instance—benefited from those cuts, because the previous rates were so obscenely high. Let us concentrate, however, on the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers. Under the Labour Government, they paid 24 per cent. of the total income tax revenues; under the present Government they contribute 29 per cent. In volume terms, we are collecting more money than ever before.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): If the hon. Gentleman looked more closely at the effect of the tax cuts that the Government have made over the past 10 years, he would discover that the top 10 per cent. of owners of private wealth currently own 52 per cent. of that wealth. The bottom 50 per cent. own less than 8 per cent. That is the largest inequality in wealth ownership since before the second world war.

Mr. Hanley: I was not going to mention housing until later, but following the hon. Gentleman's intervention I feel that I should point out that 68 per cent. of householders are now owner-occupiers. Thousands, indeed millions, of ordinary men and women who were never able to own a house, get a foot on the capital ladder, protect their families or give to their children can now do so, thanks to the Government. Since 1979, there have been 1·4 million sales of public sector houses: 1·4 million people can now say, "This is my house."

Mr. Roger King: May I apply a balance to the earlier statement about the ownership of wealth? Let us look at what is happening in eastern Europe. How much wealth is owned by those living in the ideal social democracies that Opposition Members have championed since the last war, and have they accepted any of it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May we leave eastern Europe for the time being and return to the Autumn Statement?

Mr. Hanley: How kind you are, Madam Deputy Speaker. Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out that in eastern Europe we have seen the death of Communism and the rise of the enterprise culture mirroring our own experience. We have emerged from our own mini-revolution, that of 1979. We had our problems during the winter of discontent. Ours was a bloodless revolution, but its effects will be felt as deeply as those of the revolutions in eastern Europe.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hanley: I will, but this is the last time that I will accept an intervention from across the Floor.

Mr. Rogers: May I ask the hon. Gentleman to dwell a litte more on the figures relating to owner-occupancy, of which he seems to be making a good deal? My constituency has the highest rate of owner-occupancy in Great Britain, but it is also the poorest, by any economic indicator. Owning a home does not mean sharing in the current great revolution in the acquisition of wealth; indeed, many of those who own their homes will become extremely poor as a result of the Government's recent policy of raising interest rates.

Mr. Hanley: I will not speak about the hon. Gentleman's constituency, nor would the House like me to do so. Other hon. Members will be speaking. What I will say is that anyone who has decided to buy his own home, and is struggling to cope with interest rates that are higher than any sane person could possibly enjoy, is making a worthwhile effort. Although some will find the struggle impossible, many more will find that, in the long run, it is worth the effort for their family's sake.

Although millions of people have mortgages, everyone in the country is affected by inflation—people who own their homes and people who do not; people living in council houses, and pensioners living in council flats. The battle against inflation must take precedence.

Dr. Marek: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hanley: No, I will not give way any more. Other hon. Members wish to speak. The hon. Gentleman is a charming fellow and I would love to give way to him, but we can chat later.

Let me summarise some of the more important points that have been made. First, our gross domestic product is at its highest-ever level: it rose by 4½ per cent. in 1987 and 1988, and a further 2 per cent. increase is forecast for 1989. We have experienced eight successive years of sustained growth averaging 3 per cent. and we need that growth if we are to increase expenditure on essential services. Moreover, the United Kingdom has grown far faster than any other major European country during the 1980s—well ahead of Germany and France—and that growth was vital. Manufacturing output is also at its highest-ever level.

We were talking about investment earlier. The Autumn Statement forecasts a 9¼ per cent. increase in 1989, and

business investment will have increased by 40 per cent. in the three years to that date. That shows the extent of confidence in the present Government and their economy. Under the Labour Government, investment averaged between a quarter of 1 per cent. and 1 per cent. annum. That was the measure of confidence in them. There was no confidence, especially when the IMF had to bail them out.

Total investment growth in the 1980s was higher in Britain than in any other European country, although we were near the bottom of the league in the 1960s and 1970s. That is reflected in real take-home pay. Between 1978-79 and 1989-90 the real take-home pay of the average married man with two children went up by one third. I admit that that is part of our problem as we are creating an economy in which people get more money.

The problems were exaggerated when the Government tried to repair the potential damage of the October 1987 slump. I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench that, understandably, they were fooled by the depths of that recession. Anybody could have made that mistake in the interests of the nation, and newspapers have been trying to talk every mini-slump into a major slump ever since. It is now a sport to say in newspapers and on television that the stock market will crash on Monday. On that occasion, which really was a black Monday, the Government tried to inject money into the economy to save misery and prevent a slump from occurring. But the slump was not as big as we thought and the recession that we expected afterwards did not happen. However, I am prepared to forgive the Government for that because we learnt our lesson and it will not happen again.

Real wealth and prosperity have increased under this Government. Real personal disposable income is now at a record level and is 5·5 per cent. higher than it was a year ago. I mentioned that the extra yield for the wealthy has produced more taxes to pay for essential services.

One person who has not received the plaudits that he deserves today is the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. We have talked about the Chancellor, who is doing an excellent job, but the Chief Secretary created the Autumn Statement and calculated the levels of expenditure in many difficult areas, trying to balance the demands of one Government Department with those of another.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) picked out three figures from the list in the Autumn Statement and said that the Government had cut here, here and here. He did not mention any more for the simple reason that there are no more. The Government have increased expenditure in 23 out of 25 headings in the Autumn Statement. In only two headings—the Department of Energy because of electricity privatisation, and the EEC—will there be any reductions in 1990-91. It should be clear to anyone that the successful running of the economy has meant that we have been able to increase expenditure in many important sectors. I have a list of all the extra services that are being provided because the economy is being run well enough to provide them.

In 1990-91 an extra £2·5 billion will be available for the National Health Service, representing an increase of 5·5 per cent. in real terms. Opposition Members will carp about the fact that wages in the National Health Service are going up faster than elsewhere, that there are more people to care for, and there is more this and more that. There is more this and more that, but the Government have come up with more money. Spending on the National Health Service has increased by 40 per cent. since the Government took office. There are now 10 per cent. more outpatients, 20 per cent. more inpatients and 60 per cent. more day cases treated in hospital than there were in 1979. The staff has increased from 440,000 to 520,000 and that does not come cheap. Those people deserve to be paid well and they are being paid the money that they did not get under Labour. The Labour Government had to reduce expenditure because they could not run the economy. Gross capital spending in the National Health Service is 55 per cent. higher than it was in 1978-79. That means that the Health Service is half again as big as it was, while under Labour expenditure fell by 30 per cent.

Opposition Members talk about spending on the poorest. This year social security expenditure is running at £1 billion a week, which is an increase of 36 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Rogers: That is the Government's fault. They created the unemployment.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman says that it is our fault because we created the unemployment, but we have reduced unemployment by 3 million people. A Labour Government could not have achieved that as they would seek minimum wages and minimum hours. We have an enterprise culture.

The list of expenditure shows increases in services that really matter. Expenditure on British Rail and London Regional Transport, which affects all Members of Parliament, is going up by £2·2 billion in the coming year. Expenditure on Network SouthEast has increased by £1·2 billion. The British Rail spending programme is now £3·5 billion. Expenditure is higher than ever on housing and on the environment, but spending on defence has increased by only 1 per cent. I remind the warmongers on the Opposition Benches that defence comes fourth behind the National Health Service. That was not the case under Labour. For the first year ever National Health Service expenditure outstrips defence expenditure, and not before time.

We have been able to maintain the economy to pay for essential services. I was saddened by the response to my intervention during the speech of the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), who is an intelligent and reasonable man. I asked him exactly what would be his party's plan if he thought that ours was so inadequate. He said that we should join the exchange rate mechanism as soon as possible. But that was all he said. He said that he would explain, but he did not say how Labour would pay for its spending plans. He did not say how Labour would tackle inflation; he did not say how Labour would pay for the confiscation of the industries that have been privatised; he did not say how Labour would pay for any of the massive expenditure that the hon. Member for Blyth Valley was talking about; he did not explain how Labour would pay for giving child benefit even to the wealthy and pay back the backlog.

The hon. Gentleman did not say what the standard rate of income tax would be or what company tax rates would be under Labour. He did not say how many new national taxes a Labour Government would have to create. He certainly did not say what Labour would introduce in place of the community charge or how people would be hit by Labour's plans to alter mortgage tax relief and what that would do to the cost of living. He certainly did not explain how Labour would reintroduce price controls,

[Mr. Hanley]

import controls, mortgage controls and controls on house buying or car ownership. He did not say what limits he would set for Government spending or Government borrowing. He did not say how much the proposals would cost. The simple reason is that the hon. Member for Durham, North is an intellectual who will remain a political academic because he will be serving only in theory and will never have to put his policies into practice.

The Government have achieved what people said they could not. They have increased Government expenditure in almost every single Government Department—23 out of 25 this year—and have reduced income tax at the same time by generating a healthy economy. That is the most responsible course of action that any Government could take.

8.47 pm

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): If I asked any worker in Liverpool how he knew when the Tories were telling lies, I would get the answer, "As soon as they open their mouths". Tonight we have been listening to distortions, lies and misrepresentation. Not one Tory Member has spoken without injecting into his speech what Labour was doing in government over a decade ago, when our debate tonight is on the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Labour's amendment about what we plan for the future.

I accept that we need to look to the past, but there are none so blind as those who will not see. The proposals put forward by the Chancellor and the Government are totally irrelevant to the needs of the majority of people in Britain today. We are looking over a precipice. We are looking over the edge of a major financial crisis in Britain and internationally. We are contemplating an international crisis of finance and business confidence in the United States. The problems there are well documented. Such is the interrelationship between international capitalism around the world that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) said, if America sneezes we catch pneumonia and we will follow America as sure as night follows day. The boom in the States, which has relevance and is mirrored here, has been fuelled by credit. Today, money is being given away to enable people to buy cars so that the system can be kept going. *[Interruption.]* No, I do not want to go to America.

The euphoria that greets the statements by some Tory Members bears no relation to the absolute crisis in the advanced industrial countries, which are facing rises in inflation even as we speak.

What of the British economy? The Government's friends in the *Financial Times* and in *The Sunday Times* are saying, quite rightly, that we are going back to the good old days of the stop-go cycle in Government policy. We keep having the Thatcher miracle thrust down our throats. What is the Thatcher miracle? What does it mean to millions of workers in this country, to unemployed people, to people like my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley, who is waiting for treatment for his gallbladder but cannot have it? To those people the Thatcher miracle is absolutely meaningless.

After 10 years in office the Government talk about wage restraint and blame working people for the crisis in the capital system, as Conservative Governments have done historically and as, unfortunately, has been done by some Labour Governments also. It is the same old blackmail: "You are pricing yourselves out of jobs. One man's pay rise is another man's job loss"—all the usual nonsense. At the same time, we read in the pages of the *Financial Times* and the other more serious newspapers of this country about the state of the economy and about the vast number of millions of pounds being made on the stock market where many a person has no work to do and sheds not a drop of sweat. It is referred to as the casino economy—and quite rightly so. That is what it is all about. People spin the wheel and take their chances. They gamble on the markets in the hope of taking the loot. That has no relevance to the economic and industrial situation in this country, yet it is the game that they are playing. As usual, of course, according to the Government, it is the workers who are responsible.

We have problems about investment. It is not just the loony Left that is talking about this. I would remind the House of a House of Lords inquiry of 1984, which this Government have disregarded totally. The report of that inquiry referred to the manufacturing base and to the service economy and all that it means for the future prosperity of this country and those who live and work in it. Of course, that continues to be disregarded by this Government. The squeals and screams that are being heard now are coming from the bosses and are echoed by Tory Members because profits are starting to fall. During the boom period they could afford to give working people a few crumbs in the shape of decent wage rises. But now the reality of what the economic future of this country holds for them is hitting them in the face, and they are looking for scapegoats.

Look at the economy and then look at the stock market. A report in *The Independent* on 4 January appeared under the headline

"Shares Hit Record amid Hope of Loan Rate Cut."

The article says that the previous record for sales of shares was set on 16 July 1987. What it does not say is that that record of July 1987 preceded the stock market crash by 15 months. Of course, the record set on 4 January this year must be seen in the context of the fact that only yesterday £8,000 million—70 points—were knocked off shares in this country. That, of course, is reflected in America, where the Dow Jones index fell by 77 points. But these statistics are meaningless when one gets down to the reality of how ordinary working people in this country are affected. Nevertheless, we have to explain what is taking place.

Daily we hear Tory Members say that Socialism is dead. I am not straying into eastern Europe; I am talking about the economy of this country and thinking of the Socialist measures that will resolve the problems of the mass of people here. Even in the United States—the arch exponent of capitalism—pressure is now being put on George Bush for state intervention in the infrastructure because big business and those people who should be paying due regard to the infrastructure are doing nothing about it. In America there is now talk of pump-priming by the state. That is something that the Government here refuse to do.

The Autumn Statement will do absolutely nothing for millions of people in this country. It will do nothing for old-age pensioners, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley has referred. It will do nothing for the disabled, or the sick and infirm, or the single parents, or the unemployed, or the low paid, or young people, who,

under this Government, have no future because all that they are given is phoney schemes and exploitation. Wages councils have been done away with, and people are put at risk of death and disfigurement on schemes where there are no health and safety provisions. Students have also been attacked in the form of cutbacks in loans. There have also been cutbacks in education provision. We have heard during this debate how home owners have been attacked with mortgage rate increases. Doctors have been abused, as have ambulance drivers, nurses, lawyers and, in particular, working-class families.

We are talking about inflation. Consider a place like Liverpool, whose city treasurer has estimated that the poll tax, at minimum, will be £476 for every person over 18. The authorities there will be told to cut back on staff. But sacking people will only increase unemployment, poverty and deprivation. Water rates are going up, as are transport and travel costs and gas prices—a whole catalogue of further burdens on working-class people.

Tory Members know nothing about how to resolve this problem. They are making a fast buck on their own behalf. No wonder they put up a smokescreen by referring to Labour's record. Just consider the consultancy positions and directorships that they hold. They are doing very well. It is only the working-class people of this country—the masses who create the wealth that Tory Members and the people that they represent can spend—who are doing anything about the situation.

There has been a 50 per cent. reduction in the infrastructure in this country in the past decade. That has meant decay in our hospitals. Hospitals in Liverpool are being closed down. At Question Time today, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) and I asked about the Park hospital. Geriatrics and people who are psychologically unfit are being thrown on to the streets to live in cardboard boxes, wander around and get themselves into trouble. Instead, they should have the benefit of proper care.

Today I was told about a man working for the local authority in Liverpool. He has been told that he will have to wait four years for a heart operation. To have it done privately he would have to pay £2,500. He is a cleaner, and the workers in his yard are talking about collecting money to pay for the operation so that he will not die during the waiting period. Yet the Government tell us that the Health Service is doing well and that they are investing in it. Half of them do not even use the service, so they do not know about its inadequacies, but we and our constituents use it, and we know at first hand that there is no proper health service as we knew it in the past.

During this Government's period of office more and more people have become alienated. With hindsight, we have to say that we in this country once had a far-sighted ruling class. In its place we now have the most economically ignorant, crude and short-sighted Government ever to look after the interests of big business. I am not being disparaging about other countries when I say that there is more manufacturing industry in India than there is in Britain, and I am not being chauvinistic when I say that Britain, once the workshop of the world, is now the warehouse of the world, full of foreign imports. That is the reality of the British economy.

Following the stock market crash we have been left far behind our major competitors such as France and Germany. The Government's policies, as set out in the Autumn Statement, will mean more poverty and debt for the ordinary working people of Britain.

The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) talked about Britain's home-owning culture, but he did not give the true facts. In 1987, 23,000 homes were repossessed by the building societies compared with only 2,000 in 1979. The Prime Minister tells people to go out and buy their council houses, but if they get into debt or become unemployed as a result of the Government's policies they are punished by being made homeless. When they want a council house there is none. That is the home-owning culture that the Government have created. Building society loans are crippling as a result of the Government's policies.

As some of my comrades want to say a few words, I shall cut my remarks short. We are being kidded by the Government, but more and more people are seeing through their policies. They can see through the lies and distortions that we get daily from the Dispatch Box and from Conservative Members. The working people, the wealth creators in Britain, know the reality of what is going on. They know that there are no long-term prospects for them under the Tory Government.

People ask about the Labour party's policies, but my outlook is different from some of my good colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench. We should not be going down the road of the Wilson or the Callaghan years, trying to manage a mixed economy. I am in the Labour party because I am a Socialist. I believe in the Socialist transformation of society. We cannot control what we do not own and we will take the money off Conservative Members' friends in the City. We will take over their banks and their insurance companies. We will take over the commanding heights of the economy. When they want compensation we shall treat them as they treat the poor and the unemployed—we will means test it.

Capitalism has failed not only here but internationally. Increasingly, workers will come to the only conclusion, that they must take their destiny in their own hands, just as the workers in eastern Europe are doing. They are not saying that they do not want Socialism or Communism; they have never seen either. They have thrown off Stalinism because they want to run their own lives. The British workers applaud what they are doing and will be going on to the streets themselves because the Government's policies will bring about social convulsions.

9.1 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): We have heard an almost classic speech from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields). It was almost 15 to 20 years old; an example of class warfare at its worst. Once again, he was trying to arouse the emotions of his constituents, making them more radical and militant.

But to Conservative Members the hon. Gentleman's ideas were almost laughable simply because they are part of history. Events in central Europe should convince even the last of Militant Tendency supporters that this is a changing world and that politics have moved on. The Opposition Front Bench have accepted that.

It is unfortunate that we in this Chamber always talk in jargon. Today I heard several references to fiscal and monetary policies and the supply side. To people outside, that does not mean a thing. As the Treasury Front Bench

[Mr. James Hill]

spokesmen will know, people are interested in their expectations. They are already convinced that their circumstances are much better than they were 10 years ago, but they are still looking for more.

We have heard that there is 68 per cent. home ownership in the United Kingdom, the highest in Europe, but nobody ever mentions that. Those people do not rely on local government for housing; they do their own maintenance and take pride in their property. At the same time they are anxious to leave their property to their children when they have paid the mortgage.

Not one Opposition Member made any conclusive statement on the Labour party's future policies. The majority of speeches from Opposition Members were confidence destroying and, as anyone in business knows, confidence is essential in business. If people do not have confidence they do not invest or they invest outside the country. People realise that the market place now is not just the United Kingdom or, indeed Glasgow or anywhere else; it is world-wide.

The strength of our economy was shown by our recovery from the major stock market depression. The stock market is probably healthier for being culled then. The lesson which every member of the Opposition Front Bench should note is that the market place cannot be worked in isolation. We cannot attract investment in isolation. We must rely on the large companies in the world to invest in Britain, and they will invest in Britain only if they have confidence. No amount of talking down the economy will create that confidence. If there is a lack of confidence now, it is because the Opposition have no policies to put forward. They have nothing to say about how they would run the economy. That is why the market place is extremely sensitive.

I give the House a horrifying scenario to consider. What will happen if that crowd on the Opposition Benches comes to power? The market place will go bananas. That is no slur on anyone. I am sorry to say that confidence will be exactly the same as in 1974 and 1964.

I did not agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). He suggested that if we joined the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system we should begin to do as well as Germany overnight, and that our interest rates and inflation would tumble. The German Bundestag would dominate the scene through the Bundesbank. That is not what we want. We did not join the Community to have our full range of fiscal policies controlled. The problem is that if we joined the ERM when our inflation and interest rates were high and the playing field was not level, we should be hostage to fortune and to all those on the continent who would welcome us but take advantage of our weaknesses. That is the problem. I am as much in favour of joining the ERM as anyone. However, it must be done at the right time, and now is not the right time.

I should like to make a few comments on how industry could be helped. The investment in plant and machinery that companies can write off against taxation each year should be increased from 25 to 40 per cent. I do not know whether hon. Members remember the halcyon days when it was 100 per cent. That was a tremendous incentive to do what the Opposition recommend on the supply side.

Sir William Clark: Corporation tax of 45 per cent.

Mr. Hill: Exactly. A reduction in employers' national insurance contributions would be another worthwhile move which would not create inflation and would help industry to invest more in plant.

We could also increase investments in transport infrastructure. We are already doing that in no small way. However, in my constituency of Southampton we have had to wait years for the necessary motorways. I know that hon. Members are fed up and sick and tired of me saying this, but we still do not have the M3, although Southampton is a major port.

We must watch local authority rates carefully. The uniform business rate will cause much heartburn, perhaps not to the bigger companies that are spread throughout the United Kingdom, but certainly for the smaller companies that are situated in highly-rated areas.

Therefore, the problem is not quite as simple as Opposition Members would have us believe. The careful juggling—because that is what it is—of the uniform business rate and of the investment world, and the creation of an area of confidence so that people will want to invest in the United Kingdom, must be the best possible way forward.

I hesitate to say this, but I do not think that the banks —certainly not the big five—are as co-operative or as compassionate as they should be with some of our smaller business men. If we are to have a great deal more trouble because smaller business men cannot meet their uniform business rate and are unable to keep going, the banks should take a more lenient view.

I realise that my time is nearly up. Indeed, I am waiting for you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to nod at me. In conclusion, the Government are doing an excellent job. The Treasury team is excellent. I believe that they are what is known as a "vintage year." I hope that the Opposition will eventually begin to make speeches boosting the economy and boosting confidence and that they will not always be such a dog in the manger.

9.11 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I shall speak only briefly because the debate needs to be wound up and the weaknesses and shortsightedness of the Government's forecasts have been more than adequately highlighted by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

I was impressed by the Chancellor's speech. I thought that he had worked hard at it. Obviously, the Tory drama school told him to gee-up and do a lot better. It was definitely a brighter shade of grey. However, I was sorry that he did not give way to me on one point. I wanted to question him when he made a remark about the quality of investment and said something like, "Never mind the quality, see the width." The Chancellor talked about the quality of investment. It was extremely interesting to discover that by "quality of investment" he meant the amount of money that could be made on an investment in the shortest time.

There we have the substantial difference between the Government and the Opposition—I am not sure why the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) is grinning. If the tablets are not working, I can recommend Ex-lax. The big difference between the Government and the Opposition is that we believe that money should be used to create jobs and wealth for the country, whereas the Government and the Chancellor believe that money exists

to create money. The investment made in this country now might be bigger and may have greater returns, but, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) so eloquently showed when he responded to the Chancellor's speech, that investment is in car parks, supermarkets and the service sector. It is a vital part of our economy, but is not at all helpful to our balance of payments problems. All that we are building are warehouses and supermarkets in which we can store and sell the goods that we are importing.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): The Chancellor's comment that caused me most despair today was his evaluation of public expenditure versus private expenditure. The Chancellor almost dismissed public expenditure as being a dirty word and a dirty habit. Does my hon. Friend agree that education, health and social services, and all the things that make good provision for our quality of life, are dismissed by the Tory party as the work of the devil?

Mr. Rogers: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

I should now like to speak briefly on one aspect of the Autumn Statement, if only to highlight some of the rubbish in it. I refer to the defence expenditure plans in paragraphs 122 to 124, and specifically to the allusion in paragraph 124 to

"measures taken to increase value for money from the equipment programme."

The Government's record in defence procurement and in the defence economy is appalling. The fact that they claim some credit for it in the Autumn Statement is a cheek. It is a phrase trapped in the Ministry of Defence word processor. It comes out every year to order, usually to cover some incompetence, and generally accompanied by equally predictable rhetoric fom the rally-round-the-flag brigade. They are swarthed in references to national security and say, "You cannot have this or that information". If anyone ever criticises the Ministry of Defence or a Minister, he is accused of criticising Britannia.

Britain has fundamental defence problems, and nowhere in the Autumn Statement is there anything likely to do something about them. We are talking about an industry that sustains more than 500,000 jobs. The measures taken by the Government have resulted in a gross mismanagement of Britain's defence economy and taxpayers' money. I hope that in future months we will have the opportunity to take the matter further.

9.16 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): On 22 November last year, Sir Terence Burns, the Government's chief economic adviser, told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that

"there is a great deal of uncertainty"

in the economy. That should probably be the motto for this Autumn Statement. As for the Government, whose policy stance it is supposed to outline, the more one attempts to scrutinise the Autumn Statement, the more it becomes apparent that it represents not so much a stance as an uncomfortable shuffle on to one foot and then on to the other. From the admitted uncertainty about the economy to the—apparently—greatest certainty of the economic forecasts is one of those steps. I will be fair to the Chancellor, as he insisted that those forecasts are prone to error. However, he also insisted that they represent the best estimate that the Treasury can make—falling interest rates, but not yet; falling trade deficit, but not yet; falling inflation rates, but not yet; and 3 per cent. inflation in three years' time. As a number of hon. Members have said, the Government said that they would achieve that figure last year, the year before, and the year before that. I do not want to be unfair to the Government, but somewhere along that trail they were predicting zero inflation, although I am not sure in which year that was. A number of hon. Members have said that repetition in the face of failure has not added to the credibility of that forecast.

Uncertainty returns in a flood on examination of the reality of our underlying economic strength. The Opposition, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), and others in industry and finance have highlighted fears about our levels of investment, especially in manufacturing, the wealth-creating sector, and about our world performance in that most vital of areas, only to be constantly told by Government apologists about great increases in output and investment in recent years. I want to put it firmly on record that the Opposition are pleased to see any hopeful signs that manufacturing is recovering from the near-fatal blows that that sector took under this Government in the early 1980s. When the Government imply that there is little further cause for concern—even before we had the most recent output figures—they are being more than a little misleading.

The hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) quoted a figure that he has quoted before—the percentage change in manufacturing output between 1979 and 1988. The hon. Gentleman did not point out that on those figures the United Kingdom came 18th out of 20 OECD countries. Moreover, although our share of world exports this year is estimated to rise against the growth in world trade, after a poor year in 1988, and the long-term picture shows a rise in the volume of exports since 1979—this is a figure which the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry quoted with some glee the other day—that is far exceeded by the rise in imports, which the hon. Gentleman neglected to mention, at well over twice the level of exports. This position is not likely to be remedied without substantial investment.

Between 1980 and 1983 manufacturing investment in this country fell back to levels not seen since the mid to late-1950s. Mercifully, since then we have had the recovery about which the Chancellor took the trouble to intervene to remind us. That recovery returned investment to 1·7 per cent. above the level that it reached in 1979—before the miracle-workers took over.

It is suggested that next year world trade in manufactures will grow by 6·5 per cent. and that United Kingdom manufactured exports will also grow by 6·5 per cent., which at first sight might imply that we shall hold our share of world trade. But the forecast for total United Kingdom growth in manufacturing output is only 1·5 per cent. What kind of economic miracle is it where we can deliver a growth in manufacturing output of only 1·5 per cent. when world trade is growing by 6·5 per cent.?

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does the hon. Lady understand that many of us are very concerned with industry and its profitability and that I have also suggested to my hon. Friends changes that I would like to see? I ask yet again in this long debate, a great deal of which I have heard, about

[Mr. Beaumont-Dark]

the Labour party's backing for the EEC social charter and its added cost to industry. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is an honourable man, as I am sure everyone agrees, said that if we had a minimum wage and backed the social charter it would cost 400,000 jobs and add 4·4 per cent. to the costs of industry. Does the hon. Lady agree with that or not?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is, as the hon. Gentleman said, a very honourable and a very nice man in many ways, but his figures are sometimes wrong, and this is one of those cases. Forecasts for investment in manufacturing are also far from rosy—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked a question and he got a straight answer. What is the matter with him?

The Central Statistical Office forecasts an increase in manufacturing investment in the coming year of no more than 1 per cent. in real terms—a prospect which worries the CBI, the TUC and many commentators far more than it apparently worries the Government. But then the Government's attitude to investing in our future is as far from clear as it is implicitly unhealthy. The point of the Autumn Statement is that it is supposed to tell us something about the overall size of the Government's public expenditure plans, with all that they may or may not mean for investment in our future. To quote one of the Select Committee's advisers, Mr. Brian Reading,

"Is the planning total"

for public expenditure,

"the right size? Is its allocation 'appropriate'?"

Mr. Reading then goes on to say:

"Neither of these questions can be answered on the basis of the information provided in the Autumn Statement."

Although we all recognise that the changed definitions and classifications used in the presentation this year create difficulties, I am bound to say that I agree not only with Mr. Reading but with the Select Committee when it observes that parts of the Autumn Statement can probably be fully understood only by those who compiled it. I thought that the Committee was very restrained in its remarks in this respect and others, no doubt following the lead of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who is always a model of courtesy. I was especially impressed by its restraint when I read the exchange between the Committee and officials, particularly the ones when the Committee sought to get straight answers about data on local capital investment only to be told that they could not interpret the figures because they had not been given all of them.

Not having been present, I cannot judge whether that observation was made gleefully, remorsefully or simply in a "Good God, what did you expect" sort of tone. If I had been a member of the Committee—which, I understand, asked for all the relevant figures and until that moment was under the impression that it had received them—I should have been extremely cheesed off.

But we should all have known better. The Select Committee wanted all the figures so that it could draw its own conclusions about what is really happening in the economy—about whether and to what extent we are really investing in our infrastructure—and that, of course, is the last thing the Government want.

We can deduce from the Autumn Statement that in the coming year the Government plan to spend less than they had originally intended to spend but more than they spent last year. We can also see that most of the increase will be swallowed up either by inflation throughout the economy or by even higher specific inflation in areas such as health care, despite the Government's claims to have acknowledged and met the demand for proper provision in those services.

But the question of real importance, not just for the House but for the country, remains an open question: whether and when the Government will recognise and accept their responsibility to play their proper role in investing in our future—the reponsibility accepted and the role played by the Governments of all our major competitors. On one score there is little doubt. The Government want the public to think that they have accepted that role. Their press releases and public relations address the real concern that they know the public feel at the way in which we are falling further behind our partners and competitors. The hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) mentioned those matters and told us how much more the Government were spending.

But the Select Committee pointed out, as did the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), that although one of the few things that the Autumn Statement makes clear is that expenditure on training is being cut again in real terms, as it was last year—which is extraordinary in view of the damaging effects of skill shortages on inflation, if on nothing else—the Department of Employment was issuing press releases claiming credit for a cash increase.

Whatever the statements made for public consumption about spending increases funded by the Government's economic miracle, in the comparative privacy of the Select Committee deliberations, faced with the stern countenances of the hon. Members for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), the Chief Secretary cracked and gave the game away—*[Interruption.]* In the years from roughly 1984 to 1985, said the Chief Secretary,

"planned increases in real terms did not actually materialise. . .I do not think the sort of step change we have now would be very different."

Nor do I. He continued:

"The additions to last year's plans are rather less than the rise in inflation."

The hon. Member for Bridlington drew attention to the fact that this is the lowest level of Government spending since 1967. That is not quite what it says in all those ministerial letters to our constituents, or in those brave speeches boasting of the Government's wonderful spending record. In terms of accuracy, the Chief Secretary's version of events is more to be commended.

In 1987, taking investment as a percentage of GDP—broadly, as a percentage of our national income—we were 23rd out of 25 OECD countries. In 1988, the peak year of the investment cycle—the so-called investment boom that we enjoyed recently under the Conservatives—we were 18th out of 23 OECD countries. That lack of investment can be shown by the most simple and incontrovertible evidence—the daily experience of British people.

The Government claim to have put an extra £2·6 billion into the National Health Service, and the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark), who appears to be getting somewhat agitated at this point, quoted some even more dubious statistics about the Government having, between 1979 and 1988, increased spending on the NHS by 45 per

cent. in real terms. I know that the hon. Gentleman got that figure from the Prime Minister. He should seek a more reliable source for his statistics.

On the basis of the old planning total, at the best, using the GDP deflator, which is the average measure of inflation in the economy, one might come up with a figure in real terms as high as 31·6 per cent., which is rather different from 45 per cent. Using the NHS deflator, the one that matters for available spending in the NHS, one comes up with a figure on the old planning total basis of 13·9 per cent.—1·3 per cent. a year while this Government have been in office—which is substantially below the spending needed to meet the increasing demographic and technological demands.

That ties in with the experience of our constituents. If the hon. Member for Croydon, South would prefer a measure of NHS expenditure that includes patient charges and asset sales, on the GDP deflator, one might reach a figure of 36·7 per cent. Again, using the figures for inflation in the NHS, the figure comes out nearer to 17 per cent., which is 1·6 per cent. a year—still well below what is required to meet increasing needs in the NHS.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Lady referred to the National Health Service deflator. Does that mean that when the Government give a generous pay settlement to the nurses the deflator increases and, therefore, the settlement might as well not have been given, according to the hon. Lady's figures?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall treat the hon. Gentleman's remarks with the contempt that they deserve.

The Government claim in this Autumn Statement that they have put an extra £2·6 billion into the NHS. Although we have not, as far as I am aware, had a reply, we query whether more than a small part of that—perhaps £500 million—is available to improve services, especially when one takes account of increased prices, of the Government's creative accounting and of the accountancy procedures themselves, to which much of the money will go on a scale that is not only wholly impracticable, but which seems far in excess of what would be needed for prudent management and more like what would be needed to introduce full-scale charging into the NHS.

The Government claim to be increasing investment in housing, but housing starts have fallen by almost half in the past year, while bankruptcies in the construction industry have soared. Once again, we are running to stand still. The Government are increasing investment in transport, but the subsidy to Network SouthEast is being removed. If there is one area in the country where people do not need a financial inducement to travel by car, it is the south-east.

Some may find these statistical niceties, technicalities and different specifications bewildering. They should not, thereby, conclude that they are not able to judge who is and who is not basically right. Just walk into a local hospital; just get on a Network SouthEast train or a Tube —a traumatic experience if ever there was one; just read the notes from the head of the local school, begging for funds to give our children even the most basic education; just ask charities such as the Salvation Army about the young homeless, or the Family Welfare Association about families without cookers or beds, or the citizens advice bureaux, about the growing queue of people with debts they cannot handle because they believed that there was an economic miracle and we were all part of it. Judge from the daily experience of growing public squalor and growing private distress and—from that—can judge this Government and their "miracle" decade aright.

9.32 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): The debate has covered not only the Autumn Statement, but the report by the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service to which, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, the Government will in time reply.

I am sure that every hon. Member who has been present today will agree with the generous and well-deserved tribute of the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) for his chairmanship of the Committee. My right hon. Friend made a notable speech today in which he touched on various aspects of funding policy and monetary policy, and those points will, of course, be covered in the Government's reply to the Select Committee's report. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will understand why I cannot go further than that today.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) made much in his speech of the slower rate of growth of the economy which is outlined in the Autumn Statement and he thought that there was an extremely gloomy outlook. The reasons why it is necessary to have a period of slower growth have been spelt out before and I do not intend to go over them again, but it is worth remembering that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) was Chancellor, in his Mansion house speech of 1988—as long ago as that—he said that he expected that the economy would face a year or two of slower growth before resuming its upward trend. The Government, as one hon. Member seems to have thought they should, cannot be said to have abolished the trade cycle even though they may have transformed the economy; and just as Britain led the way into the upswing, so Germany is growing faster now, just as it was growing more slowly at the point when the British economy was booming. There is nothing very surprising about that.

Looking at the decade as a whole from 1979 or 1980, whichever base the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East wants to take, and even taking into account the lower level of growth expected this year, Britain will still over that decade have grown faster than the EC average and faster than either France or Germany.

Mr. Morgan: In spite of his boasting about this wonderful consumption fiesta that we have had, a repeat of the Barber boom of 1973-74, in competitive terms with France and Germany, will the Chief Secretary not agree that the Government's stewardship of the British economy is very much like the Lawn Tennis Association running the Wimbledon championships: it is a wonderful fortnight of tennis but all the British players get knocked out in the first round?

Mr. Lamont: That stewardship has resulted in an unprecedented increase in living standards, a vastly greater increase than when the Labour party was in power. We have been a strong growth throughout most of the 1980s, and that contrasts with our dismal performance for most of the 1970s. It also represents not just an absolute increase but an improvement in our performance relative to other

[Mr. Lamont]

countries. In the United Kingdom, growth since 1980 has averaged a percentage point higher than in the 10 years 1970-80. Most other major countries in the 1980s experienced lower growth than in the 1970s. That demonstrates how this country has improved its performance relative to others.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East made much of the comparison with the German economy. He said that the German economy had performed so much better than ours, and I asked him whether it was true that our growth rate in the 1980s had been higher than that of the German economy. Of course, it is true, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman ought to have acknowledged it because it is a significant change and a significant improvement in this country's relative position. I share with the right hon. and learned Gentleman an admiration for the German economy, but if he were being realistic and fair and looking at what has happened in the past decade he would acknowledge that there are areas where the British economy has performed better than the German economy, and growth is one of them.

In manufacturing output, in 1980-88, the UK annual average growth rate was 2·1 per cent. and in Germany 1·2 per cent.; in total investment growth, 1980-88, the UK average was 4·5 per cent. per annum and in Germany it was 0·5 per cent. In productivity of the whole economy, the UK figure was 2·7 per cent. per annum and the German 1·2 per cent.; in productivity in manufacturing, the UK figure was 5·3 per cent. per annum and the German figure 2·2 per cent. The facts speak for themselves: this country's position vis-à-vis the very strong and much to be envied German economy has got better. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman had been fair and impartial, which I am sure he really is, he would have admitted it.

Mr. John Smith: I was fair enough to take the Tory claims as they put them themselves, namely, that there was a British economic miracle which had eclipsed the Germans. I simply asked, if that was the case, why the Germans had a £50 billion trade surplus and we had a £20 billion trade deficit. All the weasel statistics in the world will not get away from that. Why does not the right hon. Gentleman the Chief Secretary admit that it was a ridiculous exaggeration which has been blown apart by economic experience?

Mr. Lamont: The only claim that was made by my right hon. Friend and the only claim that I make is that our economy has improved its relative position very much compared with the German economy. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may call it a miracle; it would be a miracle if it ever happened under the Labour party in government.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also went on at some length, as he always does, about the current account deficit. We know that he is an old-fashioned mercantilist. He believes that trade is a continuation of war by other means. I noticed that in his *Daily Telegraph* interview at the beginning of the year he did not talk about getting the current account back into surplus; he just talked about possibly getting it into reasonable equilibrium.

Mr. John Smith: That is more than the Government have done.

Mr. Lamont: He says that that is more than we have done. Basically only two major countries have been consistently in surplus in the last few years. Every other country has been consistently in deficit or in and out of deficit. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would not argue that the United States, France and Canada are unsuccessful countries or countries that have not achieved a high growth rate and standards of living that we would seek to emulate.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made it clear that we regard it as prudent that the current account deficit should be reduced. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing said, there are positive signs that the measures we have taken are already moving the current account deficit in that direction.

Mr. John Garrett *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I want to make more progress.

There are two reasons why the current account deficit has appeared. It is not because of a lack of competitiveness but rather because of excess demand and an investment boom that has exceeded domestic savings. I am sure Opposition Members know that by definition the current account is the difference between domestic savings and investment. If a nation invests more than it saves, the current account will be in deficit; if it saves more than it invests, the current account will be in surplus.

There has been a fall in personal savings to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) referred, although that so-called fall in personal savings has to some extent just been the product of mortgage borrowing; the rise in home ownership has increased personal borrowing and reduced the net figure of personal savings. Although there has been some fall in personal savings, it has been offset by company saving and by the large surplus that the Government have run in their finances. The point is that by far the larger part of the current account deficit has come not from the fall in savings, which has been relatively small, but from higher investment. That is what the current account deficit reflects —an investment boom, not a savings slump.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) pointed out that we are extremely fortunate in the overseas investment that we have built up over the years. Of course, we did not have and could not create such overseas investment when the Labour party was in power. That is the real strength of the balance sheet of Britain plc. It shows that Britain is in a very strong position because we have overseas assets that are the third largest in the world after Japan and Germany, and, as a proportion of GDP, the biggest in the world. Even in 1988, when we had a large current account deficit, those overseas assets increased in value, which is evidence that the oil surpluses about which Opposition Members are so concerned were wisely invested and are bringing benefit to the people over the years.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East castigated the Government over their inflation record when he claimed to be reviewing the economic progress of the decade. As my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) pointed out, if he wanted to compare inflation in the 1980s with inflation in the 1970s, he might at least have admitted that inflation under this Government has never exceeded the heights that it reached

under Labour. He cited the underlying rate of inflation. Our 6·1 per cent. highest rate of underlying inflation since 1983 is lower than it ever was under the Labour Government. That is the reality of the difference between our inflation record and Labour's.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has an excuse for this difference. He always said that inflation under the Labour Government was due to oil. He says that everything that went wrong under the Labour Government was because of an oil crisis, while everything good that has happened under this Government has also been due to oil, never to anything that the Government have done.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If the economy is going so well, why did the spokesman for the Building Societies Association say on the 9 o'clock news that, as a result of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech in the House of Commons today—in which he said that interest rates would have to stay high for much longer—there could well be an increase in mortgage interest rates? If the economy is strong, why are the news media running stories like that? The truth is that we have never had interest rates so high for so long even in the seventies, on which the right hon. Gentleman keeps harping.

Mr. Lamont: I have not heard the news, but I understand that the chairman of the Building Societies Association did not say precisely what the hon. Gentleman said. He said that if interest rates were to remain at their present level right up to the summer, it might be necessary to have a 0·5 per cent. increase in mortgage rates. The hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot speculate about what will happen, but interest rates at a proper level are necessary to bear down on inflation. The cure of inflation matters more for everyone in this country, whether wage earner or home owner.

The Labour party has criticised the Government's spending record because it thinks that we have not spent sufficient amounts on priority services. However, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to demonstrate that we have spent considerable extra sums on health and transport while—as my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) said—maintaining tight control over total spending. We have done that by making the nationalised industries more efficient, cutting debt interest payments and using the advantages of falling unemployment.

It is because our finances are in order that we have been able to do three things simultaneously: control spending, reduce taxes, and give much-needed funds to priority sectors. That was rightly praised by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley).

The real question in this debate is whether there has been an underlying improvement in the performance of the British economy—whether the problems of the current account and inflation are temporary or whether there is a permanent improvement in our competitiveness. The facts speak for themselves. There is the profitability of British industry. There has been a reallocation of a decent proportion of GDP to profits after decades of decline.

We know that Opposition Members are not interested. They think it is a crime to make profits. We think it is a crime to make losses. Productivity in this country has risen faster than in any other country, including even Japan. There has been a revolution in industrial relations. The other day the Confederation of British Industry said that the number of working days lost is about 12 times lower than it was in 1979 when the Labour party was in power. It said that industrial action occurs today in only 1 per cent. of pay negotiations and the threat of action in only 2 per cent. of pay negotiations. So much for the argument that nothing has changed and we are getting back to the industrial relations of the sixties and seventies.

If there had not been a real change in the competitiveness of the British economy, we would not have the considerable and remarkable rise in British exports that we have had in the past year since economic growth began to slow down. In the three months to November 1989, export volumes were up 13 per cent. by comparison with the same period in the previous year. Within that total, car exports were up 29 per cent. and those of intermediate manufactures were up 17 per cent. In the same period, imports increased by only 6½ per cent. Opposition Members who asked about imports may be interested to know that, in the three months to November 1989, imports fell.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South and others of my hon. Friends mentioned the remarkable transformation in the British motor industry and the substantial foreign investment that has been made in it, which will add to British capacity by about half a million cars. That will be in place for the next decade. What a contrast with the motor industry when Labour was in power, when production fell by about one third and imports increased threefold. Today imports have stabilised and the industry is strongly placed to recover and expand its market.

When the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East presented his case, he said that the 1980s were a wasted decade. He claimed to speak for the whole nation, saying that his view was widely shared. He thought that the beginning of the 1990s would be the time to make a reappraisal. I agree that there could not be a better time to look back on what people thought about the 1980s. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman noticed that on 2 January a number of newspapers published surveys of the views of British business men in which they reviewed the progress that Britain made in the 1980s. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman raised that matter, and as he has been around a long time and has a good memory, he may recall that similar articles published at the beginning of the 1980s were full of real gloom, real hesitation and real doubt.

By comparison, in an article that was published on 2 January this year, the chairmen of leading British companies gave their view of the 1980s. The chairman of ICI spoke of a decade of unparalleled growth and of increased sales and profits. I dare say that the Opposition would not like me to cite the chairman of British Airways, but his phrase deserves to be remembered. Lord King of Wartnaby said:

"We should be grateful to the 1980s for helping us to forget the 1960s and 1970s."

What do the Opposition make of the comments of Sir Ernest Harrison, chairman of Racal Electronics? He said:

"The 1980s were a period of strong economic growth because we enjoyed a decade of stable government."

What do the Opposition make of the remarks of Sir Trevor Holdsworth, former chairman of GKN and president of the Confederation of British Industry? He said:

"The 1980s have been the best decade I have known—after 40 years in industry—for managing business."

Mr. John Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: I will, in a minute. Those are the views of practical business men who are responsible for the performance of our economy. I am sure that the British people prefer their views, as I do, to the distorted views of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, in his speech on behalf of the Opposition.

Mr. Smith: Does the right hon. Gentleman seriously expect us to take as unbiased commentators on the British economy top British industrialists who have given themselves huge salary increases over the last 12 months? Was it a sense of discretion that stopped the right hon. Gentleman from quoting Lord King? Does the Chief Secretary think that Lord King's huge salary increase, which he awarded to himself, is a good example to set the working people of this country?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's intervention is ludicrous and irrelevant. He claimed in his speech to speak for manufacturing industry and to represent its views and prospects, but his remarks are totally contradicted by the views of British business men themselves.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has a point when he says that not everything is perfect, and I admit that some of his criticisms were very telling. I know that we have not lived up to the high standards that we set ourselves. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister once said that our ambition was to make the British economy so strong that not even the Labour party could wreck it. Manifestly, we have failed because we have not educated or converted the Opposition and, although the economy is strong, it is not strong enough to withstand their onslaught.

Conveniently, that brings me to the subject of the Opposition. Old-fashioned interventionism of the type proposed in Labour's policy review will undermine the health of British industry. We are told that the Department of Trade and Industry under Labour will

"make strategic interventions into key sectors".

What are they? What are the key technologies that the Labour party says that it will encourage? How do we know that it will be different from the conspicous failures of their last period in office?

The Labour party's document gives one example to help us make up our minds. That example is not encouraging. It says that it will bring about the installation of a national broadband fibre optic network from John o'Groats to Land's End. What is that network? The policy document paints a terrifying picture, and if it gets out the Labour party will have lost all its chances in the next election—although it did not have much chance anyway.

It is suggesting a state-sponsored communication network which

"will bring great rivers of information, sight and sound in and out of every living room, classroom and work place."

The mind boggles. What else will it bring—martial music, computer dating or speeches by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) telling us that the situation on the streets is normal? What is even more alarming, I am told that the cost is estimated at a modest £20 billion. That is a precise example of what the Government ought not to do—try to spot winners in an extremely complex industry. There is nothing more disastrous than a crash programme of Government investment in a high-risk industry that will almost certainly be overtaken by technological change. It is better to have the evolutionary, market-led development of a communications network, as we have at present.

I can think of nothing more likely to lead to a gigantic misallocation of resources. One must be grateful to the authors of the document for giving us such a vivid example of the Opposition's industrial policy.

We were pleased when the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was appointed to her post, and we congratulate her again, because we thought that when she was shadow Chief Secretary we might get answers to questions about Labour policy. We did not get any answers from her predecessor. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster put some 52 questions to the Leader of the Opposition and received no replies. I am more modest, and I shall ask only two questions: what are the costs of Labour's programme, and by how much will taxes go up as a result? I am not optimistic that we shall get an answer.

The Sunday Times on 17 September last year disclosed:

"Labour leaders have decided not to work out the costs of implementing the policy review in case the figures leak out."

So that is the real position of the Opposition. Is that how they regard their trust with the British electorate and the accountability that they think they should have to the British people? They want the City and the Government to give more information and to be more accountable, but they apply other standards to themselves.

If that is their prospectus, it is the most fraudulent that has been put to the British people since 1710—the time of the South Sea Bubble—when a prospectus was issued to investors which invited them to

"subscribe for an undertaking, the nature of which shall in due time be revealed to them."

It was disastrous in 1710, and it would be disastrous now.

It is no use for the Labour party to say that what is in the policy review will not be in the manifesto, and that what is in the manifesto will not happen in a single Parliament. That is dishonest politics, and the British people know it. My right hon. Friend has presented the House with an honest appraisal of the British economy, and I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to back it in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Allen *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has already spoken.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 282.

Division No. 42] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Bermingham, Gerald
Allen, Graham	Bidwell, Sydney
Alton, David	Blair, Tony
Anderson, Donald	Blunkett, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Boateng, Paul
Armstrong, Hilary	Boyes, Roland
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Bradley, Keith
Ashton, Joe	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Battle, John	Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Beckett, Margaret	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Beith, A. J.	Buchan, Norman
Bell, Stuart	Buckley, George J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Caborn, Richard
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Callaghan, Jim

Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Martyn Jones and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*

Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kilfedder, James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Amendment accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15th November 1989; welcomes the continuing reduction in the share of national income taken by public expenditure, and the provision of substantial extra resources for priority areas; congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its policies of sound financial discipline and supply side improvement which have been the foundation of record growth of employment, investment, and business formation; and commends the Government's determination to maintain downward pressure on inflation and to bring further improvements in economic performance.

10.14 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. First, have Ministers from the Department of Trade and Industry asked permission to make a statement to the House on the complete and forecast collapse of its largest ever insider dealing case at Southwark Crown court today? More than £500,000 of public money has been wasted as a result of slipshod legislation which has allowed a coach and four to be driven through an important case. It is important that we should have a statement before we proceed on further trade union legislation.

Secondly, can we have a statement from the Attorney-General on the position in which the Crown Prosecution Service has been placed as a result of that case? It was passed the case by the Department of Trade and Industry, a case which the Department knew could never be won because the legislation that it forced through the House required total disclosure in such cases and the Department today refused the judge's order to make such total disclosure.

That own goal requires you, Mr. Speaker, to rule tonight on whether it is right that we should proceed without a statement from the Government when the conduct of public administration has fallen to rock bottom in the Department of Trade and Industry, giving a green light to City slickers to make a fortune at the expense of ordinary investors.

It cannot be right to have no statement from the Dispatch Box when such a major case has been withdrawn after half a day in court and two years' preparation, and when almost £1 million of public money has gone down the drain.

Mr. Speaker: I know nothing about the case. I understand from the news that a case has been dropped. I have had no representations from the Government that they wish to make a statement on this tonight.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon at 4.15 pm the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments considered the Code of Practice for Trade Union Ballots for Industrial Action, which we are about to debate. We had a memorandum from the Department of Employment and we concluded our consideration but, because of the pressure of time, it has not been possible to include a notification on today's Order Paper that there is a report from the Joint

Committee on Statutory Instruments which includes a memorandum on a relatively minor point which the Committee wishes to draw to the attention of the House.

As you will appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that is unsatisfactory, but we have made every endeavour to fulfil the Standing Order and copies of the report can be obtained from the Vote Office.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for that helpful advice to the House.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has given us a helpful explanation, but it does not help those Back Bench Members trying to represent their constituents in the matter. Not for the first time, the Government have brought before the House a statutory instrument which has not gone through its formal proceedings before the Committee. Only now have hon. Members been advised that the Committee has dealt with the matter. It is important for the integrity of the House that the Government should not continue to ride roughshod over the interests of hon. Members. The Government should be asked to bring the matter back on another day together with the Select Committee's opinion so that hon. Members can give it proper consideration.

Mr. Speaker: The motion has been on the Order Paper for some time. The Chairman of the Select Committee has already said that the comments on it are of a reasonably minor nature. We should get on with the debate.

Trade Union Ballots

10.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): I beg to move,

That the draft Code of Practice for Trade Union Ballots for Industrial Action, which was laid before this House on 17th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

No trade union should call on its members to take industrial action without first getting their approval to do so from a proper secret ballot. Yet until the Trade Union Act 1984 the law gave unions freedom to call members out on strike without any such democratic process. It is true that some had rules requiring ballots in one form or another, but union members could not rely on those rules, as was vividly demonstrated by the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984-85. The Government's step-by-step reform of industrial relations and trade union law has helped to correct the imbalances of power between unions and employers, and between unions and their members, which were among the fundamental causes of the industrial problems of the 1970s.

Requiring trade unions to ballot their members as a condition for retaining the protection which the law gives to what would otherwise be civil wrongs has been one of the major steps in the process of reform. It has been popular among the public and union members alike.

Perhaps one of the greatest tributes has been the dawning of awareness in the Labour party that even it must at least give the impression of going along with the principle of strike ballots. True, it does not tell us exactly how it will ensure that union members have an effective means of making sure that they are not called to take industrial action without a ballot; that can be applied swiftly, where necessary, and will carry a sanction which will ensure that the union does not ride roughshod over their rights. Nor, for that matter, does it tell us what sort of ballot will be required, or when and how it must be held. However, instructive though it may be to debate Labour party policy, that is not the purpose of the motion.

Section 3 of the Employment Act 1980, as amended by the Employment Act 1988, gives the Secretary of State power to

"issue Codes of Practice containing such practical guidance . . . for the purpose of . . . promoting . . . desirable practices in relation to the conduct by trade unions of ballots and elections".

Ballots by unions of their own members asking whether those members are willing to take part in, or continue with, industrial action which their union may authorise or endorse are the subject of this draft code. Its essential purpose is to promote good practice in the conduct of such ballots.

The Government believe that union members should have sufficient opportunity to indicate whether they are prepared to take part in industrial action before their union proceeds to go out and organise it. We also believe —and this is an equally important principle—that proper standards of democratic conduct should be applied to that balloting process.

Section 3(8) sets out the legal status of a code once it has been approved by Parliament and has been brought into operation. It provides that the code will be admissible in evidence, which means that it can be used in evidence by a party to any proceedings and that it can be taken into account by courts where they think that it is relevant in any

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

proceedings. It is, of course, entirely up to the courts to decide whether a code is relevant and the weight to be attached to any of its recommendations. No one will be able to bring legal proceedings against a union—or anyone else for that matter—solely on the basis that it has failed to observe any provision in such a code. The House should be quite clear about that. A code such as this would not—and indeed could not—add a single ground for legal action to what the law already contains. As with the highway code, it merely explains the law and gives guidance on what is good practice. I emphasise this point to make clear the distinction between this sort of statutory code, which describes and recommends good practice, and the relevant primary legislation which imposes what can properly be called requirements. The code does not—and could not—change primary legislation.

My Department first published a draft code for consultation in November 1988. In the light of representations made during the consultation period, the Secretary of State decided that it should be modified and presented for approval in its present form. The modified draft is now considerably shorter—only 56 paragraphs, plus one annex, as opposed to 103 paragraphs, plus four annexes—despite the fact that it contains some new material.

Four principles have been followed in deciding on the content of the draft code. First, the code would be of most value if it contained within the same set of covers information about both the relevant law and good practice. The passages on blue background are re-statements of the relevant provisions of primary legislation.

Secondly, the detailed recommendations on good practice should take account of existing non-statutory guidance. Hence, for example, account has been taken of the Industrial Society's publication "Conducting Ballots".

Thirdly, we drew on particular ideas put to us once the proposal to take power to issue such a code became known. The Engineering Employers' Federation booklet, "Proposal for a Code on Industrial Action Balloting", was therefore taken into account.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As the Minister mentioned good practice in relation to ballots for trade unions, can he speculate about the kind of good practice or bad practice that was operated by the Tory party when it had its recent ballot in the leadership contest between the Prime Minister and the challenger, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer)? Is he aware that the conduct of that ballot would not have met the terms of any code because when I went into the Committee Room, although Tory Members were taking part in the ballot, there was not a single polling booth and they were filling in their voting papers on the window ledges? We do not need any lessons from the Government on ballots.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I call Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Nicholls: The only thing that is more boring than an old record is a boring old cracked record. We have heard those comments so many times before from the hon. Gentleman that we do not need to give them any more credence this evening.

Finally, we also had regard to what is known about how unions actually conduct industrial action ballots. A good many of the recommendations in the draft code do little more than illustrate, in the form of principles and procedures, aspects of what some unions have done and continue to do.

We hope that the code can help raise the standards of all to achieve those of the best.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Can an employer cite the code when seeking an ex parte injunction if he has a complaint about the way in which a ballot was conducted?

Mr. Nicholls: If the employer in the hon. Gentleman's example is alleging a breach of primary legislation and substantive law, it would obviously be open to him to produce the code. It would then be up to the court to attach such weight to its recommendations as the court saw fit. The employer will not be able to go to the court to complain that the code itself has been breached per se. We hope that the code can help raise the standards of all to achieve the standards of the best.

Section A explains the scope and legal status of the code, its intended purpose and the assistance that it can provide to unions, their members and others.

Section B makes recommendations about observing procedure agreements, and other considerations, which should be taken into account before a ballot is held.

Section C restates the law on establishment of entitlement to vote and on reviewing of the "balloting constituency" if the union proposes to aggregate votes across different places of work. Recommendations are made about responsibility for determining such matters within the union and the process of review; the choice between balloting methods; the use and format of voting papers; independent scrutiny; and provision of information to voters.

Section D restates the relevant law on the method of voting; entitlement to vote without interference or constraint; and entitlement to vote in secrecy and without direct cost. It makes recommendations about arrangements to enable those entitled to vote to do so; minimum periods for postal or semi-postal balloting; procedures for checking voting papers for return by post; and arrangements for workplace balloting. Recommendations are then made about arrangements to ensure secrecy of voting.

Finally, section E restates the law on ensuring that votes are accurately and fairly counted and on the notification of details of the ballot result. Recommendations are made about procedures to ensure accurate and fair counting of votes; systems to help ensure that statutory requirements about notification of the result are fully satisfied; notifying details of ballot results; and matters which a union should take into account before deciding to organise industrial action.

The draft code, if approved, will be a valuable source of reference for unions, union members and others. Taking account of its recommendations can only help improve the conduct of ballots, and that can only help continue the improvement to this country's industrial relations that has been such a feature of this decade.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I congratulate the Minister on an admirably set out document. However, one thing seems to be missing from the draft document and

from the clear way in which he has introduced it. What happens when all the procedures have been followed to the letter but the trade union and the body of trade unionists involved—who have properly carried out all the draft agreements—find that the employer has decided, unilaterally, that the procedures are worth nothing and completely rejects any decisions that the men have made and informs them that it is null and void? What will happen to the employer? Why is there no section in the draft to deal with precisely that question?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman must understand what the draft is all about—which is the proper conduct of industrial action ballots. Many of the recommendations are based on what a great many trade unions already do. If those who wish to strike do so—and that is their decision—equally the employer can decide whether to accept that decision. That has been a feature of employment legislation under both Labour and Conservative Administrations.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): What happens if the trade union carries out all that is suggested in the code? I attended a meeting last weekend where a decision was taken to hold a ballot. The rules were followed. However, the employer has said that, even if the ballot is unanimously in favour of a 24-hour strike, the workers will all be looking for new jobs. What sort of protection will the Minister give those workers?

Mr. Nicholls: In launching an attack on the Government's legislation, it appears that the hon. Gentleman is, uncharacteristically, launching an attack also on the previous Labour Government's legislation. Under both Labour and Conservative employment legislation, the employer has had the ability to dismiss strikers. It would be a high watermark, even for the Labour party, if it said that an employer faced with a withdrawal of labour should not be entitled to consider the dismissal of those on strike.

When considering any particular recommendations in the draft code, there are three principal questions to ask. First, would following the recommendation be likely to help ensure that union members have a proper democratic voice in the decision whether their union should call on them to take industrial action? Secondly, would following or taking account of the recommendation be likely to avoid industrial relations problems and, in particular, the breakdown in such relations that a strike or other industrial action undoubtedly represents? Thirdly, is the guidance in the code helpful in explaining the requirements of the relevant law and thereby playing its part in ensuring that the law is observed?

By those tests—and they are relevant tests—the draft code deserves the approval of the House. However, we all keenly await the reaction of the Labour Front Bench spokesman. Sweet words and elegant phrases come ten-a-penny to Members such as the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). What everyone really wants to know is whether the Labour party is prepared to do the deeds that would make a reality of its new-found rhetoric. Even more to the point, can it persuade its union paymasters to co-operate with real industrial democracy, to which the continued existence of, for example, the pre-entry closed shop is such a standing and visible reproach?

I am pleased to say that the Labour party has that opportunity tonight. By its frank and unequivocal support of the code, it could show——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the debate will be confined to the motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Nicholls: By the Labour party's frank and unequivocal support tonight, it would have an opportunity to show that it supports the principle of industrial democracy and that it is not a new-found conversion. Obviously, the hon. Member for Sedgefield has the support of Conservative Members in his struggle to carry forward that principle, but we shall be interested to discover whether the same can be said of other Labour Members. The code can only assist the practice of good industrial relations conduct, and for that reason it demands the support of both sides of the House.

10.33 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I congratulate the Minister on reading his brief well, even if not with much conviction or sincerity. He was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), who rightly said that the code was of no value if the employer, having watched every word of it being put into practice, simply said, "I care not at all for that and I shall sack you all."

I challenge the Minister to say whether he accepts the situation of the Tilbury dockers, for example, who were sacked by the Port of London Authority recently after having followed the balloting procedure to the letter and having had a secret ballot that was above any kind of reproach or condemnation, even in terms of this code of practice. The Port of London Authority nevertheless sacked people such as two British Empire Medallists, Tommy Lane and Georgie Lake, both of whom had many years of service. Georgie Lake in particular was even nominated for the British Empire Medal by the Port of London Authority, which eventually sacked him.

Can the Minister tell us—I will give way to him on this point if he wants—whether he will condemn the actions of the Port of London Authority in failing to abide by this code of practice?

Mr. Nicholls: If the hon. Gentleman would like me to intervene, I am happy to oblige. I will not pass judgment on the actions of any employer in a particular situation. The hon. Gentleman should read the policy documents of his own party and some of the legislation of the Labour Government all those years ago. The hon. Gentleman is apparently saying that once a ballot has been properly conducted according to the law and the code the employer should have no alternative but to agree to all the demands made, and that should be an end of it. That is an extreme position. I have always thought that the Labour party adopted extreme positions, but I would have thought that that was too extreme even for Labour Members. However, I am more than happy to be proved wrong.

Mr. Lloyd: That was very helpful. We now have the rationale behind the Government's argument. The Minister is not prepared to comment on an employer, but he is prepared to comment on every single trade union involved in any industrial dispute. He is prepared to comment adversely on every trade union whether it takes

[Mr. Lloyd]

the code of practice in hand or whether it finds that it is, as I will put to the House tonight, so onerous as to make industrial relations a matter of great difficulty.

The problem is that, as with most of the Government's legislation on industrial relations over the years, their motivation has been to arm one side at the expense of the other. There is no notion of conciliation in the Government's approach or in this code of practice—except ironically, of course, where the Government suggest to the trade unions that they should go to ACAS and seek some kind of ordered settlement. There is no conciliation at all when it comes to advice to the employers. No advice whatsoever in this document applies to employers.

Is that any surprise when, in the present dispute with the ambulance workers, with the ambulance workers wanting to go down the recommended road of arbitration by ACAS, the Government have said, "No; we believe in the code of practice for the trade unions but we do not believe in a code of practice or arbitration for employers, particularly when the employer is central Government." That shows the partiality of this Government.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Surely the hon. Gentleman has not even read the title of this document, which states clearly "Trade union ballots on industrial action". Employers do not have any role in trade union ballots. This code of practice, which the Opposition have just condemned, is designated to support the rights and privileges of the membership of the unions and every individual member of a union. That is what it is about.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman may say that I have not read the title, but I have certainly read the entire document and I refer him to the footnote on page 9 where it refers to the role of the employer in terms of the balloting procedure. The Government suggest that it might be helpful if the employer would make premises available, but there is no suggestion of anything else. It says:

"It does not require the employer to do anything more than permit premises to be used; there is no obligation, for example, to allow employers time off work to vote in a workplace (or any other) ballot."

That is how much interest employers really have. Of course, they have an interest in the ballot. But the Government do not propose any course of action for employers, just for trade unions. Did my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) wish to intervene on that point?

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): My hon. Friend has covered precisely the point that I wanted to make.

Mr. Lloyd: The secret ballot is now the norm in industrial relations. ACAS, not the trade union movement, reported not long ago that about 90 per cent. of ballots went in favour of trade union recommendations, and that sticks in the Government's throat. That has made the Government take action, because faced with the fact that their electoral system was not working, they decided, Ceausescu-like, to change the rules. Like outmoded east European dictatorships, they decided to change the electoral system so that eventually they would get the answer right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) questioned the Minister about democracy in the Conservative party. Does the Minister believe that the type of democracy necessary under this code of practice would have applied in recent elections in, say, Clwyd, North-West or Meirionnydd Nant Conwy? I will gladly give way to enable the Minister to answer because his answer is central to the type of democratic processes that we have in society. Does any other institution, private or public, have a code of practice as difficult to operate as that which we are debating?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman obviously needs help with his speech and I make my next observation in a helpful way. I would not have thought these provisions would have had any effect in Clwyd, North-West, but from my understanding of the Labour party's position, they might have been of considerable use in Birkenhead.

Mr. Lloyd: It is interesting that the Minister does not seem to feel that there is any value in codes of practice for secret ballots in the Conservative party. But that will not surprise my hon. Friends. It will surprise Conservative Members even less, for they know what the Government are doing in terms of extracting vengeance, and in industrial relations their vengeance is even more vicious.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *rose*——

Mr. Lloyd: I hope my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way. I must make progress with my remarks.

We are entitled to ask why we even have this code of practice. The Minister claims that it will not change primary legislation, and he is right; it cannot make such a change. But he admitted to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) that this code, as with other codes of practice, could become the rule through the process of case law. That is why it is of the utmost importance.

This code of practice carries with it a big stick. If the trade union movement says that it is unworkable, further legislation will be introduced. The previous Secretary of State said that the Government would consider carefully any evidence to show that trade unions were failing to take proper account of the code's recommendations and that the Government did not rule out further legislation should that prove necessary. In other words, the Government threat is that further legislation will be on the way if the trade unions do not accept this effectively as the law of the land.

Further, the code seeks to extend the law, just as the code of practice on picket numbers extended the law so that, through case law, it is now common for courts to rule that six is an acceptable number of pickets on a picket line. That is what case law, through that code of practice, has come to mean.

In the same way, this code of practice will extend the law in terms of postal voting and independent scrutiny. After all, the Minister could not say where mandatory postal voting or independent scrutiny exists in the primary legislation. Paragraph 20 of the code says:

"'Fully postal' balloting should be the preferred choice wherever the ballot is about the authorisation of industrial action by a union".

The Government are clear that that is the preferred choice. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East asked about the possibility of injunctions and touched on the Government's raw nerve. Judges in the middle of the night—the Minister knows more about judges in the middle of the night than I do—would be taken in not only

by the seductive words of the Government's lawyers, but by the code of practice and would accept that postal voting was mandatory, de facto, under the law.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lloyd: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I shall not.

The Confederation of British Industry, when commenting on the original draft, made the point on postal voting that a code should

"allow a greater element of discretion to trade union officials about how the principles of law should be applied."

The CBI seems to have been mollified, as the Minister put some colour coding in the draft, and seems to believe that its recommendations had been fully taken on board. The CBI now seems not to be critical, although its substantive point still remains as a difficulty of the code of practice.

The code of practice is a long way from the reality of industrial relations in Britain in 1990. It may exist somewhere in the fantasy world of Ministers and their even more fantastic Back-Bench Members, but it bears no relation to what takes place on the shop floor or in other places where trade unionists organise. A postal vote is not always the most appropriate means of balloting. Not only the labour movement, but the British Institute of Management, which made the point forcefully in its submission on the present code of practice, believes that. It said that workplace balloting was as valid as postal balloting under the law and had its own advantages. The Minister chooses to ignore what a responsible body of management believes on the issue.

Even the Government's own primary legislation accepts that semi-postal voting methods are allowable for refunded moneys. I hope that the Minister will explain later why that is the case, although the Government insist that postal voting is the only legitimate way forward under the code of practice.

The danger of all this is that we have a recipe for unofficial action. The Government have so hemmed in the trade union movement that trade unionists will have no choice but to look not to official but to unofficial action as the quickest and easiest way to solve their problems. Next week, we shall discuss the Employment Bill under which the Government will again seek to plug the loophole that they have created and to act against unofficial action. This charter for unofficial action will mean that the Government will render employers unable even to enter serious negotiations with the trade unions, although the trade unions would be able to get their own members back to work in the interests of the members and of the employers.

The code of practice is riddled with impracticalities. Paragraph 11, for example, insists that the trade unions should "inform every employer" about the balloting process. In the present dispute in the engineering industry over the 35-hour week, does the Minister seriously intend that every engineering employer should be informed of the proposals to ballot?

The Government also insist that every employee should be informed well in advance of where, when and how balloting will take place. Will the Minister tell us exactly what that means? How long is "well in advance"? What would constitute not being sufficiently "well in advance"? Why, when it is in everyone's interests for industrial disputes to be resolved as quickly as possible, does the Minister want to institute further delays in industrial relations procedures? Within the four-week period in which a successful ballot would be effective—these are perhaps the most worrying parts of the code of practice —the union would have to notify its own members of the result of the ballot, it would have to consider a wide range of factors about whether it should proceed with industrial action, it would have to examine all the options and then, if it decided to take action, it would have to inform its members why that action was appropriate, inform any employer, on request, about the result of the ballot and give time for the employer to take the necessary health and safety steps.

The Minister must understand that it is in nobody's interest to build in this kind of delay. This is a charter for frustration and ultimately a charter for unofficial action. If that is what the Minister wants, he should understand that that is precisely what will happen under this code of practice.

I have already said that it is very difficult for Opposition Members to understand why this code of practice is so one-sided. Conservative Members have said that this is nothing to do with the employer, but paragraph 2 of the code says:

"The code should assist unions and their members who are directly involved in such ballots, and employers, and their customers and suppliers who may be affected by industrial action organised by a union."

Of course, employers have an interest in industrial action. If Conservative Members seriously believe that employers are somehow immune to such action, they live in a very different world from the real industrial relations world in Britain. The employer has a direct interest, and that is where the Government should have been even-handed in their approach.

It is not just we in the Opposition who demand that evenness of approach; the British Institute of Management made the powerful point that to leave the employers the power of recourse only through the courts was very one-sided. The BIM stressed that it was not comfortable with recourse to the law as the means of resolving industrial disputes. It said:

"Any code of practice concerned with industrial disputes should seek to avoid conflict, not generate it."

In reality, the Government are not concerned with the process of conciliation. They are not concerned, as we know from the ambulance dispute, with getting all sides round the table. They are concerned with conflict, with making sure that one side can win at the expense of another and that in all circumstances the odds are so loaded against the trade union movement that the unions are put on the defensive from beginning to end. That is why I say to the Minister that, for all his fine words, the code of practice is destructive to industrial relations. The most sensible advice that the Minister can take is to accept the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and take this code of practice away, because it is unfitted to the reality of industrial relations in this country.

[Mr. Lloyd]

10.51 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): I very much welcome the opportunity to debate this code of practice and thus to debate the whole topic of democracy on the shop floor and within industrial relations. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has mentioned, we have a reasonably satisfactory position in primary legislation. The spirit of that primary legislation is also satisfactory. We must ask, however, if the spirit of the law is being implemented on the shop floor. Although in many instances I suspect that it is being implemented in that way, and that what now appears in the draft code of practice is already best practice on the shop floor, there will also be many instances where this is not the case. I hope that the publication of this code of practice will ensure that things are done more often in accordance with the recommendations of the code.

My concern about this first arose when I received a letter from the chief executive of the port of Tilbury during the dispute on the dock labour scheme. My hon. Friend will remember that at the time I sent him a copy of the letter. The chief executive expressed concern about local voting procedures and about the problems experienced with workplace ballots. I would like briefly to quote a couple of paragraphs from the letter that he sent to me. He said that "a very significant point" was that the voting procedures of the Transport and General Workers' Union were to be questioned, and he added:

> "At national level the counting of votes was probably correctly carried out and reflected the information from local level. However, the two ballots at Tilbury were anything but satisfactory. Voting forms were supplied in very large quantities, and the procedure was, over the days of the voting period, for each man to be given a voting slip which he marked in a private booth. This seemed to be fine but we now understand that the completed slips were then placed in a cardboard box, kept in the custody of a shop steward, which had a hole in the top large enough to put a hand through."

He went on to say, in the concluding paragraph:

> "I have no doubt that if the ballot had been conducted by an independent organisation by post then the outcome would have been totally different. The present system of workplace ballots cannot give the quality of balloting that should be insisted upon by law."

Therefore, I am particularly pleased with paragraph 20 in section C of the code of practice which says:

> "'fully-postal' balloting should be the preferred choice wherever the ballot is about the authorisation of industrial action by a union or wherever the 'balloting constituency'. . . covers all the members of the union, unless this is impracticable in the time available (for example because it is necessary to obtain members' views sooner than its use would allow)".

Mr. Skinner: I have looked at the Register of Members' Interests and I see that the hon. Gentleman is a consultant to Pinpoint International. Can he tell me whether there was a ballot under this code of practice, a previous code of practice or any code of practice before the company appointed him to that job?

Mr. Janman: I do not think that is a serious question. That question and the question that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) put to my hon. Friend the Minister reduce the standing of the House in the eyes of the public. We are trying to have a serious debate about an important issue. All the hon. Member for Bolsover can do is try to trivialise the issue by the sort of silly remark that he has just made. It is not worth considering further.

The position of the Conservative party on industrial relations is clear—to encourage responsible trade unions, working within the current legal framework, to ballot their members properly within a balanced industrial relations setting, unlike Labour, who, if ever in power, will stop employers obtaining injunctions against illegal strikes, and will scrap pre-strike ballots. We have heard a lot of nonsense about democracy in the Conservative party. We all know that, in the unlikely event of the Opposition winning the next election, they will end the opportunity for people in trade unions to have pre-strike ballots.

The reason Labour Members get so upset in these debates is that they know that it has taken a Conservative Government, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), to bring genuine democracy into the trade union movement. They know that the vast majority of trade union members support that democracy and wish it to continue. They know that their continued threats to undermine it are a serious threat to them losing support at the next election. It is also the Labour party which welcomes secondary industrial action, and whose leader said that secondary picketing is a right that should be enjoyed. It is the Labour party which will prevent the courts from taking effective action against unions via sequestration when those unions break the law.

This code of practice is consistent with the philosophy behind the approach that we have been enacting on a step-by-step basis over the past 10 years to make trade unions more accountable to their members. That approach has been consistently successful and successfully consistent. The proposed code of practice will not alter that position.

10.58 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Hon. Members will be aware, certainly those who were in the House during the last Parliament, that my right hon. Friends have long supported the idea of proper ballots for trade unions. During the proceedings on the Trade Union Act 1984 we tabled amendments to secure a preference for postal ballots, while recognising that there should be flexibility and that they should be mandatory in all cases. For example, the National Union of Seamen, for obvious reasons relating to its work, needs some flexibility so that other means of communication can be used.

The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said that, with the code of practice, the Government were trying to make law. However, during the passage of the 1984 Act, much against the wishes of my right hon. and hon. Friends who proposed a preference for postal ballots and their independent scrutiny, the Government failed to include such measures. The provisions have been given a place in the code of practice, although that is second best to being included in primary legislation. Therefore, we will support the code of practice in the Division Lobby this evening. However, it is important to sound some caveats about its provisions and the general approach adopted by the Government.

It is well established, and has already emerged during the debate, that in this country—unlike many others—there is no right to strike. I often feel that the Government

would like to move towards a position in which striking would be so frowned upon and deplored that, if they wanted to use stronger measures against anyone who dared to strike, they could attempt to get away with using them.

The code of practice lacks any sense of proper proportion and balance. Paragraph 34 states that

"A union should take steps to ensure that any information it supplies to members in connection with the ballot is accurate and does not mislead voters in the process of forming their opinions"

It goes on to specify matters which the union should consider. By itself, I would not find that objectionable. However, if a strike takes place and employers wish to communicate with union members, there is no obligation on employers in the code of practice to ensure the accuracy of the information that they give to union members. Therefore, the provision is unbalanced.

It may well be argued that the employers would not dream of providing inaccurate information, but the document is meant to ensure good practice which should oblige employers to provide their employees with accurate information. There should be proper provision to ensure that accurate information is supplied by employers to their employees in those circumstances.

There is a whiff of hypocrisy in some of the Government's proposals. In paragraph 8 they say that

"An industrial action ballot should not take place until",

certain procedures have been completed, and that

"where no such procedures are available, or have been exhausted, consideration has been given to resolving the dispute by other means, including where practicable seeking advice from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)."

It takes two to tango and come together.

In the ambulance dispute, the unions are perfectly prepared to proceed and take the advice given in the code of practice, but the National Health Service, speaking through the Government, is not prepared to meet in that forum and follow the very recipe for proper industrial relations that the Government prescribe.

Another point which should be made perfectly clear is that if unions pursue a proper course through the law and the code of practice with regard to ballots, it can strengthen their hand in negotiations—if there is a successful outcome to the ballot.

Many of us can remember in the summer, at the height of the railwaymen's dispute, listening to commuters who had obviously been grossly inconvenienced and had to bring their cars and park them in Hyde park. Those commuters said that because the Government had put all the barriers in the way of unions taking strike action, the fact that the unions had got so far and crossed all the hurdles meant that they probably had a good case. In that instance they had, and their position strengthened their hand in negotiations.

If, having followed all those procedures, and having obeyed the law and the code's specific provisions, the union proceeds to ballot in favour of industrial action, that will be indicative of the strength of the membership's views on a particular set of negotiations and should strengthen the union's hand.

The code also encourages unofficial action, and we shall debate that aspect when the House considers the Employment Bill. At this stage I only remind the House of the speech made by my late friend David Penhaligon on Second Reading of the Trade Union Bill in 1983, when he said:

"The second part of the Bill worries me most . . . However, the Government's basic point sounds reasonable. To say that there should be no immunity for official strikes without a ballot sounds so reasonable that any platform speaker in Britain could carry his audience with him. However, will it work out as well as Conservative Members think on the shop floor, inside the factory gate? It will make wildcat strikes more likely. The Minister said that it would make them less likely, but I would be interested to hear his evidence. At best, the position will be much as it is now."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1983; Vol. 48, c. 187.]

My late friend, with his customary foresight, put his finger on a flaw in the previous proposals that the Government are taking steps to remedy, but that are not in the best interests of industrial relations.

However much we support the concept of properly balloting trade union members when industrial action is in the offing, the law and codes of practice are no substitute for proper and constructive industrial relations. The more that the Government embark on the road to further legal quagmires, as they are in the Employment Bill, the more likely it is that some smart lawyer will find a way around their legislation. There is no substitute for proper industrial democracy and partnership in industry—which the Government have ignored for the whole of their 10 years in office by relying not so much on the law but on high unemployment in restraining strike action and enforcing an apparent degree of good industrial relations.

That approach has failed, as is evidenced by the new phase of ever-increasing wage demands, skills shortages and a fall in unemployment that is not nearly as big as it should be. It is clear that the Government's whole industrial relations strategy is coming unstuck. The law is not a substitute for a proper industrial partnership.

11.7 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): If all that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said about the Government's industrial relations record was true, they would already have been confronted by massive strikes—and wildcat strikes at that. However, the statistics clearly show that the opposite is true. Even in difficult times, when there has been a greater threat of industrial action and people have wanted to improve their rates of pay, there has been little in the way of industrial action.

Mr. Wallace: If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that there has been little in the way of official and unofficial industrial action, why are the Government taking up the time of the House next week to consider legislation for dealing with such strikes?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that Opposition Members, desperate for Britain to adopt the European social charter, need the Government to get rid of the pre-entry closed shop that the charter outlaws. However, I do not want to stray into aspects of the Employment Bill in a debate on a code of practice.

I sat through the previous Employment Bill, in 1988, when many of the Opposition speeches in Committee took the approach, "You are introducing legislation that will ensure different rights for trade union members and ballots for this and that. But what will happen in this event, or that event?" The Government are reacting correctly in saying "Here is a code of practice that all sides of industry

[Mr. Bruce]

agree is sensible. If the trade unions keep to this document, it will protect the rights of individuals in the unions, and that is what our industrial legislation has often been about."

The document will help people to know the right way to go about things so that they do not fall foul of the law. I find it incredible that the Government have been criticised for producing such a helpful document, as that is precisely what many hon. Members were demanding during the debates on the previous Employment Bill.

I was a work study engineer, and I advised management when they were faced with the possibility of industrial action in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time we did not have this type of secret ballot. Often, the employer listened to the militant voice of trade union officials and shop stewards, but did not believe that the union members would back up the militants. The advantage of the present full procedure and the secret ballot is that many employers now understand the strength of feeling behind what they see as unreasonable or militant action. Therefore, the employers have settled many disputes at the 11th hour becaue they realise that the union members have expressed their sentiments clearly and fairly.

The number of trade disputes has been reduced because the procedure takes time. How many Labour Ministers at the Department of Employment came to the Dispatch Box when they were in government and talked about cooling-off periods and trying to stop people going on wildcat strikes? I am sure that Barbara Castle, if she were in this place today, would admit that it is a great thing that we have cooling-off periods and a reduction in the speed with which people go out on strike, because it has been extremely good.

The Opposition's claim that all our legislation would cause more strikes has been disproved. During the previous Labour Government, when there were so many strikes, the real rise in wages and employment was very low. We lost jobs and prosperity, and the lowest-paid and unskilled workers were affected most. That trend has been reversed by the Government.

Some hon. Members have spoken about democracy, and compared democracy within political parties with that in trade unions. I do not believe that any hon. Member would vote for a document if every shop steward, because of his position within a trade union, had 100 votes in a strike ballot, but the ordinary member had only one vote.

There has been a comparison of what happened in Clwyd, North-West, Birkenhead and St. Helens, South. There is clearly a big difference between them. In each case there was a rule book, under which the ballots were carried out. There was a secret ballot in Clwyd, North-West and the hon. Gentleman who came through the ballot, having seen that the rule book was adhered to, knowing that there was one man, one vote, agreed that it was a fair ballot and accepted the result.

We all know what happened in Birkenhead and in St. Helens, South——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that we have gone far enough along that line; let us get back to industrial ballots.

Mr. Bruce: I know that I was straying from the subject, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was simply trying to illustrate my point that industrial ballots are seen to be fair if the rules behind them are seen to be fair. Clearly the Labour party has not convinced its own Members of Parliament of that.

Mr. Leighton: Was not the chairman of the Conservative party elected by a block vote of one?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. The chairman of the Conservative and Unionist party is voted for by the membership, and constitutes the liaison between the parliamentary party and the grass roots.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us get back to the motion.

Mr. Bruce: In answering the intervention by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), I have clearly strayed from the point. I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is a sensible document, designed to protect the interests of individual union members, and I cannot understand why any Opposition Member should want to vote down such an excellent measure.

11.15 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): It amazes me that any work study engineer—I met such people in my days in the trade union movement—can come here and talk about the freedom of the trade unions and trade union ballots. All that those people ever did was to tell us that we should work harder, with less pay, at the expense of the working class. I remember them very well, and I never took kindly to them.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: No. Sit down.

How hypocritical Conservative Members are. They are saying now that there should be union ballots on industrial action, but I have heard the Prime Minister and others speak in the House about how they have supported the Solidarity members in Poland over the years. I supported them, too, but they never had a ballot; they went on strike because they felt that they had to. Workers in Czechoslovakia also went on strike recently, because they wanted democracy and freedom, and the same has happened in East Germany and elsewhere. They did not have ballots; they took that action because they did not want to live in industrial slavery. Conservative Members are suggesting that we should get rid of our democratic practices and replace them with just that—industrial slavery. That is what it comes down to.

I have studied the document carefully. One section refers to "statutory requirements", and states that

"for example a 'show of hands" is not sufficient even if it appears to show overwhelming support for taking industrial action".

I have been a member of my union for 51 years. That is a long time. I remember many occasions when mass meetings of the workers reached decisions through a show of hands. That was not undemocratic. I do not need any lessons from Conservative Members about democratic practices in the trade union movement. We know about democratic practices: we were the ones who fought for them. Conservative Members are learning about democracy only now. They are in favour of democracy only when it suits them. When it does not suit them—in Chile,

Spain and Germany, for instance—their people go against it. I want to put that on the record, because it is what has happened over the years.

I am not ashamed of the trade union movement's record on democratic practices. We have always employed such practices: we have fought for them against Conservative Governments and Conservative class politics in the past. We have always fought for democracy and we shall continue to do so.

The Employment Act and the code of practice based on it represent class legislation against our people in the working-class movement in Britain. The Government do not believe in trade unions. They want to tie us up so that we can never take industrial action when it is necessary. What will happen if a trade union shop steward is elected by the workers in his or her factory and the employer uses the legislation to sack that shop steward? What will the workers do? Will they simply let it happen or will they take action in support of their fellow worker? I know what they will do; they will take action. Never mind the industrial ballot—the Government are proposing legislation to deal with any worker who takes such action. That is industrial slavery. The Government believe in the power of employers against the working class. That is what it is all about. The hon. Member for Dorset, South may laugh, but I spent years fighting people like the hon. Gentleman and I shall continue to fight people like you for as long as I live—*[Interruption.]* I did not mean Mr. Deputy Speaker, as he is part of my movement. We have fought on the same barricades against such legislation.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: No.

I have read the legislation very closely. It adds up to the fact that Conservative Members are underlining their class legislation with further restrictions against ordinary working people in Britain. I am glad that my party will vote against it tonight and I hope that next week we shall go further and vote against legislation that would further restrict workers in Britain.

11.21 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I rise to support my hon. Friends. The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) typifies a lifetime of struggle in the labour movement—a daily struggle against the iniquitous activities and industrial power of unscrupulous employers. If Conservative Members have ever fought for anything in their lives it is usually for a couple of seats at Ascot. They have no understanding of the daily activities of working people in the trade union movement fighting for their rights in the workplace.

Throughout the 1980s the Government tried to create the myth and the lie that trade unions did not belong to their membership but to some trade union barons. First, they introduced the principle of ballots to decide political activities. Unfortunately for them, the Government were proved wrong. The unions belonged to the members who voted in massive numbers to continue the political activities of the trade unions. Then the Government argued that trade unionists were being led by the nose in industrial activities. Throughout the 1980s 90 per cent. of trade union members who were balloted on industrial action supported the views of the union as expressed by their shop stewards or full-time officials.

Having preached a lie and been found to be dishonest, the Government now want to introduce a code of practice not to improve industrial relations or to facilitate better activities in the workplace to prevent industrial action, but to cripple the ability of trade unions to take industrial action. During industrial action unscrupulous employers will exploit the code to take trade unions and individual trade unionists to court.

This code of practice attempts to impose on trade unions additional obligations in respect of the Employment Act 1988 and the Trade Union Act 1984. It tries to create the longest possible delays in the implementation of decisions by the work force. It facilitates that process by providing as many grounds as possible for injunctions by unscrupulous employers. It attempts to induce ballot votes against industrial action, and when that cannot be done it attempts to discourage official action by trade unionists. That is the reality of this piece of legislation.

If the Government were really honest about parliamentary scrutiny and about the need for a code of practice, they should have been prepared to include such provision in clause 5 of the Employment Bill which the House will be discussing on Monday. In that way there could have been proper parliamentary scrutiny of their activities, instead of an hour-and-a-half's debate to rubber-stamp an instrument that will be used by unscrupulous employers and by the courts to hamstring trade unions involved in legitimate activities.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. McCartney: No. The hon. Member will have an opportunity to make his speech as he wants to make it. Other hon. Members on this side want to contribute. On various occasions the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) has refused to give way to me, so he has given up the right to debate with me on matters such as this.

The reality is that it is not just trade unionists or employers who are saying that the Government's code of practice is unjust and will promote confrontation instead of good industrial relations. Of this proposal, the International Labour Organisation, which is probably less popular in Britain than even General Noriega, had this to say:

> "The effect of piecemeal reforms, often introduced in order to achieve quite narrow objectives, has been to generate uncertainty in some areas of the law. This in turn may lead to unintentional breaches of Convention 87 and may inhibit lawful industrial action".

That is the International Labour Organisation's view of the Government's attempt to impose this type of industrial law on trade unionists.

Throughout this instrument there are paragraphs whose wording shows that the Government are attempting, formally and informally, to undermine the ability of workers to take action. For example, paragraph 8(a) places on unions an obligation to complete

> "any agreed procedure, whether formal or informal, which might lead to the resolution of a dispute"

before a ballot is held. That is absurdly wide. What is meant by an "agreed procedure, either formal or informal"? Does it mean all procedures or only those agreed for the avoidance of disputes? What if an employer breaches the agreed procedures? There is nothing here to protect trade unionists in that situation. Unscrupulous employers will use paragraph 8(a) to obstruct and

[Mr. McCartney]

undermine, and to prevent trade unionists from taking specific action that is allowed under current legislation. Those people will be able to go to the courts and obtain support in their attempts to neuter trade unionists.

This code is not about improving industrial relations or the right of workers to take legitimate industrial action. As my hon. Friends have said, it is the latest item in a long catalogue over a decade during which trade unionists have been undermined in their attempts to improve conditions in the workplace.

But the Government have not crushed working people. They have not crushed industrial trade unions, and they will never crush them. While there are Conservatives and unscrupulous employers, working people in the East and in the West will never bend to any kind of legislation that would undermine them. That has been proved by the history of the working-class struggle. In a decade's time this shoddy piece of legislation will be in the dustbin of history. Unfortunately, in the meantime many of the positive things that need to be done to improve industrial relations in this country are being neglected by the Government.

With the return of a Labour Government, it will be up to people who are now on this side of the House and to trade unionists to restore the rights of trade unionists, and to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the right of people in the workplace to go about their lawful business without having their position undermined by unscrupulous employers and an unscrupulous Government.

11.29pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): In a debate such as this the only contribution that can be made is to give one's opinion and experience. The main criticism and the main thrust of opposition to the code of practice on industrial ballots is that it is defective, because it does not consider what, after all, is the hallmark of solving industrial disputes—conciliation. I make no apologies for saying that throughout my industrial life I have believed in conciliation rather than confrontation. I shall explain later why the legislation is defective.

It is an abuse of this mother of Parliaments to present the code to us in a debate of one and half hours. It cannot be debated adequately in that time. I paid particular attention to the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). Some of the criticisms that he invoked are the same as mine. The only difference is that he will vote with the Government whereas I shall oppose them.

The code is defective and will not provide for any measure of conciliation. It will not solve the problem of industrial relations and industrial action. Certainly it will not solve the problem of what is generally described as rag-outs, or unofficial action. The more that one examines it in detail, the more it seems that it will be a prescription for unofficial industrial action and rag-outs.

The Minister made extravagant claims about what the code will achieve. It will not solve our industrial problems. We could ballot until the kings come home and at the end of the day the employer can still say, "Yes, you have a ballot, but you will get nothing." There is no provision in the legislation to compel the employer to seek conciliation rather than confrontation. I was thinking during the debate about an experience that I had. One can have all the ballots under the sun, but if the men decide to take action they will take action to resolve the problem.

I have belonged to a trade union since 1934. My union is the National Union of Mineworkers, about which the Minister made some snide comments. Before I came to the House, my trade union had not had a national official industrial strike for more than 40 years. That is as good a record as that of any trade union in Britain. I know what I am talking about when I say that we should seek conciliation rather than confrontation.

We had a particular problem in the mines—rats. They are rather filthy things to have in the mines. As a boy of 14, I remember being terrified. I was with my father and the roof was coming in. A flitting of rats came rushing out of the road. Despite the fact that I was only 14, I shall never forget that experience for as long as I live. The miners knew that if there was a flitting of rats in the pit, the place was unsafe and they should not go into it. I remember my father saying to me, "We'll sit here. I know what's going to happen. The roof is going to collapse", and an hour or two later the whole place collapsed and the roof came in.

Over the years we put up with the inconveniences of being down the pit and with the rats. A miner might be sitting having his piece when a rat would crawl across his leg. If a miner went out for his piece, he might discover that a rat had been in his jacket and stolen his piece. We could see them in the waste, looking at us as we were eating our piece. It was unpleasant and, of course, rats in pits cause both industrial and health problems. Rats are infectious animals. If a miner who was working in a low seam which was wet should happen to cut his finger, he ran the risk of getting what is called Weil's disease, which we knew as "rat jaundice".

We had meeting after meeting with the management for years and years, saying, "It is absolutely intolerable that we should work trying to wrest the treasures of nature from the earth, and have to do so alongside these diseased creatures." But then a crisis erupted when a couple of miners in my pit, who had been working in a low seam and had cut their fingers, developed Weil's disease, or rat jaundice, which is caused by the urine of rats. I advise those who have not seen anybody who has developed Weil's disease that it is a pretty horrible sight because the victims slowly get blacker and blacker and then they die.

We said that we were absolutely fed up with it in our area. We had tried to negotiate and conciliate. The whole coalfield was alive with unofficial industrial action. We said to the board, "Look, we've lost a couple of lives. We're no longer going to work down the pit if there are rats in it. You must do something about it." It was strange that after 40 or 50 years we had to sacrifice four or five days' wages and then, like magic, the employers came up with an answer. They said that they would clear the pit of rats. They developed something that many people with heart disease know about nowadays, Warfarin, and within a week there was not a rat in the place——

Mr. Skinner: They are all on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Eadie: Indeed.

The Minister is saying that, if an industrial work force is thinking about industrial ballots, it will stand still once it has tried to negotiate and conciliate, but I must tell him

that if he is developing these provisions as a panacea to prevent industrial action, he is living in cloud-cuckoo-land.

Mr. Skinner: He is a lawyer.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: Perhaps my hon. Friend will let me carry on. The Minister is living in cloud-cuckoo-land. If he is concerned, as I and my hon. Friends are concerned, about having orderly industrial relations that have been thought out and developed, he will take back his proposition, re-examine it, rectify its imbalances and force the employers to indulge in consultation and conciliation following the result of an industrial ballot.

11.38 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I wish to speak only briefly. The whole House has listened with attention to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) talking about Weil's disease and rats in mines, but tonight we are debating the danger of us once again having the "English disease" and becoming the sick man of Europe. That is why I am so disappointed that the Opposition intend to divide the House and to vote against this code of practice which can only help to improve industrial relations.

It is important that the country should have good industrial relations. The Labour party should remember its record when it was in power, when every year millions of days were lost through strikes. Between 1974 and 1978 in the private sector, some 390 working days were lost per 1,000 employees. Since then, the figure has dropped to 236 per 1,000. That shows that the legislation is working and that we should encourage its use.

I have today received a report from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce about a survey of the north-west chambers of commerce. It shows that there is confidence in future profitability. How on earth could exporters continue to have confidence in their profitability were it not for employment legislation that enabled them to run their businesses properly? The report states:

"One heartening result is an increase in orders for local exporters. Nearly half of those involved in foreign trade reported an increase in both deliveries and orders overseas."

That shows that the north-west is performing well. I do not want it to return to the days when there was a Labour Government, when industries were riddled with strikes and there was no hope of manufacturers and exporters looking forward with confidence.

I hope that Labour Members will stop and think before they divide the House tonight. I want to hear from them exactly what policy the Labour party has on such legislation. What position, in law, do they expect the unions to have? Do they expect real sanctions? Does the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) agree with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who has spoken about sanctions for the courts? Where does the Labour party stand on sequestration?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should stick to the motion before the House.

Mr. Thurnham: The Labour party's policy on points of the law is relevant to this motion, and I should be pleased to hear more about that policy.

11.42 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I speak in this debate with some experience of the issue as I was a trade union official for 12 years and during recent years have been involved in industrial ballots. I am not opposed in principle to ballots, but I am opposed to the one-sided nature of codes of practice such as the one before us tonight. It has nothing to do with democracy or with improving industrial practices. The section headings in the code include:

"Whether an industrial action ballot would be appropriate.

Preparing for an industrial action ballot.

Holding an industrial action ballot.

Following an industrial action ballot."

Assuming a vote is in favour of industrial action, that then takes place. Where is the code for when a dispute is resolved? Where is the democracy and the good industrial practice when it is possible to end an industrial dispute with only a show of hands? I accuse the Minister of sheer hypocrisy in peddling this shoddy little document as an act of democracy. It is as undemocratic to return to work on a show of hands as it is to strike on a show of hands.

The code has nothing to do with democracy. It is a further step down the road of anti-trade union action. It makes it as difficult as possible to strike and as easy as possible to return to work. It should be rejected for those reasons, if for no other.

11.43 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that, in such a short debate, it is not possible to do justice to all the points raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I shall try to extract the common themes in what has been said.

The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) opened the debate for the Opposition on the basis that the code could be criticised for what it was not, not what it was. He said that it had nothing to say about employers' roles in these matters. The important point to remember is that this is not a code about employers calling strikes. It is not a code about what employers might be doing. It is a code about strikes and about the trade unions that call them. It is surely right in a situation such as this that there should be a ballot. The argument that the code can be criticised simply because it does not address the role of employers in the situation seems to me not to be tenable.

The hon. Member for Stretford also seemed to be criticising the code for the fact that it would not automatically solve the problem of strikes. Quite obviously no code will do that. It is impossible to outlaw strikes and it would not be right to attempt to do so. At the end of the day there will always be situations in which working people will feel that they have to withdraw their labour. So criticism of the code on the basis that it will not stop strikes does not seem to me to have any validity whatsoever.

The code addresses a very important principle. Withdrawal of its labour by a work force is obviously a serious step that should not be taken lightly. All the working people involved ought to be able to ensure that they are given a vote and that it is conducted in a proper way. That is the purpose behind this document.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I thank the Minister for giving way when time is so short. Does all this mean that the Government are to put forward a code for employers in industrial disputes?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Lady misses the point. We are not dealing today with a code about employers; we are dealing with a code about the conduct of strikes. The hon. Lady will have to make a decision in due course—very soon, indeed—about this code, not some code that her party would introduce in the somewhat unlikely event that it was ever called to govern.

The curious thing about what the hon. Lady has said—and it has been echoed in a number of Opposition speeches—is that it is based on the really ridiculous proposition that if a ballot is conducted lawfully and in accordance with the code that should be an end of the matter. At that stage the employer should be expected to say that the workers have broken their contract of employment but it does not matter; they all agreed on what they would do, therefore he will not take any further action. That is a bizarre proposition—so bizarre that it was not adopted even by the last Labour Government; and if it was so bizarre as not to be adopted by them, one would not expect it to be advanced by the Labour party now. But that is the line that is being taken today.

The hon. Gentleman went on to talk about the code being one-sided and laying great stress on using only postal ballots. I really wonder at times what it is that so upsets the hon. Gentleman when he considers this code. Surely he will be the first to admit that there are circumstances in which ballots can be conducted in a way of which he would thoroughly disapprove. That has happened before, and it may happen again. It is surely right that there should be some arrangement to ensure that it does not happen.

When the hon. Gentleman says that this is effectively a code which is to be used against working people and not against employers, he simply could not be more wrong. He was supported in that view by a number of other hon. Members. When the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) talks about the Alliance having had a good, consistent and clear record on matters of this sort he takes a highly selective view of history. But I suppose that if one cannot decide what one's own party is called, one cannot decide what its policies are either.

What we have to face is this. In a few moments' time Labour Members will go into the Lobbies and apparently vote against this proposition, against the idea that there should be postal ballots. There are no "Hear, hears" for that, and I am surprised. They will say that they disagree with independent scrutiny, with the idea that a ballot should be conducted secretly. For all their yuppie convictions as espoused by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), they will say at the end of the day that it is the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) who still represents the real soul of the Labour party—time warped, locked into the language of the class war and knowing nothing about the world in which we live. We have moved beyond the ragged-trousered philanthropist, but the Labour party does not know it.

Question put:—

The House divided:—Ayes 204, Noes 142.

Division No. 43] **[11.49 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howells, Geraint
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew

Ryder, Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr.Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Frank Cook.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Code of Practice for Trade Union Ballots for Industrial Action, which was laid before this House on 17th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

European Fighter (Nose Radar Contract)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

12 midnight

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this important issue in the House tonight. It is certainly most convenient for the House that we should debate this subject now. First, it follows the important meeting that took place yesterday between the Secretary of State for Defence and his West German counterpart, and I hope that in due course we shall have some indication that the optimistic press reports are likely to be confirmed. I also welcome the fact that we have the chance to refer to the future of the Ferranti operations and, in particular, the announcement this evening that there is an agreement in principle for GEC to acquire Ferranti Defence Systems Limited and some Italian businesses of the Ferranti Defence Systems group for cash.

The House will be aware of my interest in this issue, primarily as an hon. Member from Edinburgh who is concerned about the future of the Ferranti business, about jobs and about the long-term future of the technology possessed by these companies.

A tremendous campaign has been mounted in support of Ferranti; the way things are unfolding is a culmination of that campaign. I pay tribute to all those who have taken part, to the work force, the trade unions, the management, Members of Parliament, the Minister of State, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, who have all played an important part in the progress that has been made on this issue.

I refer in the first instance to the argument that has gone on for two years about the nose radar contract for the European fighter aircraft. The Minister of State will probably be inhibited from saying anything beyond the official announcement made yesterday by the two Secretaries of State; but I will assume that the reports are broadly accurate, that there are strong grounds for optimism that they will be endorsed in due course and that within a few weeks we shall have the announcement of formal agreement among the four countries—Britain, West Germany, Italy and Spain—that the ECR90, the Euro-collaborative radar system, will be chosen for the European fighter aircraft.

The system is being chosen for powerful reasons. It is technically superior. There is no doubt that in detection performance for approaching or receding targets the ECR90 system will be a lot better than the MSD-2000 could ever be. There is no doubt about the electronic counter-counter-measures within the proposed ECR90 system to resist jamming. Nor is there any doubt about the importance of this new technology; it is a new generation of radar, and the spare computer power will be useful in the future. It is certainly a user-friendly system.

I believe that we have won the contract because the Government have stood firm, because the system is technically superior and because we owe it to the Royal Air Force and to the forces in West Germany, Spain and Italy to ensure that they have the best when they fly the European fighter aircraft. Taking into acount the major issues, it is also cheaper. Notwithstanding all the argument and the various bids, the total acquisition cost of the ECR90 will be cheaper than the rival MSD-2000.

I believe that the Minister will not contradict the statement that the studies show that there is no greater risk with the ECR90 than with the West German system, which is basically a modification of the APG65. For those reasons, it is crucial on military grounds that the radar system that has been developed by the consortium, including Ferranti, goes into the European fighter aircraft.

There are other important reasons why this is in the British interest. We should support British and European technology. It cannot be in the long-term interest of Europe or Britain to abdicate all major technological developments to big multinational companies based in the United States or Japan. There is no question of the enormous importance of that in relation to the radar system and the aeroplane itself. No doubt these are some of the reasons why the Spanish and Italian Governments have been firm on the issue throughout.

There are also trade benefits. Let us be clear about the position. If the ECR90 system is chosen, the four Governments will be in control of sales to third countries. It will not be a question of the attitude of the United States Government or of any other Government on the matter. It will be a decision for the four participating Governments. Whatever view one takes about the sale of aircraft to whatever powers—of course, there is scope for discussion and argument about that—I submit that in principle it is better on balance that the decision should be within the orbit of the countries involved in the manufacture of the plane and not any other country.

The jobs argument is crucial. We are talking about thousands and thousands of jobs. They will be good jobs in Ferranti, which has been a successful company, and also in GEC, which we trust will maintain conditions such as have existed in Ferranti and build on them.

Moving to the European fighter aircraft itself, it will not be a great victory if we win the radar contract and find eventually that the whole EFA project runs into the ground. I welcome the affirmation by the West German and British Governments that they recognise the need for EFA to go ahead. It will be a tremendously important conventional weapon to defend our people, although I hope that we will never use it.

That view has been put consistently over the years by the Ministry of Defence and accepted by the Select Committee on Defence. The Select Committee could have been more explicit, but it stated in a report on the major procurement programme:

> "It is the Ministry's view that the role of EFA could not be performed adequately by additional Tornado F3s and Harrier GR5s, neither of which possesses the performance, mission capability and agility of EFA."

Its role and importance cannot be disputed. I know that the Minister will not want to be drawn on this issue, but we can argue whether it might even replace some Tornado F3 fighters.

I do not expect the Minister to develop those issues at great length this evening. However, we need the aircraft because it is in the long-term interests of Britain's defence. Notwithstanding the developments of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the progress that we hope will be made in the talks in Vienna on conventional forces in Europe, I do not see how it could be in the interests of our country or of NATO for the EFA programme to be recued or cancelled to meet some agreement.

I support agreement between NATO and the Warsaw pact and want a reduction in conventional forces and, even

more, in nuclear forces. When we consider that this is an aeroplane for the 21st century, and recognise its scope in relation to the aging and replacement of existing systems and the importance of this radar, I do not see how it will make sense for Britain, Spain, Italy or West Germany to want to back off from their commitment to the European fighter aircraft.

The issue is inseparable from Ferranti. We are grateful for the meetings that we have had with Ministers—two with the Minister of State, one with the Secretary of State for Defence and one with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The argument, dialogue and discussion in the media have naturally revolved around Ferranti. I do not doubt that the West German Government were seeking to exploit that. I say that because the Ferranti problem—the loss of the £280 million, or whatever, through alleged fraud in the United States—did not reflect on the British technical capability. It could not reasonably be advanced as an argument that the work should not be done by Ferranti Defence Systems Limited in Scotland. But perhaps that argument was being advanced fairly strongly by the West German Government and, therefore, it is important to consider the position of Ferranti in the context of this debate.

Since the announcement of the fraud there have been, and may be more, sales of assets by the company. I hope that there will not be many more such sales. The standby rights issue may not now go ahead. We shall see whether it does by the beginning of next month. Most importantly, we have had the announcement of an agreement in principle between the GEC board and the Ferranti board that GEC will acquire, for £310 million, the Ferranti Defence Systems group—Ferranti Defence Systems Limited in Edinburgh and some smaller Italian businesses owned by Ferranti.

We should support that sale in principle. I believe that that will be the view of the Ferranti management, the workforce and Scotland and Britain generally. I am referring not just to Ferranti Defence Systems, which will probably become part of GEC, but to the other parts of Ferranti. There will still be thousands of jobs in Ferranti in Scotland, including some in Dalkeith, some in Livingston and some in the Edinburgh area. This is not a Scottish versus English issue. Under the agreement, if it takes place, Ferranti will continue in Scotland and England and FDSL will be acquired by GEC.

What conditions need to be met if we are to support the agreement which, I emphasise, is in principle only—nothing has been signed? First, we must be sure that the ECR90 system will be chosen. We must recognise that GEC had an involvement in the rival bid led by Telèfunken in West Germany. We must assume, and might guess, that that factor was discussed in yesterday's talks and there may be a link between the two. That is speculation on which the Minister may or may not wish to be drawn.

We assume that GEC will not pay £310 million for FDSL if it does not obtain the radar contract for all the EFA planes. That is why it is essential that the radar contract goes ahead.

The management structure must be right, which means that GEC's other air radar interests must become part of FDSL. After all, its turnover is about twice that of the GEC interests in question. A merger of GEC interests with FDSL interests in Edinburgh could take place, with the management of that combined operation based in Edinburgh but answerable ultimately to GEC's main board.

There must be some commitment by the GEC board to invest heavily in what can reasonably be described as a technological jewel in British industry's crown. I hope that the contract will go to a British firm because of the tremendous technical expertise and capability of Ferranti's Edinburgh work force and management, which was built up over not just a few years but a long period. FDSL has worked on the design of nose radar for two years, its development will take four years, and the contract could provide jobs and other benefits for the next 20 years. GEC must therefore undertake to invest heavily in the company that it may be taking over in the not-too-distant future.

We also need to ensure that the merger has the Government's approval. I shall not speculate on whether the proposed merger will be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I am not sure whether the market share situation is such that it will automatically trigger such a reference. I trust that the Government are clear about the interests of British industry and of Britain's defence.

It is true that if the merger goes ahead, GEC will dominate to some extent aspects of the defence industry, but it does so already in relation to some military contracts, as the Government prefer to award them to a British company. However, the defence market is not British but European, and that will be even more true in 1992. In fact, it is a world market—certainly in respect of a nose radar, which will confirm our world lead. It will allow us to sell not only planes using the radar to other countries, but the radar itself for use in planes produced in the future. It is a development of enormous importance, and it cannot be viewed simply as a matter of competition within the British economy. It would be wrong to suggest that it is in the interests either of British defence or of Britain's military forces for the project to be halted by MMC considerations alone.

Right hon. and hon. Members representing Ferranti workers and their families, trade unions, management and everyone else concerned are motivated by the need to maintain Ferranti's British jobs. Some 16,000 to 18,000 jobs exist in the United Kingdom, of which about 8,000 are in Scotland. Good employment will be created, giving areas of the country a real future. We hope that the radar contract will be confirmed and that the West German Government's undertakings probably sought yesterday were met by the British Government. Those thousands of jobs will be more secure, as will the thousands of jobs with subcontractors in Scotland and elsewhere in Britain.

Ferranti is Scotland's most important manufacturing employer. Assuming that Ferranti Defence Systems is sold to GEC, it will still be important. GEC will be even more important to the future of the Scottish economy. That is why I make no apology for asserting that there is an important Scottish interest here. I welcome the fact that hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies are present, and that there is a Scottish Minister on the Government Front Bench, because this is crucial to the Scottish economy.

I believe that we are getting it right, assuming that the radar contract is confirmed. If we get the ECR90 system and the arrangement that I have suggested in relation to GEC, we can go forward and invest in those enterprises, and our considerations will no longer be dominated by the

[Mr. Gavin Strang]

unfortunate fraud. I shall not comment on that. We tend to assume that we can rely on audited accounts. There is no question but that the accounts were phoney. However, we shall hear more about that in future.

I hope that the Minister will confirm the good news that has appeared on the media today, and will give some sign that the Government and everyone else concerned are making progress on the issue.

12.21 am

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): It is fortunate and timely that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) should be focusing the attention of the House on the question of the airborne radar to be selected for the air superiority fighter for the 2000s—the European fighter aircraft. The hon. Member has been most assiduous in pressing the case for ECR90. I have met him and a number of his colleagues on several occasions. I have listened to the points that he made in his speech this evening, and I am broadly in agreement with everything that he has said.

Ferranti Defence Systems Limited of Edinburgh has a distinguished record as a contractor for the Ministry of Defence in the field of high technology, and I recognise the hon. Member's concern to ensure that the company's proposal in the radar competition is fully recognised. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) and the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) have been similarly active, and by their endeavours in support of ECR90 they will have earned the respect of their constituents.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to this evening's announcement of the proposed acquisition by GEC of Ferranti Defence Systems Limited. My Department welcomes a solution which will maintain the future of Ferranti Defence Systems as an important and competent supplier. The companies informed the MOD that discussions were taking place, and of the benefits that they believed should accrue from the bid.

As far as the specific issue of EFA radar is concerned, although no decision has yet been reached, it is the case that the Federal German Ministry of Defence had previously expressed misgivings about placing such a substantial programme with Ferranti, given its then financial difficulties. I believe that today's announcement will provide reassurance to those concerns.

The proposed arrangement is a commercial judgment for the two companies concerned. The Director General of Fair Trading will, of course, consider the implications of the merger and advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. He will do so against a background of consultations in which the Department will be closely involved.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): The EFA programme——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We cannot have two hon. Members on their feet at the same time.

Mr. Clark: It is very unusual, but of course I will give way.

Mr. O'Neill: This is a very unusual debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We must congratulate the workers in Edinburgh on their efforts to keep faith with the programme when it seemed that all was against them. Can the Minister confirm that all the work in the ECR90 programme that was to go to Edinburgh will go there, and that none will be diverted to GEC-Marconi's subsidiary at Donnybristle, which was part of the Telefunken competition against Ferranti for the programme?

Mr. Clark: Employment and the allocation of work schedules are matters for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned, but I believe that those developments are necessarily beneficial and should be welcomed. I have been very pleased hitherto by the welcome that the House has extended to them.

Mr. O'Neill: In other words, the Minister does not know the answer to my question.

Mr. Clark: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should breach the conventions of the House on an occasion such as this, and particularly surprised that he should greet with such ill grace a development that has been widely welcomed. I admit that I do not know where the work will be placed; I can only tell the hon. Gentleman that, if the matter proceeds to the satisfactory conclusion that we all expect and for which we all hope, the jobs will be in Britain and not in Germany.

Much attention has rightly been focused on the radar issue, and it is best considered in the context of the overall EFA programme. It was only just over a year ago—in November 1988—that the memorandum of understanding on the development of EFA came into operation. Since then, the main development contracts for the aircraft and engine have been concluded with the four-nation Eurofighter and Eurojet consortia. Work on the prototype aircraft is proceeding well, as is the development of the engine and the selection of equipment.

The United Kingdom share of one third of the development of the aircraft represents a significant programme of work, and will provide major opportunities for British industry. It guarantees our continuing stake in key areas of advanced technology, as well as providing long-term employment prospects for many companies and their work forces.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East characteristically made a number of cogent points, and I am reassured to note that there is much common ground between us. Most important, we both want an early resolution of this long-running problem, and we both want EFA to be an effective aircraft for the defence of the United Kingdom in the 1990s and beyond. We also recognise that the radar is an essential element of the aircraft's weapon system.

The radar is the key to EFA's ability to detect, identify and attack hostile aircraft. Much of any air defence battle would be fought in a hostile electronic environment, with the opposing forces beyond each other's visual range. It would be fought at very high speed, and success would be largely dependent on the ability to hit the attacker first time with air-to-air missiles controlled by the radar. The ability to track multiple targets will be essential. Those considerations demonstrate both the complexity of any future air battle and the immense technical challenge faced by industry when developing the next generation of airborne radar.

As hon. Members will see, along with agility in combat and the preformance of its weapons, the radar will be the crucial element in determining EFA's superiority over a modern adversary. The radar chosen must therefore meet demanding specifications that follow from the operational needs of the four collaborating partners. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that competing bids for the contract have been subjected to very rigorous scrutiny. It has taken longer than we would have liked, but that is a measure of the importance that the EFA nations attach to this equipment.

During one of his meetings with me, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East asked me when I hoped that a decision would be made about the choice of radar for EFA. I seem to remember that I replied that I hoped that it would be made soon, and he reminded me that he had received just such a reply from my predecessor a year earlier.

If I could be more precise, I certainly would. I assure the House that it gives me no pleasure to be in the position of having to report at regrettably regular intervals that no decision has yet been made. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met his German counterpart on five occasions for discussions on EFA since coming into office barely five months ago. The last was only yesterday.

I recognise and, to a certain extent, share the frustration of hon. Members over the time that it is taking to decide on the future of the radar for EFA. Collaborative programmes are undoubtedly beneficial in terms of commonality of equipment, spares and support, and produce financial savings from longer production runs. We must also recognise, however, that there is sometimes a price to be paid in terms of the time taken to make decisions. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept my assurance that a decision is very close.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Rifkind presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to British Railways (to be presented under Section 7 of the Act); And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon 30 January and to be printed. [Bill 64.]

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it concern a matter requiring my immediate attention?

Mr. King: It does, Mr. Speaker. Today's Order Paper shows that there are to be questions to the Prime Minister at 3.15 pm. Is that an innovation—which my right hon. and hon. Friends would welcome, but which would terrify the Opposition—or simply a misprint?

Mr. Speaker: It is a misprint.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Recycling

1. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the environment protection technology scheme will include initiatives promoting recycling.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The EPT scheme supports research into technology, which will lead to higher environmental standards. We have decided to extend it to include aspects of recycling, which is a fundamental part of our policy to conserve resources and minimise pollution.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent reply and the news that recycling will feature heavily in the scheme. The Environmental Protection Bill will encourage local councils to become involved in recycling. My hon. Friend is aware of the problems at Lodmoor near Weymouth where methane is leaking from landfill sites because waste disposal was not dealt with properly in years gone by. Both the local council and the county council are planning to spend community charge payers' money on recycling. Will my hon. Friend assure me that proper funding will be provided, particularly in view of the revenue support grant that is available this year?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Environmental Protection Bill requires waste collection authorities to draw up recycling plans and to report on them. Local authorities will not themselves be required to undertake recycling, and I hope that private sector companies will perform the work that my hon. Friend mentioned. We acknowledge the need to encourage the use of recycled products so that the process can be economical.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Given that many people take the recycling of paper and of glass bottles as a matter of course, will the Government now place emphasis on plastics recycling?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We intend to include in the EPT scheme research into plastics recycling. It is partly a problem of better collection and sorting, but research is needed also into the use of plastic products. We want to put money behind good research that will help to increase the present low percentage of use.

Mr. David Martin: Does my hon. Friend agree that environmental protection must be seen increasingly in an international context? As I understand that the European Environment Agency is looking for a home, will my hon. Friend promote the interests of Portsmouth as its location? Portsmouth has excellent links to the continent through its ferry port and roads, which would make it an ideal base for the agency.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Portsmouth would be a strong candidate, but we have chosen Cambridge as the candidate site that we are promoting to the European Commission. We hope very much that the agency will be sited in this country.

Ms. Walley: Everyone welcomes any recycling initiative, but does not the Minister acknowledge that there is no substitute for a national recycling plan? Will he have regard to the glut of recycled material collected by local authorities? Does he agree that there are at times more important matters than plain market forces, to consider—such as concern for the environment?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Hasty interference in the market has led to a glut of low-grade waste paper. Subsidies and mandatory recycling in West Germany and in certain American states have led to an oversupply of low-grade waste paper. We are anxious to match that supply with increased demand. The American experience shows that interference before planning has the opposite effect.

Mr. Steen: I am sure that the Minister is aware that we are very conservation minded in south Devon, and that a large number of voluntary groups are collecting litter and paper. Will he explain what help the Government will give them so that they do not collect paper that nobody wants to use, thereby allowing the cutting down of more trees in the tropical rain forests?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I acknowledge the excellent work on recycling that my hon. Friend does. He refers to the glut of low-grade waste paper. I am aware that three investment schemes are in progress to improve the use of and increase the demand for waste paper. I shall draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs to his points.

Homelessness

2. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the most recent survey undertaken by his Department as to the number of homeless people living rough on the streets of London; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Michael Spicer): The most recent count of rough sleepers in London was carried out last year by the department of psychology at the university of Surrey for the Salvation Army. It reported 753 people sleeping rough on the streets of 17 boroughs.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware that that is a deplorable reply? A known problem is worsening month by month, and he says that the most recent survey was last year. Does he read the reports of the Salvation Army and the London housing unit, which outline the enormity of the problem? It has been caused directly by the Government—by the lack of low-rent accommodation and the cutting of benefits to those most in need. Instead of the supposed voice of concern, when will we hear from Ministers about real action to end this scandal in London and many other parts of Britain?

Mr. Spicer: Of course, we accept the seriousness of the problem of the number of people sleeping rough. We have already earmarked £250 million to relieve the problem of the homeless, and that will release some hostel space for people sleeping rough. As a matter of urgency, we are considering further steps to solve this serious problem.

Sir George Young: Is my hon. Friend aware how much we welcome his appointment and wish him well in his new responsibilities? Does he agree that a vigorous extension of the tenants' incentive scheme, to enable council tenants living in cities to move out and to buy their own home, would enable many homeless people currently living in bed and breakfast accommodation to be rehoused within 12 months? Will he confirm that that scheme will have high priority in his approach to dealing with the problem?

Mr. Spicer: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. The thrust of our policies is to ensure that, first, new homes are built and, secondly, that they are owned by the people who live in them. We have a multitude of schemes for converting tenancy into ownership. That is a combination that will help to solve this serious problem.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Minister aware that, in addition to his own Department not carrying out surveys, it took the Home Office six months—from July to December last year—to write to me to explain that it does not collect statistics, except a year or a year and a half in arrears, on the number of young people who are being prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act 1824, for homelessness on the streets of London? Does it not behove his Department and the Home Office to organise the statistical collection of information that I get week after week from barristers at the Horseferry road magistrates court, which is only 300 yd from this building, and from elsewhere in London? The evidence shows that every week more teenagers are being prosecuted for lack of money and for sleeping rough on the streets of London. When will the Minister get the facts?

Mr. Spicer: I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman thought the matter through, he would appreciate that facts are difficult to come by because of the nature of the problem. There is no disagreement between the two sides of the House about the seriousness of the matter. There is no question about that. The issue is how we are to solve the problem, and we are urgently applying our minds to that.

Mr. Jessel: What proportion of those people are young people under 18? Could not, and should not, some of that number return to live with their parents?

Mr. Spicer: It seems that a growing number of young people form part of the increasing population who are sleeping rough. It is certainly part of our policy to do as my hon. Friend suggests and encourage them to go home, and among the first things that the voluntary organisations do are to ask them why they left home and to try to persuade them to return.

Mr. Cox: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the deplorable nature of that reply, I give notice that I shall seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Housing Grants

3. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider linking grant rates to a definition of affordability of housing based on an agreed percentage of disposable income; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Chris Patten): Landlords who provide rented housing with the help of public subsidy are already expected to charge rents within the reach of those in low-paid employment, and are best placed to decide what such rents should be.

Ms. Ruddock: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply, but it is wholly inadequate. Last year the Government forced the providers of such public housing—housing associations—to put up their rents by 24 per cent., thus compelling them to abandon the very goals that the right hon. Gentleman has just reiterated. Public housing rents are now forcing people into poverty.

Mr. Patten: I am not sure that the hon. Lady's propositions are entirely correct. As I believe she knows, the rates of grant for housing association schemes are aimed broadly at enabling housing associations to set rents that comply with the tenants' guarantee. We wish to stand by that guarantee, as do the Housing Corporation and housing associations, so that the accommodation that they provide is within reach of those in low-income employment.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with the present generous system of housing benefit for those in need, low rents do nothing to help those with housing problems? What is more, do not Labour councils that are engaging in what might be called a rent holiday with the approach of the district council elections care less about housing problems than about gaining votes in those elections?

Mr. Patten: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's last point: such conduct demonstrates the irresponsibility of some Labour authorities. As my hon. Friend implied, housing benefit covers any increases in rents and, as he knows, we are currently spending more than £5 billion on housing benefits.

Mr. Soley: The Secretary of State is not only complacent but ill-informed. That is probably why the turnover of Ministers responsible for housing has now reached a rate of more than one a year. Assuming that the present Minister remains in his post for long enough before being evicted, will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind that housing association rents went up by 24 per cent. last year? No one disputes that figure—except, apparently, the Secretary of State. If the Government really care about housing problems and homelessness, when will they get their act together and adopt a housing policy that delivers homes at prices that people can afford, whether for rent or for sale?

Mr. Patten: We have been fortunate in having a succession of excellent Ministers responsible for housing, although it would be invidious for me to suggest that each has been better than his or her predecessor. I am sure that my hon. Friend the current Minister is as delighted as I am that we are now set to double the Housing Corporation's programme, and that the money going to the housing associations is to increase twofold over the next three years.

Mr. Knapman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who shout loudest for open government are often the last to divulge details of their own policies, particularly when it comes to housing?

Mr. Patten: It seems that the Opposition are opaque not only about their housing policies but about some of their other policies, particularly those on local government finance. They all wait avidly for the next appearance of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in the television studios so that they can learn something about Opposition policies.

Paint Spray Cans

4. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to protect the environment from the effects of paint spray cans.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): Damage to property by graffiti—whether caused by spray paint or otherwise—is already an offence under the Criminal Damage Act 1971, attracting a possible maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment. However, the scourge of graffiti will be removed permanently only when it is brought home to those responsible that their activities are unacceptable. The role of parents and schools in this educative process is clearly of the utmost importance.

Mr. Ashton: The Minister is blaming everyone else. What does he intend to do to prevent the walls in practically every city in Britain being covered by disgusting graffiti? The Minister said nothing about that. First, why does he not introduce a simple law that would prevent paint spray cans being sold to people under 18? Secondly, why does he not introduce a law that would oblige people buying paint spray cans to give their name and address to the shop? The police could then easily trace them when graffiti appeared on walls in the neighbourhood. Simple measures such as that would deter children—it is children, not adults—from doing this. The way to deter them is not by Acts of Parliament.

Mr. Trippier: I share the hon. Gentleman's views about what is clearly a disgusting habit, but he is being uncharacteristically unfair when he says that we are not doing anything about it. I have heard some of his suggestions before. I do not believe that they would be all that effective. They would be extremely difficult to enforce, particularly the taking of names and addresses. That would place an unduly onerous burden on shopkeepers. Many thousands of paint spray cans are sold for legitimate use every year. It is doubtful whether offenders could be tracked down. The House should acknowledge that the Department of the Environment is spending a sizeable amount of money, through its estate action programme, on helping to combat graffiti on rundown council estates. Under the urban programme, we are spending more than £500,000 on anti-graffiti and anti-vandalism projects.

Mr. Summerson: Will my hon. Friend consider using his good offices to persuade the manufacturers of paint spray cans to institute a recycling system? That would be much better than the Romanian idea put across by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton).

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to confirm that we are approaching those companies.

Homelessness

5. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to change the rules of local connection in the Government's review of the homelessness legislation.

Mr. Michael Spicer: We are committed to discussing with local authority associations a thorough overhaul of the "rules" of local connection. It is for local authorities to put forward their views on the most appropriate arrangements.

Mr. Skinner: I hardly dare ask whether the Minister is aware that, whatever rule changes are made with regard to local connection, they will be insignificant compared with the need for a massive public sector housebuilding programme throughout Britain. When the Minister goes to the Strand and sees people living in cardboard boxes, he will understand the reality of the past 10 years of running down the housebuilding programme. There are millions of bricks in stock, thousands of building workers ready to be employed and millions of homeless people. One does not need to be a Pythagoras to put the three together.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman and I have been sparring over coal matters for many years. He seems to be as wrong about this subject as he is about coal. A massive increase in funds is going through the Housing Corporation to housing associations. That will double the rate of build by those associations during the next two years. The hon. Gentleman is right that shelter must be provided. That is precisely what the Government are doing by means of a panoply of policies that affect both the private and the public sector. As those policies affect the private as well as the public sector, the hon. Gentleman ignores them.

Mr. David Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is sufficient housing accommodation in London to accommodate 10 times the number of homeless people there? The long-term homeless have turned their back on

society. Young offenders should be the responsibility of their parents, not of this Government. The Government have done quite enough for the homeless. I hope that they will spend no more money on them.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the problem of homelessness goes much deeper than Opposition Members seem to imply. It has to do, for instance, with the relationship between parents and their children, as my hon. Friend said. It is also an international problem; one of the countries in which it is rife is Denmark. The problem has been in existence for years. I was involved 25 years ago in the setting up of Crisis at Christmas, so homelessness has been with us for a long time. It is a great problem and it will be a great challenge to solve it.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister aware that homelessness goes no deeper than the fact that there are not enough homes at affordable prices for people who desperately need them? One does not need a degree in housing administration to work that out. Will the hon. Gentleman take note of the fact that in the mid-1970s local authorities in London were building about 25,000 units of accommodation a year, whereas last year they built fewer than 2,000? That is the problem of homelessness: the homes are not being built.

Will the Minister assure us that the Department will carry out a full survey of homelessness in London? As he is new to his job, will he take up the offer made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and go out to the streets of London to see this critical problem?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised, perhaps, to know that one of the first things that I did in my new job was to go out to see the problem on the streets, as he might have expected of me. Part of the homelessness problem has been caused by the tremendous mismanagement by councils of their estates throughout the country, which has resulted in uninhabitable properties being empty. That is one of the reasons why we are spending £250 million to upgrade those properties—that is a contribution to solving the homelessness problem.

Thomas Brown (Waste Disposal Licence)

6. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce a decision concerning the appeal by Thomas Brown of Whinfield farm, Pennington, regarding the revocation by Cumbria county council of his waste disposal licence, lodged in summer 1988.

Mr. Trippier: Written representations have been completed on this appeal, lodged on 16 September 1988, and an official from the Department will make a site visit on 20 February. The Secretary of State hopes to be able to determine the appeal once he has received the site visit report.

Mr. Franks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for having taken a personal interest in this matter since I tabled the question. I am sure that he will agree, if only in private, that it is not only unsatisfactory, but an utter disgrace that it has taken 18 months for the Department to arrange a routine site inspection on a routine appeal. Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity provided by this question, and by others tabled by hon. Members on both sides of the House, to look at the appeals procedure, which is the weakest part of the planning process?

Mr. Trippier: I am prepared to go further than my hon. Friend expects me to, in that I am prepared to say publicly that I think the delay wholly unacceptable. I am grateful to him for drawing this matter to my attention. There is certainly enormous pressure on staff time, but, as a result of my hon. Friend drawing this matter to my attention, I shall ensure that the process is speeded up.

Pollution Inspectorate

7. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received on the staffing and resources of Her Majesty's inspectors of pollution.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations, mainly from hon. Members and from, or on behalf of, local authorities.

Mr. Michael: What will the Minister do about those representations? Vacancies are running at about 20 per cent. across professional grades; there is low morale and poor recruitment; and about 32 staff, compared with Holland's 1,000, are dealing with air pollution. So how does the Minister expect us to believe that the Government are serious about tackling pollution?

Mr. Trippier: It was the Government's idea to set up the inspectorate in the first place and we are very proud of that. The inspectorate of pollution is a powerful agency, set up by us and staffed by talented and highly dedicated people who are committed to ensuring better protection of the environment. It is very sad that the hon. Gentleman should seek to devalue the currency of that. It is true that there are vacancies now, but as I told the first sitting of the Standing Committee considering the Environmental Protection Bill yesterday, whatever resources HMIP needs to do its job it will have.

We have been short of applications for the vacancies, but in the past we have been short of people who were up to the necessary quality to fill the vacancies. We have an accelerated recruitment programme, which we hope will end by February, by when I hope to be able to tell the House that we have filled the vacancies.

Mr. Onslow: Has my hon. Friend received any representations from the chairman of the National Rivers Authority?

Mr. Trippier: Yes, I have on this specific matter, and we shall have to consider them under the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the Minister expand on his statement in Committee yesterday that whatever resources HMIP requires in future will be available? Will he confirm that that has been cleared with the Treasury, and will the same resources be allocated to local authorities, which under part I of the Bill, will share responsibility with HMIP?

Mr. Trippier: The recruitment of local authority staff is not the responsibility of the Department of the Environment or any other Department. Several local authorities would have much to say if we were so to

interfere. I think that the hon. Lady prepared her supplementary question prior to hearing my substantive answer to the question on the Order Paper. I clearly said that HMIP will be given whatever resources it needs to do its job.

Mr. Adley: Will my hon. Friend confirm that noise is one of the problems being considered under the Environmental Protection Bill? Will he further confirm that the Department of Transport appears heavily to have censored the content of the Bill, and will he take this opportunity, if I am wrong, to deny that it has insisted that aircraft noise be excluded from consideration?

Mr. Trippier: It is true that we have set up a committee to study noise and that we shall consider certain aspects of noise pollution under the Environmental Protection Bill. The Department of Transport is reviewing aircraft noise. Whether it will be involved in considerations prior to the White Paper is another matter.

Local Government Finance

8. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his latest initiatives to publicise the introduction of the poll tax.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. David Hunt): A public information campaign is currently taking place. It is designed to ensure that as many as possible of the 10 million people who could be helped through the payment of community charge benefit, and of the 6 million people who could be helped through the provision of transitional relief, know whether they need to apply in order to receive such help.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Minister aware that no matter how much the Department spends on television advertisements, such as the pensioner telling her dog "Flash" about so-called community charge benefit, the reality is that 1 million people in Scotland are not paying the poll tax? They are likely to be joined in April by millions more in England and Wales [HON. MEMBERS: "Including Labour Members?"] Yes, including more than 30 of my hon. Friends. The Minister may think that the battle ended last Thursday with the containment of a few Tory rebels, but, in the words of Ronald Reagan, "He ain't seen nothing yet."

Mr. Hunt: I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman will carefully reflect on what he has just said. He is in a position of authority by virtue of his membership of this honourable House. Will he reflect on the fact that by his action his constituents will have to pay a higher community charge so that he and his cronies can have a free ride?

Mr. Squire: Is my hon. Friend aware that I have a press release from the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) which mentions up to 30 Labour Members of Parliament joining a mass non-payment campaign? Will he accept that those of us who have always been agnostic about the community charge have never suggested that we support non-payment? We fully represent and recognise Parliament's standing in passing laws. Will my hon. Friend join me in recognising that any campaign to encourage the non-payment of taxes can only be in the worst interests of this country and, above all, can only reflect badly on the Labour party?

Mr. Hunt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The privilege of membership of this mother of Parliaments confers on us not only rights and privileges but also duties and responsibilities. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) sets a very bad example to the country in seeking to urge others not to pay as well as saying that he will not himself pay the community charge. It is, however, very much a matter for the Labour party, and I urge the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and his colleagues to join me in condemning the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not think that we will have any difficulty in defeating the poll tax at the ballot box.

Given the Secretary of State's admission last Thursday that the standard spending assessment system on which local authorities' assessment of need is based is inadequate, given that the distribution system was admitted to be flawed and in need of revision for next year and given the undisputed fact that poll tax figures in at least two thirds of local authorities will be somewhere in the region of £60 to £100 above the Government's target figures, will the Minister stop blaming local government and admit that the £3 so-called ceiling on increases is a myth and that the transition system which is being publicised is, therefore, unacceptably flawed when it comes to what people will get? Will he redirect our money away from propaganda and towards telling people the truth?

Mr. Hunt: I greatly regret that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) did not take this early opportunity of criticising his hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East and of making it clear that his hon. Friend would get no support from him.

As regards the hon. Gentleman's other points, we made it clear in the debate, and I made it clear to the Association of District Councils yesterday, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are perfectly prepared to look at any new evidence that councils wish to adduce as to why their position under the standard spending assessment should be improved. That remains our position. It is now a fact, however, that as the last piece of the jigsaw goes in and every council in the country knows the amount of external finance that it will receive, the level of the community charge is now up to every council to decide.

Sir Dudley Smith: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that many well-conducted councils face a tremendously above-average increase in the community charge? After this first year, will he please go into the whole question of the grant formula to see whether councils can be more fairly treated?

Mr. Hunt: I agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) is an effective lobbyist on behalf of his area and the Warwickshire county council. I reiterate that we shall look at any new evidence that he seeks to adduce as to why the standard spending asessment in Warwickshire does not reflect the county's actual needs, but I remind him that nationally the total of the SSAs is 11 per cent. above the equivalent total for grant-related expenditures in the coming year and the external finance goes up by 8·5 per cent.

Homelessness

9. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to tackle the problem of homelessness.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In consultation with local authority associations and voluntary organisations, we are now taking forward the proposals that my right hon. Friend set out in his statement of 15 November, following our review of the homelessness legislation.

Mr. Orme: Following the exchanges this afternoon, does not the Minister agree that this issue is now a national scandal? It is not just a London problem but is to be found throughout the cities and towns of our country, including my own area of Manchester and Salford? Will his Department initiate a census and report back to the House within one month on the size of the problem and how to deal with it?

Mr. Spicer: This is not just a problem in London or the other cities in the United Kingdom, it is an international problem—many countries suffer from the same phenomenon at present.

It is very difficult to get accurate figures because the population is mobile, but we aim to get as accurate a picture as possible because, as the right hon. Member and many other right hon. and hon. Members have said, the matter is one of considerable urgency to us. There is no question about that. I give the House a firm assurance that we are treating the problem in an urgent manner. The amount of £2 million is available to voluntary organisations to be used to the best advantage.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: As my hon. Friend said in answer to an earlier question, one of the main causes of homelessness is the apparent shortage of rented accommodation, especially in London. Does he recall that last year the Environment Select Committee made it clear that Labour-controlled housing authorities were keeping properties empty for inordinate periods? That is grossly inefficient. What are my hon. Friend and his colleagues doing to ensure that those authorities make better use of their housing stock, thereby reducing homelessness in the capital?

Mr. Spicer: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government have launched many programmes that have that effect. The estate action programme is a highly imaginative scheme which the Government introduced to ensure that, in particular, Labour-controlled council property is put to far better use than it has been recently. I agree with my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Fearn: Is the Minister aware that many voluntary organisations catering for the homeless are desperately short of money? How much of the £2 million will be distributed to the north-west of England, where we have a great homelessness problem, or is the Minister leaving it entirely to voluntary organisations to sort the matter out?

Mr. Spicer: No. The Government will be deeply involved in the allocation of the funds. We may use the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux as a means of co-ordinating part of the distribution of the funds. The Government are taking an intense interest in the allocation.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend accept that anyone in his right mind has much sympathy with people who are homeless? Over the past few weeks, and especially last Thursday, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* ran 48 pages of job advertisements. All those jobs were available for people who wanted them. People who have the good jobs that are advertised in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* can afford a home. Let us not think that anyone who is homeless is deprived by the Government—often such people do not want to work and do not want to thrive.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend makes a very strong point. It must be said, however, that one of the features of those who are roofless and sleeping rough is, of course, that they find it difficult to get jobs.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Of course.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend says, "Of course." That is one reason why the problem is unacceptable. Many of these people are children, and our first advice to them is, therefore, to go back to their parents.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls

10. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ban the importation of all polychlorinated biphenyls.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have no plans to ban the importation of all polychlorinated biphenyl waste. To do so would be environmentally irresponsible when we have facilities for safe disposal and effective notification and monitoring controls. But the Environmental Protection Bill contains powers to restrict, and if necessary to ban, imports of waste—including PCB waste—where there are risks of pollution or harm to human health.

Mr. Livsey: Given that the Government are moving towards banning transfrontier shipments of hazardous waste, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a strong case for tabling an amendment to the Environmental Protection Bill to prevent toxic waste and PCBs coming to Britain from developed countries?

Mr. Patten: We have argued within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Community that, by and large, developed countries—the OECD members—should deal with their own toxic waste. We must limit the amount of movement of toxic waste between countries. I do not think that it would be right to press for a ban. If I did that, I would be a Secretary of State whose decisions had led to illegal dumping at sea and on African beaches.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that environmental pollution does not recognise national frontiers? We would like industrial waste, especially toxic waste, disposed of in the country of origin. Nevertheless, because Britain has at its disposal plant that is capable of handling such waste safely, we have a moral duty to the rest of the world to accept it, and that is totally in keeping with our lead on green matters internationally.

Mr. Patten: We have first-class technology, as my hon. Friend says, for dealing with toxic waste. The House probably recognises that the overwhelming majority of

waste that we deal with is produced in this country; only about 5 per cent. of it comes from abroad. That is a far smaller proportion than in many other countries.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the Secretary of State condemn the practice of Rechem International—the chemical company that imports PCBs—of issuing writs like confetti against anyone who criticises it, thus stifling any possibility of public debate? Fourteen writs have been issued. I must admit a vested interest; I am one of the 14 people being sued. Will not the Minister accept that what he has said is wrong? There are plans for increasing the amount of imports. Will he confirm that between October 1988 and August 1989, 6,700 tonnes of toxic waste came into the country, that Rechem is increasing its capacity for incinerating toxic waste and PCBs from 82,000 tonnes to 150,000 tonnes and that the Government are allowing one shipload of toxic waste and PCBs a week into the country? The Government are ministering purposely over the trade in poison to mask the balance of payments deficit in manufactured goods.

Mr. Patten: Even by the hon. Gentleman's standards that is average nonsense. I do not want to come between the hon. Gentleman and his solicitors or anybody else's solicitors. The figures that I gave earlier are correct. Only about 5 per cent. of the waste that is dealt with in this country comes from abroad. We have pressed internationally to limit as much as possible the movement of toxic waste. We will continue to press home that initiative.

New Towns Commission

11. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next proposes to meet the chairman of the Commission for the New Towns.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): The date of my next meeting with the chairman of the Commission for the New Towns has not yet been fixed.

Mr. Soames: When my hon. Friend meets the chairman of the Commission for the New Towns, will he remind him that the commission made an exceptionally successful investment in properties of which it is now disposing in new towns, from which the taxpayer is being paid a handsome return? Will my hon. Friend have a word with the Treasury to see whether it is possible to establish from the proceeds of the sales a charitable fund of a very small amount per annum, the percentage to be agreed, to provide community projects in the new towns concerned?

Mr. Chope: The commission already has power under statute to make contributions to local charities and other voluntary organisations. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about the extent of those contributions. I shall be happy to raise that matter at my next meeting with the chairman of the commission.

Water Standards

12. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his latest estimates of the capital investment required to meet European Community directives on water standards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have notified the Commission of the £1·8 billion that water undertakers in England and Wales will be spending over the next five years to remedy current situations of non-compliance with the EC drinking water directive.

Water companies also have investment programmes totalling £1·4 billion to improve bathing water quality.

Mr. Welsh: Why is it taking European court action against the British Government to force the pace in bringing British water supplies up to recommended European standards? Is it not disgraceful that levels of aluminium, lead and other substances above European standards are daily being ingested by millions of people in Britain? As a lead pipe replacement programme would solve the lead problem, is the Minister encouraging his housing colleagues to reverse their present policy of reducing finance for such a project as part of a general scheme to bring British water supplies up to European standards?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman mentioned lead. In fact, our national standards are more stringent than that required under the European directive. He also mentioned aluminium, where the directive standard is aesthetic rather than for health reasons because water containing aluminium can appear cloudy even though it is safe to drink. We have drawn up a comprehensive and fully funded programme of compliance and agreed it with the water service companies

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Richard Holt.

Hon. Members: Favouritism.

Mr. Speaker: It is not favouritism, it is compassion.

Mr. Holt: My hon. Friend may be aware that at lunchtime today I had the privilege of hosting a table of parliamentary guests from Belgium, who are in this country to discuss water because of the excellence of our supplies. They said that Brussels does not have a single water purification plant. In view of that, before the EEC starts telling us what to do with our water, it should get its own house in order.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We understand that the Commission has begun infraction proceedings against virtually every other member state. Even if we do appear before the European Court for an alleged breach of the drinking water directive, it will be our first case. I remind my hon. Friend that 68 other breaches of environmental directives by other member states have already come to court. Instead of being the dirty man of Europe, we have one of the best programmes and records of compliance of any country in Europe.

Mr. Ron Brown: Is not London water recycled six or seven times? That may go down well with some people —possibly because it is time that people in the city had a pure water supply. Is not that a basic right? Is it not something that the Government should consider with real intent as these basic issues will arise time and again? It is a rip off.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: London water is entirely safe to drink, even if it has been recycled through the hon. Gentleman. The Water Act 1989, by placing those companies in the private sector, has given them access to additional investment finance, while setting rigorous independent scrutiny by regulations.

Housing Investment

13. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received following the announcement of allocations to local authorities for their housing investment programmes in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: Very few representations have been received. While some have been critical, others have welcomed the doubling of HIP allocations in 1990-91 and the better targeting of those resources.

Mr. Nicholson: My hon. Friend will be aware that, during progress on last year's Local Government Housing Bill, I made several representations about the specific problems in the urban areas of Taunton Deane. We are grateful for the recognition of those problems in next year's allocations. We also note that the inner cities again receive the lion's share of the new money. As my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) pointed out, Labour councils do not always use their resources effectively. Will my hon. Friend the Minister, do his best to ensure that those Labour councils fill their empty council homes, collect rent and rate arrears and work constructively with the private sector to meet housing need?

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his appreciation of the increased HIP allocation for Taunton Deane. It has almst quadrupled for next year and it shows the effectiveness of our new system of targeting. My hon. Friend was right to express frustration at the way that many Labour authorities use the large sums of money that the Government make available to them. I hope that more of them will heed his points and get better value for money.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Minister confirm that local authority associations have made repeated representations to his Department because the HIP programme has been reduced? Will he also confirm that the reduction during the past 10 years under this Government has meant a reduction in affordable homes and in homes available for the elderly? Even with the increase for 1991, is there not a reduction of more than 25 per cent. on last year because of the way that the housing programme has been manipulated by his Department? When will he give the full facts about the housing investment programme and about the needs and demands of the local authorities that are required to meet the need for affordable housing?

Mr. Chope: I am sorry to have to tell the House that the hon. Gentleman has got his facts wrong. HIP allocations next year will be more than £2 billion, which is more than double this year's allocation, and total public expenditure on housing capital next year will be more than £4·4 billion, which is 7 per cent. higher than this year's provision.

Association of District Councils

14. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Association of District Councils; and what was discussed.

Mr. Chris Patten: My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities addressed the ADC national symposium yesterday. He spoke about the revenue support grant settlement.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Amber Valley has done extremely well out of the safety net arrangements, for which we are extremely grateful to the areas that have contributed? Does he also agree that if the community charge in Derbyshire generally ends up being higher than the estimates, it will be due solely to the profligacy of Derbyshire county council?

Mr. Patten: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend and I look also for the endorsement of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Gould: But what answer can the Secretary of State give to the Tory chairman of the ADC, who said last week on behalf of the association that the Government's poll tax estimates were artificially low? What answer can he give to poll tax payers in Tory-controlled districts and elsewhere who, when their bills arrive on 1 April, will be outraged to find that they are required to pay much more than the Government have so far let on? What answer can he give to his own hon. Friends, including the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), who know all too well what is in store for their constituents, or does he think that all those people are wrong and only he is right?

Mr. Patten: I give to those councillors and to others the answer that I gave the House last week—the main determinant in community charge levels next year will be the rate of spending by local authorities. I wonder when the hon. Gentleman will be answering the point put by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities earlier this afternoon. We waited with edge-of-the-seat enthusiasm just now to discover whether the hon. Gentleman would condemn his hon. Friend the free riders of the Militant tendency.

Council House Sales

15. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the right-to-buy legislation since 1980.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The 174,000 sales in 1988-89 bring the number of tenants who have exercised their right to buy their homes to more than 1·1 million.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that complete reply. Does he agree that the sale of council houses represents the greatest shift of assets to the individual that the United Kingdom has ever experienced, and would he care to comment on the Labour party's policy? Although the Opposition say that they would maintain the sale of council houses, they will not confirm that they will maintain the discount system. Does my hon. Friend further agree that, without discounts, the sale of council houses would stop and that the Labour party's policy is typical humbug yet again?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is right on all counts, I think, although the Labour party's policy on the right to buy is a bit of a mystery. It seems that the Opposition have performed a volte face and decided that they now like a policy that they originally attacked, as they attack so many of our policies at their inception. On the other hand, there seems to be no question of the Labour party's giving incentives to buy. Moreover, it would seem from leaks of the Labour party's policy that its new policy on local

taxation would give a kick in the teeth to those who have bought their council houses. I do not know what sort of a policy that is.

Dr. Reid: Is the Minister aware that some Labour Members have always been pleased to support the provision of opportunities for working people to obtain their own homes, either by purchase or by rent? What we find criminal is that the selling-off of existing council houses has not been complemented by the building of new council houses for people who cannot afford to purchase their own homes. Is it not a very one-sided and unfair policy that correctly provides for the majority of people in Scotland and throughout Britain to purchase their own homes but at the same time deprives local authorities of the moneys necessary to provide the homeless and those on low incomes, who have no prospect of purchasing their own homes, with a roof over their heads?

Mr. Spicer: The Government take account of the total housing stock in Britain, and that has been expanding rapidly particularly in recent times. The hon. Gentleman will know that there is a massive increase ahead in expenditure in public sector housing by the Housing Corporation and housing associations, which will combine public with private money to build new homes, and that is precisely the way it should go in future.

Olympic Games

16. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to meet those bidding to host the 1996 Olympic games in Manchester.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I met members of the bid team on 2 October last year to discuss progress on Manchester's Olympic bid and am ready to meet them again at any time. They are well aware of the Government's enthusiastic support for Manchester's bid.

Mr. Sumberg: Is my hon. Friend aware of the concern among those who support this bid that the unofficial cricket tour of South Africa may jeopardise Manchester's chances of hosting the Olympics in 1996? Does he agree that that would be most unfair to Manchester? Will he use his considerable influence with the Olympic authorities to promote Manchester's bid for 1996?

Mr. Moynihan: I do not think that my hon. Friend's fears will be confirmed. On the contrary, I believe that the bid will be looked at on its merits. Manchester and the north-west of England have a long and illustrious sporting tradition and are well versed in providing for the very best in sport. I am confident that holding the games in Manchester would be a fitting tribute to the centenary of the modern Olympic movement.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does anyone not have a point of order?

Mr. Speaker: A good question. Mr. Heffer first.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, when my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) raised some points with the Prime Minister in relation to the chairman of the Conservative party, you were quick to rush in and tell him that the Prime Minister had no responsibility. I did not argue with that; we all know she has not.

But today, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) raised the question of Labour party policy. He droned on for some time and you did not make a move, Mr. Speaker, in relation to that matter. If we are to have a decision about Conservative party policy—I do not disagree with that—then the same must apply to the Labour party and——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Heffer: It must apply to the Labour party and——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Heffer: —to any other party in the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No. This is an abuse. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has been here long enough to know that we frequently discuss party politics across the Floor of the Chamber. What happened yesterday—and I am not prepared to go over what happened yesterday—as the hon. Member for Walton well knows, is that there was a question to the Prime Minister from the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) about an individual Member, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer). It was not about the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), Mr. Speaker. Is it not a fact that the real point at issue——

Mr. Heffer: I had not finished.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not seek to bully me. I have given the hon. Member an answer. Mr. Pawsey.

Mr. Heffer: But, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pawsey: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is not the real point at issue the fact that no Member rose from the Opposition Benches actually to say what Labour policy was on the discount of council houses?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a clear continuation of Question Time. I will take points of order now, if they are matters with which I can deal, but we cannot have a continuation of Question Time or, as I have said to the hon. Member for Walton, a continuation of what went on yesterday. That was bad enough.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. News is just coming through that a helicopter on hire by Strathclyde police has crashed on a sheltered housing complex near Eastwood Toll in my constituency. I understand that at least one death has been reported so far. Would you consider sympathetically a request from the Scottish Office for a statement to be made on the matter in the near future?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me, although I am sure that the House will be distressed to hear what the hon. Gentleman had to say. However, I am sure that his comments have been heard by the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. With great respect, and understanding your problems, you will be aware that, just before 3.30 pm, you called the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), who asked a very important question about attracting the Olympic games to this country. He associated that point, quite rightly, with the vital question of South Africa and the views of the British Government which will dominate that matter. However, you did not find it possible to call a Labour Member, not even myself. I wonder whether you could exercise a little tolerance so that we can express our views about that matter.

Mr. Speaker: I saw the right hon. Gentleman looking at the clock, which read 3.31 pm. Question Time ends at 3.30 pm, and I am sorry that I was not able to call him.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received a request from the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) or for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) for a statement by a member of the Treasury Front Bench on the apparent unclearness of the Customs regulation?

Mr. Speaker: I have not.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully ask that later this afternoon you obtain a transcript of the *Official Report* of the last few minutes of Question Time. If you would be so kind, would you read the question from the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey)—Question No. 15—because I believe that at the time that he asked his question you were being distracted? I could see the Clerks in front of you trying to attract your attention to make the point that I am about to make.

I for one, and I suspect many of my hon. Friends also, do not mind if Tory Members want to raise aspects of Labour party policy, because we are quite capable of answering those points—as long as the application of the rules of the House are wide enough to allow my hon. Friends such as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) yesterday, the same rights as——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No. As far as the Clerks are concerned, they were, I think, warning me about the time. It was getting on for 3.30 pm.

Mr. Nellist: You are smiling.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Surely the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is not suggesting that it is open to him and his hon. Friends to attack the Government for their policies, but not to hear an attack from the Government on Opposition policies. That would not be fair.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Just a simple point: is it in order for an hon. Member to incite people to break the law? If it is, will you at least deprecate that?

Mr. Speaker: Every hon. Member must take responsibility for what he says here, to ensure that it is in order, and also for his actions.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Further to that point of order. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) has put out a press release headed "MPs defy the Poll Tax". The paper on which that press release is printed carries the House of Commons portcullis crest and also a note of a House of Commons telephone number for inquiries about that incitement to break the law. Will you rule whether the rules of the House in any way allow the use of the portcullis and House of Commons telephone lines to incite breaches of the law?

Mr. Speaker: The whole House knows that that is not in order. If the hon. Gentleman has evidence of that, he should, as I said yesterday when a similar matter was raised, send that evidence to the Services Committee which deals with such matters.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an Opposition day. If there are points of order with which I can deal, I will take them.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Could not the difficulty manifested in the turmoil today and yesterday be neatly resolved if you were to say that, when hon. Members make points of order they should distinguish between two new categories—television points of order and real points of order?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have my own private thoughts on matters of that kind.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have a reputation second to none for safeguarding Members of this House. I wonder whether you could use your position and your involvement with the Commonwealth Speakers Conference to have a word with the Speaker in Singapore about whether he will take steps to ensure that hon. Members visiting Singapore have their affairs safeguarded. In a recent case, three Members fell for a situation in which a shopkeeper gave a very low receipt. This has caused problems in this country. If you, Sir, were to have a word with the Singapore Speaker, and if Members who were overseas were looked after properly, this sort of embarrassment would not occur.

Mr. Speaker: I am not certain that the Speaker in Singapore would relish that added responsibility.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Two and a half years ago, in response to a query from my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), you deprecated the Liberals' habit of putting down questions relating specifically to other Members' constituencies. There is a series of early-day motions on the Order Paper that relate specifically to the constituencies of Members of this House. Does your deprecation of questions, both oral and written, relating to specific constituencies extend to early-day motions?

Mr. Speaker: This matter has been drawn to my attention, and I am considering what I can legitimately do about it.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): You, Mr. Speaker, are responsible for the proper conduct in and working of this House. I believe that the influence of Militant Tendency on MPs' conduct is a matter of considerable concern to Members on both sides. You, Sir, will not be aware that the Isle of Wight Labour party has condemned the "Don't pay, won't pay" campaign against the poll tax or community charge——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is seeking to carry on Question Time. The point that he seeks to raise is not a matter for me.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: This is an Opposition day, but I will call Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): You will know, Mr. Speaker, that there is considerable difficulty in raising questions about the internal workings of government—in fact, it is impossible to do so—yet it has been widely reported that the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is just leaving the Chamber, was humiliated by the Prime Minister when she restored the trade in ivory and thus put the African elephant at risk—a matter which concerns many hon. Members. Would it be possible to table questions about the Prime Minister overruling the Secretary of State for the Environment——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that in this House we will maintain our tradition of debating party policies rather than individual differences within parties. That is not our traditional practice in this House.

Rent Acts (Repeal)

3.43 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I beg to move, That leave be given to bring in a Bill to repeal the Rent Act 1957, the Rent Act 1977 and the Rent (Amendment) Act 1984.

This Bill would repeal what remains of the Rent Acts. My objective is to increase the supply of modestly priced accommodation available for renting in the private sector so that no one need sleep out in a cardboard box or spend years in bed-and-breakfast accommodation while on a waiting list for a council flat, or pay an extortionate amount of key money to obtain a tenancy in what remains of rent-controlled property.

Everyone in this Chamber knows full well that Members of Parliament, at their surgeries, deal endlessly with people who come for help to find accommodation or to shift from one council estate to another. Certainly half of the people who come to my surgeries are in that position.

You, Mr. Speaker, and I know that, when we were young, there was an adequate supply of privately rented housing for people of modest means. My family lived in a flat in the top half of a house, but if we chose to move, we were able to do so. In those days, people even did moonlight flits from one private rented flat to another. There was somewhere for them to go. It is not true that today there is a shortage of low-cost housing; it is just that people who own that property are afraid to rent it out because they see the Rent Acts as an obstacle to their control over the situation.

We must ask ourselves what has happened to the market since the days when you and I, Mr. Speaker, were young people and could find somewhere to rent. Of course, we have retained the Rent Acts which were introduced as emergency measures during wartime.

A Swedish economist has said that, short of saturation bombing, the best way to create a critical shortage of housing is to control property through rent legislation. In Sweden, where there was a similar problem to ours, the Swedish Government took a step forward and removed what remained of rent control. Sweden now has a surplus of housing, and young people can pick and choose in the accommodation market. If Sweden, the Socialist Utopia, can do that, it is surely time that we, under a Government dedicated to the principle of creating markets, should also take that step.

People watching this programme may ask, "How does it affect my tenancy if I am a tenant in the private sector?"

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is not a programme for the television; it is a debate in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is speaking to her motion. It is the case that it is in the view of the television cameras.

Mrs. Gorman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

People who rent property may be worried about what remains of the Rent Acts disappearing, but property in the council and private sectors is already subject to market rents. By creating a new pool of rented property, we will help to secure tenancies. When I was Westminster city council's vice-chairman of housing, we examined the census for central London alone, and pinpointed 10,000 units which were under-let, not let or available for let only as holiday rents.

People would rather leave their properties empty than risk losing control over them, which is what currently happens. We have turned the landlord into a bogyman, and we have made it shameful to rent property. Therefore, it is not surprising that people are reluctant to adopt the role when they have a spare room in their homes. I am sure that my proposal would release such property into the marketplace.

Whenever the state seeks to take over the provision of any service—for example, education, health, roads and housing—we get shortages, queues and human misery. We know that, when the free market is allowed to operate—for example, in food, clothing, holidays and leisure pursuits—there is a surplus, because we are catering for people's needs and aspirations.

There is no shortage of privately owned cars, but there is a shortage of roads on which to drive them; there is no shortage of television sets, washing machines and other things to put in the home, but there is a shortage of homes to put them in. My legislation would partially correct that problem.

If the Opposition seek to divide the House on this simple, modest measure, people will conclude only that they wish to continue their doctrinaire attitude that only the state should provide housing for the people. However, my party is dedicated to the idea that, by restoring markets and by giving people the freedom to supply a service without unnecessary encumbrance, we will increase the supply of that service. That is what people want.

I acknowledge what the Government have already done, particularly in the Housing Act 1988, in recreating assured and shorthold tenancies, but people living in cardboard boxes in inner London cannot apply for tenancies because they lack the necessary references or respectability to do so. If we can release the spirit of the kindly landlady—the type of landlady I had when I first left school and rented a room in a private home—we will supply housing that can serve those people's needs.

That principle is the one at which my Bill is directed and to which the Government are dedicated. I commend the Bill to the House.

3.49 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I suppose that it is logical for the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) to make the arguments that she has, because her belief in the market is well known to all of us. She does not believe in any form of legislative interference at all and her belief in the free market can be described as being the same as that of any 18th or 19th-century Whig. She has a political attitude of her own that can best be described as the stone age tendency with some fraternal leaping towards ticket touts.

The hon. Lady's Bill refers to the Rent Act 1957. Most Tory Members would not be happy to refer to that legislation, which was piloted through the House by someone whose fervent enthusiasm for the free market is no less than that of the hon. Member for Billericay. I refer to Mr. Enoch Powell, who was then a junior housing Minister.

Mrs. Gorman: He is a brilliant man.

Mr. Winnick: On Second Reading of that legislation, Mr. Powell said—now we shall learn how brilliant he was—

"It will halt the drain upon rented accommodation, it will release additional accommodation which is under-used or wasted, it will arrest the deterioration of millions of houses for lack of maintenance, and it will give to persons who are moving or setting up home the opportunity to find accommodation in the market."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1956; Vol. 560, c. 1775.]

Those are almost identical to the words used by the hon. Member for Billericay. Mr. Powell was proved wrong, and not for the first time—just as the hon. Lady herself has been proved wrong.

In June 1956, privately rented dwellings numbered about 6·5 million, but by December 1961, after the Rent Act 1957 had done its work, that figure had been reduced —I emphasise the word "reduced"—to less than 5 million. The abuses that were a consequence of the 1957 Act are known to us all. That legislation brought such misery and hardship to countless people that, when Labour was returned to office in 1964, the then Tory Opposition could not bring themselves to defend it and did not argue against new legislation introduced by the Housing Minister, Richard Crossman.

Recently, Ministers said that the Housing Act 1988 would lead to a revival of the private rented sector, and there were questions on that subject today. We know that there has been no such revival, but a revival only of the practice last seen around the beginning of this century, of people having to sleep in the open, for instance, just five minutes' walk from this House. Night after night, they are forced like people elsewhere to tolerate such conditions because they cannot afford market rents.

The purpose of the hon. Lady's Bill is to take away the legal rights of tenants who were in occupation before the Housing Act 1988 came into force. If her Bill ever became law, the rights of more than 1 million tenants would be denied. There is enough intimidation and pressure on private tenants already, without that happening. I suggest that a more appropriate title for the hon. Lady's Bill would be the Return of Rachmanism Bill.

The 1957 Act failed totally and the Housing Act 1988 is also failing. The Department of the Environment refuses to answer my questions about how many new tenancies have been created by that legislation. The real need is not for a supposed revival of the private rented sector, which will never come about, but for local authorities and genuine housing associations to be permitted once again to do the job that they should be doing, and build new accommodation. It is not just the homeless as such: I have constituents, even families with two children living in council flats, who now have to wait years before they have the opportunity to get a house.

Some Tory Members referred at Question Time today to the number of council dwellings that have been sold. That is fair enough, but why should they not be replaced? Why should people be penalised because they do not have the means to obtain a mortgage or to pay the market rate for private rented accommodation? Why should so many of our constituents be penalised, be inadequately housed, or have to live in the type of accommodation that I have just described, or, what is even worse, in bed and breakfast accommodation?

The solution to the problem will result not from the hon. Lady's Bill but from a Labour Government allowing local authorities and genuine housing associations to build houses. That is the solution to the housing problem, and I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 56, Noes 167.

Division No. 44] **[3.55 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amos, Alan
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Bevan, David Gilroy
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Fry, Peter
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gregory, Conal
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hayward, Robert
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Janman, Tim
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Mudd, David
Pawsey, James
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Viggers, Peter
Ward, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Barry Field and
Mr. David Evans.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*

Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Tony Banks.

Question accordingly negatived.

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

Schools

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

I do not have the authority to limit speeches to 10 minutes on an Opposition day, when two subjects for debate have been chosen. However, I hope that both Front-Bench and Back-Bench speakers will bear in mind the fact that, if they are able to limit their speeches to 10 minutes, many more hon. Members will be called.

4.6 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That this House condemns Her Majesty's Government for the divisiveness and failure of its schools policies; notes that Britain now spends a lower proportion of its national wealth on education than in 1979, that fewer children receive nursery education, that a lower proportion of young people stay on in full-time education post-16 than in competitor countries, and that teacher morale has never been lower; and believes that unless there is effective investment in education and training with a properly valued and well motivated teaching profession, the Government will fail the next generation and further undermine Britain's economic prospects.

The Government's schools policies have clearly failed. Britain's teachers are underpaid, demoralised and leaving the profession. Children have to learn in squalid, underfunded conditions. The whole system is overloaded with hasty and ill-considered changes. Worst of all, the Secretary of State is blind to the scale of the problems that he now faces, as the complacent claptrap of the Government's amendment makes clear.

When the Secretary of State replies to the debate, he will no doubt feed the House with a series of comforting platitudes about the Government's record and intentions. He will ask us to accept his claim that there has been no deterioration in teacher resignations, no overall change in teacher supply during the last few years—as though the mid-1980s was a golden age of English education, when standards rose, choice was extended, books and equipment were plentiful and every child had a permanent, properly qualified and well-paid teacher in front of his or her class. However, Sir Keith Joseph was in office those few years ago, to be followed by the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker).

What this Secretary of State must grasp is that the crisis over which he presides has arisen not just in the six months during which he has been in office, although it may sometimes seem that way. Instead, this crisis is the consequence of the accumulation of 10 years of damage and neglect; 10 years in which one year's flight of experienced teachers out of the profession has turned the screw on the next year's; 10 years in which one year's cuts in books and equipment and redecoration has compounded the next year's; 10 years in which each year's lack of investment means a generation of children who have been denied the educational choice——

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

These have been 10 years in which each year's lack of investment and intellectual self-fulfilment has meant a generation of children denied the educational choice and intellectual self-fulfilment to which they are entitled. They have been 10 years in which the nation has fallen further behind our competitors in its skills and ability to compete.

A rising proportion of parents now believe that the general standards of education have fallen in the past few years. An overwhelming proportion of the electorate believe that the Government want to run down public services such as education and health. And the difference between the Secretary of State and the electorate is that the electorate have direct experience of the Government's neglect of education—he does not.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that one of the most notable reforms of the Conservative Government, especially in London, was the abolition of the Inner London education authority. Will he give me an unequivocal answer: will the Labour party bring back an Inner London education authority or not?

Mr. Straw: As I shall say later in my speech, there is no question but that the gratuitous and unwarranted abolition of the ILEA has made a difficult situation for teacher recruitment much worse in inner London; I know that as a parent. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is: no, I do not give that unequivocal assurance. Nor have I ever given it, because, unlike Conservative Members, we care about the education and about the children of inner London. Having seen the damage caused to them by one disruption, we shall not, in a cavalier way and without consulting parents or teachers, force further change. When we have won the next election, we shall carefully consult the boroughs and parents and teachers about what arrangements they think best for the education of the children of inner London.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Is my hon. Friend also aware that, the interjection by the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), notwithstanding, the Inner London education authority was abolished against the wishes of the parents and teachers of London? The hon. Member for Surbiton, who lives in the borough of Wandsworth, knows that meetings were called there at which total opposition to abolition was expressed—and the hon. Gentleman was never at the meetings.

Mr. Straw: Of course I understand what my hon. Friend says. The abolition of ILEA was an act of political spite with no educational justification. Those of us with children in ILEA schools have seen the difficulties that those schools have had to face in the past two years because of the Government's deliberate disruption of children's education and of the administration of education. Ministers' children do not go to school in ILEA or any other——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I must get on.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment. Let us examine the record of the past 10 years. The first Secretary of State, then Mr. Mark Carlisle, was a well-intentioned wet who tried but failed to save education from the first and most savage round of cuts in 1980-81. He was followed by Sir Keith Joseph, sincere, indecisive to the point of paralysis, whose inability to produce a settlement of the two-year teacher dispute and whose failure to secure resources for the system tested our education service almost to the point of destruction.

It is perhaps as well to remember that the new chairman of the Conservative party was put in to repair the havoc wrought by Sir Keith, but he left the service in an even worse state than that in which he found it. The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) is the master of the gimmick and the quick fix—the "here today, I'm off tomorrow" approach to policy. The man who landed the Government with the poll tax and the student loans scheme was also the architect of the lethal combination of city technology colleges, opting out, the local management of schools, an inflexible national curriculum, and the constant denigration of the teaching profession which has brought the service so low.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I will give way in a moment.

In 10 years, the proportion of national wealth devoted to education and training has fallen. Except in Labour areas, far fewer children in England receive the benefit of a nursery education than in our European competitor countries.

Perhaps the greatest test of any system is the proportion of young people who complete their compulsory school education with recognised qualifications and stay on beyond 16 in full-time education or high-quality training. On that test, the Government's record over the past decade is a national disgrace. The life chances of half a generation have been wasted. Fewer young people stay on after 16 than in any of our major competitor countries.

Moreover, the proportion staying on after 16 in full-time education has, as statistics from the Department of Education and Science show, barely moved—from 33 to 35 per cent.—despite a rapid decline in the size of the age group, which should have led to a dramatic improvement in opportunities.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is talking about spending. Will he explain why yet again, the Inner London education authority spent the most on secondary school pupils but came 88th in the examination league? Before he says that it is because of the composition of London, will he explain why Wigan, which spent £1,000 less per pupil, came 15th in the examination league?

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The hon. Gentleman should know the answer.

Mr. Straw: Yes, the hon. Gentleman should know the answer. The figures that he gave distort relative examination performance. As the Department's statistical bulletin makes clear, when an adjustment is made for the social input and intake of children in ILEA, it comes not 88th but 46th in the league. The hon. Gentleman should know that the costs of services in inner London are much higher than outside. Proportionately, it costs less to run ILEA than the social services department of the Conservative-controlled City of Westminster, and much less than running the Government-controlled Metropolitan police.

[Mr. Straw]

I return to the Government's lamentable record on 16 to 19-year-olds. The excellent report, "Towards the Skills Revolution", from the Confederation of British Industry, says:

"Britain has one of the lowest rates of participation in post compulsory education and training of all"
western
"countries, producing a much smaller number of school leavers educated to the standard required of a modern economy . . . Even in the newly industrialised nations in the Pacific Basin, far more people remain in education and training after the end of compulsory schools"
than in Britain.

Other countries have clearly established targets to raise standards and participation. South Korea proposes, within a decade, to get 80 per cent. of its young people to university entrance standard. The Socialist Government of France say that 75 per cent. should achieve university entrance standard. Labour has proposed the setting of similar targets for Britain—the doubling of participation for those aged between 16 and 19 within a decade, with clear machinery for ensuring that locally realistic targets are set and funded.

After 10 years in office, where is the Government's programme for extending participation for those aged between 16 and 19, and where are their targets for that age group? They have none. The one reform that the Government could have implemented at little extra cost —the broadening of the 16-to-18 curriculum with a five-subject A-level, as recommended by the Higginson committee—was vetoed last year by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): How quickly does the hon. Gentleman think that the numbers participating in higher education could be doubled? As he is asking for more resources, will he say why Ealing council has cut its education budget by £2·5 million but increased its rates by 32 per cent.?

Mr. Straw: I shall send the hon. Gentleman a copy of Labour's policy review and a copy of "Children First", which sets out Labour's policy in detail. Ealing is in the same position as every other local education authority: the Government have imposed completely unrealistic targets on it which, if it meets them, will result in the closure of classrooms and the sacking of teachers.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: No, this is supposed to be a short debate and I have given way five times. There is lots of talk from this Secretary of State and his partner, the Secretary of State for Employment, about the need to improve education and training between 16 and 19, but precious little action, because this Secretary of State knows, as a former Treasury man, that if there is to be improvement in education there must be investment in it, and that is the one thing that the Government have resolutely refused to do.

In the past 10 years, the Government have deliberately cut their investment from the centre in the running and in the building of schools. In 1979, Government funded £6 of every £10 spent by local authorities; today, they fund only £4·50 of every £10. The Government have cut their investment in the running of schools by over 25 per cent. in real terms, and the modest improvement in total spend is entirely accounted for by local authorities and ratepayers who, year by year, have had to spend in advance of Government guidelines just to maintain a half-decent service. So underfunded is the service that in many parts of the country parents are forced to raise thousands of pounds to pay for essential books and equipment, but where the parents of a school do not have that kind of money, their children go without.

At Rottingdean school in Brighton, children are now to be charged £9 each for the use of a school locker.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: What has that to do with education?

Mr. Straw: If that has nothing to do with education, perhaps Government Members and the Secretary of State will tell me whether the arrangements for charging at the Bligh county infants' school in Kent, a state school, have nothing to do with education. This county primary school has made arrangements, as schools up and down the country do, to admit children who are rising five, those whose birthday falls in the summer term. They have done so especially this year because of anxiety among parents that, unless their children are now admitted, they will miss out on the nine terms of education that other children will receive before the national curriculum tests at the age of seven.

The parents of the 25 children rising five who were admitted at the start of this term are being charged £11 a week for tuition fees—this is in a state school.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Why not?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) asks why not. I will tell him. One, it is almost certainly illegal; two, if it is not illegal it is in breach of very clear commitments from the Treasury Front Bench.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I will give way on this issue to the Secretary of State and no other.

I spent this morning checking whether the report in the *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News* was correct. I spoke to the headmistress and to the reporter of the story, and my office spoke to the divisional education officer. The story is correct in every particular. Kent county council now says that it is not a class for rising-fives but a pre-school playgroup. We asked the divisional director of education whether, if it was a playgroup, playgroup leaders were in charge of the class. We were told that it was a trained teacher on the roll of the infants' school. We asked whether the children were playing or learning. We were told that they were not playing, that they were learning. We asked who was paying the teachers. The county council is paying the teachers, we were told, but the parents are paying the county council. It is schooling, not a pre-school playgroup.

I now offer the Secretary of State a chance to intervene. Will he promise to investigate, under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944, whether Kent county council's actions are lawful, reasonable and consistent with Government policy or whether this is, as we believe, the start of fee-paying in state education? The right hon. Gentleman does not wish to speak.

Mr. Dunn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Straw: I give way.

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful for the fact that the hon. Gentleman has finally given way. I know that he likes to take these matters seriously, because I believe that he wishes to be remembered for that. He must understand, however, that the quality and range of education in the county of Kent are supported by the people of Kent. If the hon. Gentleman had his way, the range, variety and concept of schools in the county of Kent would not exist for five minutes under a Labour Government.

Mr. Straw: I have no idea why I accepted my hon. Friends' invitation to show my usual generosity and give way to the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). He did not answer the point; nor did the Secretary of State, and his silence is revealing.

One of the schools governors, the Rev. Steve Wallis said that the school had to charge parents for what their children would receive in any other educational authority because

"Kent Education Committee refused to fund such classes".

That is shameful and outrageous, and the Secretary of State should condemn it.

Current spending by central Government has been cut; so has capital spending, which is down 25 per cent. in real terms in 10 years. The Secretary of State will not give the figures since 1979, but even since 1981—a year of cuts—there has been a catastrophic cut in the amount invested in the nation's schools. As Labour's campaign has highlighted, we have a nation of crumbling schools and schools with leaking roofs, rotting windows, classrooms that have not been redecorated for years and classes housed in split sites, prefabricated buildings and buildings that are way past their useful life.

This morning, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) told me that in his constituency, at the Birmingham Padget junior school in Pipeboys, the ceiling of one of the classrooms had collapsed yesterday evening. If that had happened during school hours, many children would have been injured.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The problem was worse than that. A ceiling in a corridor collapsed. For two years, school staff, parents, the council and I have been trying to get money to get the roof repaired. The city council has said that it has a growing backlog and inadequate funds. This puts children at risk.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving that detail. Birmingham has not been able to repair that classroom because it has not received the requested capital allocations from the Government. This year, capital allocations for England are just 64 per cent. of the 1981 level. Next year, despite all the bally-hoo from the Secretary of State, they will be £67 million less than in 1981. They are wholly inadequate to make up for the neglect of a decade.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Has my hon. Friend seen the school magazine "In Our Own Words"? The magazine was originally produced in Warrington, has become a national magazine and is about to go international. It is designed and edited by children, and all the contributions are by children. The magazine has been supported by Cheshire council and received substantial grants from the council. When it applied for a tiny amount of money centrally, because it was now a national production, the request was refused. Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Straw: Yes, it is. If Cheshire county council spent at the target set for it by the Government, the teachers who are running that excellent project would have to be fired.

Throughout the country, desperately needed repairs and improvements have been delayed yet again by the Government's failure properly to meet local authorities' capital requirements. St. John's and St. Clement's Church of England primary school in East Dulwich is on two sites, one a converted church hall. Children have to walk back and forward across a busy main road. Its rebuilding is at the top of the diocesan list for Southwark, but it has been vetoed yet again by the Secretary of State.

In Bradford, the Buttershaw first school had three temporary classrooms which could not be used, so children had to be bussed four miles across the city to watertight premises. At last the city council has said that it will replace the classrooms, but I understand that they are being replaced not by permanent classrooms but by further temporary classrooms.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that there are now 600 temporary classrooms in Bradford, many of which have been temporary for so long that they themselves are falling down, as were the classrooms at Buttershaw, and that even Tory-controlled Bradford has been denied about £20 million when it asked for £30 million capital expenditure to improve the shanty town and crumbling Bradford schools? The Tory Government cut the amount to below £10 million.

Mr. Straw: I accept what my hon. Friend says. My hon. Friends who represent Bradford have run a brilliant campaign to draw attention to the state of the city's schools. There is scarcely a city with schools in a worse state. The conclusion we draw is that that is directly related to the fact that there is a Conservative council in charge.

While Britain's county schools are starved of cash, the Government continue their support for city technology colleges. No programme has been such a comprehensive and expensive failure. Twenty were promised by last month; we have three. Most of the money was supposed to come from business. Instead it has come in the main from the taxpayer. Nearly every blue chip company has boycotted the programme. What support there is has come from the sleazy, the failing and the second-rate—from American car auctioneers, ADT Securities; from the nearly-bust Lowndes Queensway; from the bid victim Dixon's.

The Secretary of State knows that the scheme is a failure. He has already limited CTCs to 20 in total, and has described the original programme of his predecessor as over-ambitious. He knows that the policy is wasteful and wrong, so why does he not scrap it altogether and immediately save £120 million, which could be spent on a crash programme of repairs and improvements, as we have demanded?

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): Apart from the fact that parents are queuing up to send their children to CTCs, will the hon. Gentleman explain why teachers prefer to move from the state sector to work in city technology colleges?

Mr. Straw: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman does not understand why. If as is happening in Nottingham, more is spent on a single school, than the Government have allowed Nottinghamshire county council to spend on over 450 schools in its area, if money is lavished on school buildings and if the teachers are paid more, of course many parents will apply for their children to join that school and many teachers will prefer to work there. That does not make the policy right. It exposes the hypocrisy and double dealing of the Government in regard to the majority of children.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that the capital allocation to the city technology college in Gateshead is larger than the amount available for all the other schools in Sunderland this year?

Mr. Straw: Is it any wonder, therefore, that the rest of the schools in Sunderland face such difficulty?

Mr. Flannery: Will my hon. Friend accept that the nonsense talked by Tory Members conveys the impression that teachers go along with the policy? The reality is that teachers in Nottingham are outraged because so much money is being spent on one school and a handful of teachers. Does my hon. Friend accept that other children and parents are angry at what is happening? *[Interruption.]* Tory Members all know that that is true.

Mr. Straw: I am aware of that, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Investment in education has been cut by central Government and the system has been overloaded almost beyond endurance by ill-considered, divisive, meretricious initiatives.

We warned two years ago that the Government's national curriculum was far too inflexible, much more a state syllabus, and that schools could not operate it in full and meet the other educational and social needs of their children. So it is turning out. The national curriculum is imploding under its contradictions. The testing arrangements are obscure, but potentially a nightmare, especially at seven and at 16, when Ministers have yet to explain how GCSE and national curriculum testing will fit together.

The Prime Minister is trying to make the history syllabus a partisan instrument. Schools are weighed down with paper. Local management of schools could have resulted in sensible delegation of some local education authority cash and functions. Instead, it is forcing many schools to choose between teachers and books, posing them impossible choices and putting schools under a financial incentive to dispose of experienced teachers and to employ the cheapest and the youngest.

There are more than 1·25 million surplus school places, wasting £240 million in premises costs alone. However, the responsibility for the lack of progress in removing those places lies with the Secretary of State. Opting out has scarcely been a success, but the possibility of opting out has paralysed the prospects for sensible schools reorganisation in many parts of the country, especially as Ministers have allowed schools to opt out to escape closure or reorganisation.

Given all that, is it any wonder that the morale of the teaching profession

"is lower than it has been for fifty years, that teachers feel unappreciated, that the Government reforms . . . have certainly not treated teachers as professionals"?

Those are not my words, but the words of the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), a former Conservative Education Minister, at a speech to the constituency Conservative association of the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), the former Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, last weekend.

The right hon. Member for Brent, North was right to say that the blame for the collapse in morale lies firmly on Ministers. The Secretary of State may comprehend that he is reaping the whirlwind for the way that his predecessor treated teachers as the whipping boys of society. However, he has yet to acknowledge the scale of the problem over which he is presiding, rather than repeatedly making light of it.

Britain has been short of properly trained permanent teachers throughout the mid and late 1980s. However, a bad position is now becoming much worse. The percentage of teachers qualified in the subject that they are teaching actually dropped between 1984 and 1988. The percentage of graduates entering teaching halved during the 1980s. Half of those who train to teach are not in teaching after five years; some may later return, but there are as many people with teacher qualifications not teaching as there are teaching.

Today, thousands of our best and brightest teachers are getting out, either to other jobs, to no jobs, to go abroad or to retire early. Yet again, the Secretary of State will no doubt trot out his claim that only 1 per cent. of teachers —around 4,000—have been leaving teaching for other jobs. He knows that that figure grossly understates the real wastage in the profession. The report of Professor Alan Smithers, of Manchester university, states that, if one strips out those changing teaching posts and those reaching normal retirement age,

"we arrive at a provisional departure rate of 4·9 per cent."

That is nearly 20,000 teachers—not 4,000—for 1989. He said:

"This . . . is likely to be an under-estimate, but it is nevertheless five times the aspect of wastage commonly referred to by Government Ministers".

The Secretary of State will also claim that the acute problem is confined to inner London. As Ministers have acknowledged, all London Labour boroughs have worked with a will to make the transfer of education responsibilities to them as smooth as possible. However, as I said earlier, there is no question but that the gratuitous abolition of ILEA has greatly contributed to the problem of recruiting new teachers in inner London. Despite the problems that inner London boroughs' now face, Ministers have yet to respond to the joint Labour and Conservative boroughs, initiative on housing, which was sent to them two months ago.

The figures for the country as a whole show a slow but steady worsening of shortages outside London, and across the country, with one head teacher and LEA after another reporting more and more difficulty in recruiting candidates of adequate quality.

If the Secretary of State denies that, let him answer three questions. First, can he guarantee that no child will be without a properly qualified permanent teacher in his or her class this year, next year or the year after? Or is he willing to give that guarantee only in respect of children who go to private schools?

Secondly, if there has been no change in the situation, why has advertising of teacher appointments in *The Times Educational Supplement* increased by nearly 60 per cent. in two years?

Thirdly, if there is no problem outside London, why did the schools sub-committee of his own, Tory-controlled Norfolk county council have on its agenda on 6 December last year, for the first time in its history, an item dealing with teacher shortages? Can the right hon. Gentleman explain the report in the *Eastern Daily Press*, which said:

"Nearly one in five Norfolk secondary school teachers are expected to leave their posts this year, new figures have revealed. The number of primary school teacher resignations has also soared"?

If there is no problem outside London, where do those stories come from? I am prepared to give way to the Secretary of State if he has an answer.

The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) said in the House on 5 December:

"if we are beginning to have problems in Norfolk, whatever must it be like in other parts of the country?"

The hon. Gentleman continued:

"It is no good"

the Secretary of State

"pretending that the problem does not exist. It is no use pretending that, while money will not solve everything, we can expect a highly motivated teaching profession if we do not reward teachers accordingly."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. 286.]

But teachers will not be rewarded accordingly by this Secretary of State. This Government's stock in trade is pretence.

The Secretary of State will tell us that teachers' pay has risen by 40 per cent. since 1986. So it has, but the right hon. Gentleman omits to tell us that, before 1986, teachers' pay had fallen grievously behind. A comparison of teachers' pay in 1979 and teachers' pay today shows that it is £1,000 less today that it would have been had it simply kept pace with increases in non-manual earnings over that period.

The Secretary of State has cash-limited the interim advisory committee on school teachers' pay and Conditions to £600 million, to give teachers an increase lower than the rate of inflation. When he fixed the cash limit in September, the Secretary of State wrote to the Chilver committee that inflation

"will continue to decline further in the months ahead".

In fact, inflation has risen. What allowance will the Secretary of State make for that? Does he not understand that, if the cash limit is not lifted, teachers will not be properly rewarded, and that if they are not properly rewarded, they cannot be retained?

How will local authorities be able to keep the teachers they have if they observe the Government's poll tax spending targets? The Government's poll tax spending targets mean that education authorities across the country—Tory as well as Labour—will have to cut their budgets by more than 3·5 per cent. Let the Secretary of State say, now or in his speech, how many teachers will have to be fired and how many classrooms closed if those targets are met.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): None.

Mr. Straw: The Minister's PPS says, "None." Does the Minister himself say, "None"? Does he deny the claims made by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Association of District Councils? The simple truth is that there is not a local authority in the country that could meet the standard spending assessments for education and other services without having to cut the number of teachers that it now employs.

In an orgy of self-congratulation, the Government's amendment refers to the "coherence" of their programme. I hope that, in his heart, the Secretary of State does not believe such nonsense. Certainly no one else does. As the Government's so-called coherent programme of reforms has been introduced, so public support for their policies has evaporated. That is why Conservative newspapers such as the *Sun*, the *News of the World* and *The Mail on Sunday* have severely criticised the Government's education record since Labour launched its "crumbling schools and teacher shortage" campaign.

In contrast to the Government, we promise no wasteful, divisive gimmicks such as CTCs, assisted places and opting out. We have already spelt out and published a comprehensive programme for schools and teachers. We propose the setting of clear targets for staying-on rates, the establishment of an educational standards council, the reform of teacher training, the establishment of teacher training schools and a general teachers' council. We shall secure effective support for new teachers, a proper database for the teacher labour force and a career structure for teachers' assistants, make major modifications of the national curriculum and introduce local management of schools and a crash programme of repairs.

Above all, we promise a Labour Government committed to state education, investing in it and using it, and because the public increasingly——

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for nearly 40 minutes. That means that it will take well over an hour to launch a three-hour debate. There are many wise heads on both sides of the House, particularly on the Conservative Benches, and I wonder whether they could be given some consideration by the Front-Bench spokesmen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I repeat what Mr. Speaker said at the beginning: this is a short debate and I hope that all hon. Members will keep an eye on the clock.

Mr. Straw: This debate was called by the Labour party. I had hoped to make a shorter speech, but the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) will find in tomorrow's *Hansard* that at least 12 minutes, if not 15 minutes, of my speech were taken up in dealing with interventions from Conservative Members.

The public increasingly back Labour's constructive alternative proposals, and public support for our educational policies is rising sharply. At the general election, the Conservatives and Labour were level on the question of which party had the best education policy, but Labour now has a 20 per cent. lead.

If, as the right hon. Member for Brent, North said, teacher morale has never been lower in 50 years, there is a reason for that; the reason is that, in 50 years, we have never had a Government who have treated teachers and children so casually, and who have so obstinately refused to invest in the nation's future. It is time for the Secretary of State to wake up to the crisis in education that is all around him. This Government's schools policy has failed, and I commend the motion to the House.

4.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its coherent programme for securing lasting improvements in standards in schools through its policies for the National Curriculum, assessment and testing, for increased parental choice, and for greater autonomy for schools; notes the increased expenditure since 1979 of over 40 per cent. in real terms per pupil; contrasts these reforms with the neglect of relevant education policies by the last Labour Government and the absence of any constructive alternative proposals by Opposition spokesmen; notes that the requirements of the National Curriculum, building on the successful introduction of GCSE examinations, enjoy widespread support in the education system; and welcomes the enthusiasm with which governors, teachers and parents are seizing the opportunity to exercise more choice and greater autonomy in the management of their schools."

The Education Reform Act 1988 represents the culmination of a decade of work by this Government to create the conditions and framework to secure real and lasting improvements in our schools. The reform programme has been based on what needs to be done to raise standards. I have been quite clear throughout my period as Secretary of State that we need to raise standards substantially, and I am determined to do that.

Parents, employers and the public at large recognise that we must take a number of steps. We must define more clearly national objectives for what is taught in order to raise the expectations and achievements of pupils and teachers. We must guarantee a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and improve the relevance of that curriculum to adult life and the world of work. We must improve the quality, standards and range of subjects taught for pupils of all levels of ability to match what is being provided by some of the best of our main competitor countries. I regard that as vital for our economic success in the 1990s. We must foster greater choice for parents, greater variety at local level, more control over their own budgets for schools, more responsibility for governing bodies, and greater involvement of local business people and parents in them.

Much has already been achieved in all those matters. It was clear from the dismissal by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) of the national curriculum that he simply does not understand what the reforms are already achieving. Let me remind the House of a decade of action under this Government, in contrast to years of drifting under Labour.

Mr. Haynes: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to be brief. The hon. Member for Blackburn complained that his speech had been lengthened by responses to interventions, so the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way.

Mr. Haynes: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall give way once.

Mr. Haynes: Does the Secretary of State agree that, if people have a choice and can go to a CTC, they should not expect to use the facilities of their local education authority? That is what people in Nottinghamshire think anyway.

Mr. MacGregor: Many people in Nottingham think it wrong that children going to a CTC—I shall have more to say about CTCs later—should be deprived of extra-curricular activities for which their parents have paid through the rates. That is the wrong kind of discrimination.

I shall contrast the decade of activity under the Conservatives with what went before. Labour Members talked about examination reform. We acted. The introduction of the GCSE has already seen substantial improvements in teaching and learning; it was noticeable that the hon. Member for Blackburn did not refer to those.

Attainments have improved significantly. The proportion of candidates getting grades A to C has increased in just two years by about 15 per cent. The number of pupils staying on after the age of 16 rose in 1988 by about 10 per cent., the biggest single increase ever. That shows what our reforms are achieving. The available evidence suggests another substantial increase in 1989.

Her Majesty's inspectors report that those improvements, which are helping to motivate more children to positive achievement, are already beginning to improve the curriculum in the early years of secondary education. That is success, not failure.

We acted to introduce greater relevance and technical applications into the curriculum through the technical and vocational education initiative, known as TVEI. That programme is being supported by over £1 billion of new investment during the 14 years from 1983 to 1997. Every local education authority in the country is involved in TVEI. That is success, not failure.

We acted to put the Education Act 1981 on the statute book, ensuring a new deal for all pupils with special education needs. We acted to create 35,000 places in successful independent schools for bright pupils through the assisted places scheme, after the wanton destruction of the direct grant schools.

The hon. Member for Blackburn talked about greater achievement and attainment. The achievement of those pupils tells its own story. Over 90 per cent. of assisted places pupils last year gained grades A to C at GCSE, 86 per cent. gained grades A to E at A level and 70 per cent. of last year's assisted place leavers went on to higher education. That is success, not failure.

With schools now being able to manage much of their own budgets, we are now building on earlier legislation in 1980 and 1986 to give them greater freedom to take their own decisions. There are now thousands of new governors in our schools, representing a huge injection of new support from the community and from parents. Already, 83 schemes of local management have been approved in principle. From April, the great majority of LEAs will be introducing their schemes of financial delegation and formula funding.

There is widespread support for the principles of local management, and we shall be working with LEAs to ensure its success. That is why the Government are supporting a programme of over £100 million to assist schools in managing their budgets, through installing information technology systems and through training governors and staff. That is important reform for achieving success, not failure.

We have acted to improve and increase the availability and quality of in-service training for teachers. In the last three years we have supported a programme of £600 million for in-service training through specific grant for

both national and local priorities. I remember the priority that the last Labour government gave to in-service training for teachers. No wonder we heard nothing about that from the hon. Member for Blackburn.

At the same time, we have reformed and sharpened the focus of initial training through the work of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. Contrast that with the wringing of hands by former Labour Secretaries of State, which was all that passed for action on that count under the last Labour Government.

We will have substantially increased spending per pupil —up by 42 per cent. in real terms over the last 10 years. That is success. That compares with a cut of about 2 per cent. in the last five years of Labour government—that was failure.

Capital spending per pupil has increased by 10 per cent. in real terms over the same period, compared with the slashing of the school building programme under the last Labour Government because of the total failure of their economic policies.

I clearly remember how the school building programme was savagely cut under the last Labour Government because they went for over-ambitious spending targets in the first year or two, did much to destroy our economy, had to go to the IMF to be bailed out, and then we saw slashed capital building programmes for the three years thereafter. We had to pick up the problem from that point and make the improvements that we are now achieving.

Dr. Hampson: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that the only time since the war when the proportion of young people going on to higher education fell was under the last Labour Government, due to the dramatic cuts that they made in education provision.

In view of the complaints that Labour Members now make about the fall in GDP, their attention should be drawn to the fact that the latest OECD figures show the proportion of GDP in this country well ahead of Germany, only slightly behind—by 0·01 per cent.—that of Japan, and the same as in the United States.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right on both points. The illustrations that I have given and his point about higher education demonstrate how much hypocrisy there was in the speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I will not give way again.

In short, while Labour dithered in the past, and still cannot make up their minds on how to improve quality, we have acted. Where they failed on educational expenditure, we have succeeded, as a result of the economic expansion that we achieved in the 1980s, in considerably increasing the resources devoted per pupil throughout the education system.

Mr. Straw: As the right hon. Gentleman is so proud of the amount being spent on education, may I ask him to comment on the policy of Kent county council, which is short of money and is charging rising-fives £11 a week for education? Does he approve of that policy?

Mr. MacGregor: I have a relevant part in my speech in which I shall reply precisely to that question— *[Interruption.]* It will fit into the context better if I deal with it then.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I shall not give way again, having taken careful note of what Mr. Deputy Speaker and my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said a few moments ago.

I refute the charges of the hon. Member for Blackburn, and point to the considerable progress achieved on all fronts in the 1980s. We are on the right track. But of course —I accept this and have always said it—we still have a long way to go if we are to achieve the competitive, high-quality standards and performance that we require for the 1990s.

That is why we introduced the national curriculum and the many other measures contained in the Education Reform Act, the biggest reforms since 1944. I find it amazing that the hon. Member for Blackburn is so dismissive of the national curriculum and those reforms. We are pressing forward at speed with the national curriculum programme. It is a major challenge for everyone involved in education, and one we should all relish and welcome.

I suspect that secretly the hon. Member for Blackburn knows that that is right, but of course he cannot bring himself to give open support to the reforms carried through in that Act and in the national curriculum. There is widespread support and acceptance by teachers of the benefits which nationally agreed attainment targets and programmes of study are bringing to teaching and learning in schools.

The national curriculum is bringing new and welcome rigour to the curriculum planning of primary schools. I have made it clear in speeches at conferences where I have addressed members of independent schools that I hope that all independent schools will take up the national curriculum. As we get success with it, I believe that they will, because there will be a demand from parents that they do so, and the teachers will wish to respond. Clearer objectives and a supportive framework of what should be taught is bringing new life to the curriculum throughout our schools.

The fact that there is much enthusiasm for our approach is shown by the demands that I am now getting for the other subject areas to be brought fully and effectively within the national curriculum as soon as possible. Of course, there is lively debate about what they contain, and that is all to the good. I hope to publish the final report of the history group next month, geography and modern languages will follow in the summer, and I shall be making an announcement soon on music, art and PE.

There is widespread support, too, for the national curriculum to be underpinned by effective testing and assessment arrangements. In a survey of parental attitudes conducted by independent analysts last year, over three quarters of parents expressed support for regular testing and regular reporting of the results.

That is the Government's policy. Under the national curriculum, pupils will be assessed against clear national standards at seven, 11, 14 and 16. For the first time, parents will have reliable reports, throughout the country and at all those stages, about their children's progress, and teachers will have the information they need to tailor their teaching to the strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils.

[Mr. MacGregor]

National assessment is well on the way to becoming a reality. Prototypes of the first national tests are under development and are being tried out in schools. The first national assessments of seven-year-olds in mathematics, English and science will be in 1991. Other foundation subjects and key stages will follow in subsequent years.

I have dwelt on that issue, because I believe that the national curriculum is a fundamental reform. When historians look back, this will be seen as a time of enormous change and improvement. That is why it is right to underline the importance of the national curriculum. We are devoting an enormous amount of resources, time and effort to ensuring that the national curriculum works. We are getting on with that constructively, with massive effort and with vigour, with the aim of raising standards and improving quality and relevance. Typically, the speech made by the hon. Member for Blackburn contained scarcely any recognition of that.

I want now to consider the Government's policies for extending real choice for parents, something that the Labour party does not really understand or believe in. We have abolished artificial limits on the places available in popular schools and parents are already benefiting this year, where places have been freed in secondary schools. We have required every local education authority to set up local arrangements for handling complaints which offer parents a readily accessible local route for pursuing complaints.

When schools have control of their own budgets—as so many shortly will—those which attract more parents, and hence pupils, will also attract more funds. That is a key principle of the formula under the local management of schools for distributing budgets. We have introduced a new and flourishing grant-maintained school sector. There are now 20 grant-maintained schools in operation, and a further 12 have been approved to start later this year. The new sector is growing rapidly. Already, the number of grant-maintained schools is about the same as the number of schools in an average local education authority—and they started only in September.

I want to spend a moment or two on that aspect of our reforms, because I believe that the benefits of and the potential for grant-maintained schools have been much underrated. Typically, the hon. Member for Blackburn dismissed those schools as a gimmick; that shows that he does not understand. Of course some local education authorities and their officials, in a narrow and blinkered way, oppose grant-maintained schools, because they are dedicated to uniformity and bureaucratic control. At heart, I suspect that some of them dislike giving the governors, teachers and parents real choice. I suspect that is what the hon. Member for Blackburn does not like about them. Some LEAs may be tempted to squeeze them out, but I hope that they will think again, as was shown in relation to CTCs.

Grant-maintained schools are popular with parents and successful with teachers. So far, there have been ballots at 78 schools on whether to apply for grant-maintained status. Even though the first grant-maintained schools have had their greater independence for only a short time, there has been a marked increased in the number of applicants for places.

Many schools have yet to complete their admissions procedures for entry in September 1990, but responses from parents greatly exceed the overall number of places available. For example, at Wilson's school in Wallington, there have been more than 470 applications for 120 places. That shows that we are extending parent power and parent choice and the results are clear.

The success of the first grant-maintained schools shows that parents have been quick to utilise their rights and choose the autonomy that grant-maintained autonomy brings. Moreover—this is very important—on my visits to grant-maintained schools I have seen the obvious dedication and enthusiasm of governors and staff for their new status. Many of them talk of the motivating effect that such status has had on them. Their hard work and commitment is proving a sure foundation for the new sector.

We are also widening parental choice by pressing ahead with our programme of city technology colleges. Three colleges are now open—only three years after the start of the programme. Yesterday I announced that Derby is to have a CTC, opening in 1991, and only last week I was able to confirm that the parents and children of Corby would soon be able to opt for this new and exciting choice of secondary education.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No.

Mr. Straw: Oh, go on.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Member for Blackburn admitted that his speech was too long because he had to give way; I will bear that in mind.

Parents are voting with their feet for places in the CTCs because they want their children to benefit from the vigour and innovation which characterises CTCs. They will pioneer new approaches to classroom practice, timetables, even the working day. They will develop new approaches to the curriculum, and show the way on co-operation and collaboration between business and industry and education. The CTCs are doing this just where it is most needed—in our cities and towns where, for years, the outlook for young people has been bleakest.

I want to put the expenditure into context, because the hon. Member for Blackburn always touches on peripheral points. We expect local authorities to spend about £11 billion on the maintained sector of schools under current spending. We expect CTCs to spend £14 million.

I want to see the benefits of CTCs as they develop spread more widely. That is one of the purposes of this innovative and creative idea. I want to build on the enthusiasm and commitment of business and industry which the CTC programme has already unlocked. That is why I heard with interest the proposal from the London borough of Wandsworth last week for a voluntary-aided CTC as a way of bringing what CTCs have to offer right into the maintained sector. I shall be looking carefully at all the issues involved.

Of course the proportion of spending on CTCs will rise as they expand. However, the proportion of spending on CTCs is still tiny in relation to spending on the total maintained sector. The whole of the education system and

the inner-city area programme will receive benefits and a high rate of return from that comparatively modest investment.

The hon. Member for Blackburn referred to teacher shortages. He continues to show an unenviable capacity for misunderstanding—or perhaps he just prefers blatantly to misrepresent the facts. I am glad that, in reply to my repeated invitations, he has now accepted my offer of discussions with my Department's officials about the available statistics. I want a completely open debate about the statistics, and it would be at least an advance if we could have better informed speeches from the hon. Gentleman in future.

I have said many times—I repeat it again today—that there are some serious problems of teacher supply. However, no purpose is served by misrepresenting them. The hon. Member for Blackburn is always highly selective in his choice of statistics and examples. Therefore, I want to state the overall position.

There is no evidence that teacher shortages are dramatically worse than in previous years or that we are facing a nationwide crisis. All three measures of teacher supply bear that out.

Mr. Flannery: Rubbish.

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will do me the courtesy of hearing the three points.

First, vacancies are running at the same rate as when the Labour party left office in 1979. Secondly, teacher resignations and wastage have stayed within a narrow band for many years; that is confirmed by research by Manchester university. Finally, recruitment to initial teacher training is running at levels unmatched in recent years. Teaching is clearly a popular profession, and rightly so. It offers a worthwhile career to young people. There has never been a better time to become a teacher; that is reflected in the increasing number of people queueing up to do so.

I want now to refer to morale and teacher status. Those who point to the worst examples as being typical of what is happening in schools actually discourage people from entering the profession. That is one factor that has diminished teachers in the eyes of the public and that is a great shame for the vast majority of highly dedicated and professional teachers who do so much. We should now be positive to deal with problems of morale and stress.

As for teacher shortages, I have always recognised that there are clearly problems within the overall picture, and I have frequently highlighted two problems. First, teacher recruitment is suffering from exactly the same problems as some other occupations in London and other high-cost areas, where housing—and the environment in which some of the schools have to operate—are particular issues. Secondly, there are certain key subjects—physics, chemistry, modern languages and maths, for example—for which schools may find it difficult to recruit. County education authorities such as mine are now addressing those problems.

But it is not just teaching that cannot get enough recruits in those subjects. They are the very same areas of expertise in which industry complains of recruitment problems. They are also, of course, the skills which are now in particularly high demand.

There has been, and is, a long-term problem here which we as a Government have been trying to address—the fact that, compared with the countries with which we most have to compete, not enough of our young people have been taking up these subjects. This is now exacerbated by the demographic downturn—the much lower number of school leavers up to 1996—on the one hand, and by the ever-increasing demand in a technological age and with the single European market looming for them, on the other. In the long term, one of the many benefits of the national curriculum is that it should greatly increase the enthusiasm among, and hence the numbers of, young people with such qualifications.

But that long-term solution will not provide an answer, so in the short term we are taking action which is targeted directly on these clearly identified issues. We have spent over £50 million since July 1986 on measures to address them, and these are continuing. They include bursaries for trainee teachers in physics, mathematics, technology and chemistry. They include the remit that I have given to the interim advisory committee for its recommendations for the coming year's salary settlement for teachers. I have specifically asked it to address these two areas of concern, with special reference to further use of incentive allowances. As the House knows, I have asked the interim advisory committee to report to me by the end of this month. With its report imminent, I clearly cannot say any more today about that matter.

Mr. Straw: When the Secretary of State sent his letter to Lord Chilver on 26 September, he said that inflation would fall further in the months ahead. In fact, it has risen. Is the Secretary of State going to take that into account in raising the cash limit.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made it clear that the cash limit is a remit to the interim advisory committee. I do not want to say any more about what the committee might recommend to me. Clearly that is a matter for the committee, whose report I shall receive within the next few days—certainly by the end of the month, the time by which we asked it to report.

Let me turn to the other short-term measures. In-service training for conversion and updating of shortage-subject teachers is one. We have also commissioned open learning materials for the in-service training of teachers in these subjects. Through our new education support grant, which I announced last week—£2 million has been given in the first year, and with more to follow as total expenditure for this particular area—we are supporting local education authorities through the education support grant, particularly in areas of recruitment difficulty, to develop programmes for recruiting former teachers. This is an area that I regard as a major priority, and one in which there is tremendous potential. I have given a clear indication that, if good progress is made, I should like to see rather more of the education support grant concentrated on this aspect when we come to look at the priorities for next year.

Included also in the short-term programme is a publicity and advertising campaign, spearheaded by the teaching as a career unit. In addition, we are encouraging mature people to come into teaching, often after working in other careers. We have run a highly successful series of taster courses aimed at encouraging mature people to come into teaching, as we will be expanding this programme next year. The licensed teacher route will provide an important source of teachers in the future.

[Mr. MacGregor]

This is a coherent and consistent programme of measures, and I will add to them as necessary. They are focused; they are targeted; above all, they are positive. They recognise that there are issues seriously to be addressed. That is in marked contrast to the contributions of the hon. Member for Blackburn. I re-read his speeches in the previous two debates on this question in the summer. Then, and now, he has failed to make a single constructive proposal. *[Interruption.]* I will come in a moment to the package that he raised at the end. When his criticisms are matched by complete absence of analysis and no positive ideas, then the House is entitled to dismiss them as empty rhetoric.

Let me turn now to resources. This Government have not merely set the policy agenda—acting where others have talked. We have also backed up our policies with resources. Look at the trend in spending per pupil. In 1979-80, about £515 was being spent on each pupil in nursery, primary and secondary schools. By 1988-89, that figure had risen to about £1,365 per pupil.

Mr. Straw: What about inflation?

Mr. MacGregor: I will come to the point about inflation.

That is a cash-terms increase of no less than 165 per cent. The real-terms increase, which is the one on which we ought to focus, is also impressive. In each and every year between 1979-80 and 1988-89, there has been a real-terms increase in spending per pupil. Overall, during that period, real-terms spending per pupil rose by 42 per cent.

Part of this increase is due to the improvements in staffing under this Government. As we all know, of course, teachers are much the biggest item of expenditure in school budgets, accounting for around half of all spending by local education authorities. As the House knows, there has been a steady improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio. In 1979-80, there was one teacher for every 19 pupils in primary and secondary schools; by 1987-88 that ratio had improved to one teacher for every 17 pupils.

I shall come now to the point that the hon. Member for Blackburn has been raising. He talked about the under-fives. Of course it is not possible to achieve everything at once. The great fault of the Labour party has been its promises to everybody that it is going to achieve everything at once. Unfortunately, quite a number of people will not remember just how very badly it did last time in that respect.

Having said that, I want to consider what has been achieved in respect of participation rates in education among the under-fives. That has shown an upward trend —rising from 39 per cent. in 1979-80, to 45 per cent. in 1987-88. This expansion has been funded by a substantial increase in spending on the under-fives—by about 45 per cent. in real terms over the same period.

Here I come to the point about Bligh primary school that the hon. Gentleman raised. I too have had this matter looked into this morning. I understand that a pre-school playgroup has been set up in the premises of Bligh primary school. Children are admitted to this group on payment of a fee. The children attending the group are not of statutory school age and are not on the school's roll. The group is funded, managed and taught separately from the main school, and the group is charged for the use that it makes of the primary school's accommodation.

Such arrangements are not uncommon or illegal. As there are always priorities for individual education authorities—they cannot achieve all that they would wish —we should commend the initiative of parents who undertake this kind of project.

Mr. Straw: This is a very important issue, so I am glad that the Secretary of State has given way. The truth is that the pre-school playgroup arrangement is a simple device or trick to circumvent the law against charging fees. The Secretary of State must agree to investigate what Kent county council has done. This is not a playgroup. Does the Secretary of State not understand that the teachers, who are teaching these children part of the national curriculum —not simply to play—are paid by the county council, out of funds provided by the parents?

Mr. MacGregor: I have had the matter looked into this morning, but I wish that the hon. Gentleman were not so disparaging of the pre-school playgroup movement. I think that it has achieved a great deal.

Let me turn to other resources. The education share of the Government's local authority grant settlement for next year amounts to very nearly £15 billion. Over 9 per cent. higher than for 1989-90, it is a huge sum by any standards. As regards capital resources for schools, next year will see a substantial increase for local authority capital and for grants to voluntary-aided and special agreement schools. The big increase in funds made available will allow local education authorities and governing bodies to continue their programme of improvement to schools. What we are making available for new improvement work alone—this, of course, is through the annual capital guidelines, and clearly it would be possible for local authorities to add considerably to it through capital receipts and in other ways—is a four-and-a-half times increase on the figure for last year.

Of course, there is never enough to satisfy everybody's aspirations. But I have to remind hon. Members that capital spending per pupil has increased by 10 per cent. in real terms over the last 10 years. I do not yet have the figures for actual spending—as distinct from forecasts— for 1988-89 or 1989-90, but I expect them to show further very substantial increases in real terms. I ask the House to contrast this with the record of the last Labour Government, who cut spending on local authority schools capital to around half its 1974 level in real terms.

All this clearly puts paid to any claims that this Government are not investing in our schools. Of course we would like to do more—all of us would like to do more —but we have to do what is possible within the resources available in the country as a whole. But we also believe that taxpayers and ratepayers have a right to expect that their money will be well spent. It is the Government's duty to press local education authorities, schools and colleges to achieve the best possible return for the enormous resources given to them.

We have had from the hon. Member for Blackburn the same old Socialist agenda rooted in the failed solutions of the 1970s. Opposition Members talk about a commitment to excellence, but where we seek to build excellence, their party has a commitment to destruction.

Opposition Members would tear up choice for parents. Their idea of excellence is a monolithic single-state system. When they talk about choice—they do not often do so—they do not mean choice for parents. When they talk about a new partnership, they mean a return to the old tyranny of monopoly local education authority provision. Theirs is a commitment to producers, not to consumers. Ours is a commitment to pupils and parents.

Opposition Members posture about a broad and balanced curriculum, but their own policy document will deny it. By limiting the national curriculum to the core subjects of English, maths and science, they will return schools to the unsatisfactory mish-mash in which many pupils followed an inadequate and unbalanced curriculum.

Our reforms of the school system are necessary for the new world of the 1990s. They are in schools now, building upon the solid foundation that the Government have already put in place. They are now rapidly taking shape, to the benefit of pupils, parents and teachers. The real failure would be to stand in the way of those great reforms. The Government have created them, are developing them and will bring them to fulfilment.

In comparison with that record of reform and achievement, from the utterances by the hon. Member for Blackburn, it is obvious that he and his party have no new thoughts. They peddle the failed old mixture that they peddled before. This afternoon, hon. Members heard plenty of spending commitments along the old lines. We will rapidly try to find out from the hon. Gentleman just what they amount to, and we will ask him to cost them so that we know how much substance there is in them.

The last Labour Government made promises and totally failed to achieve them. In fact, we saw a downturn in spending. In 1987, the Labour party made promises, but, when they were totted up, the electorate saw through them and realised that we could not afford them on that scale at that time. We will look carefully at what the hon. Gentleman said this afternoon and we will ask him many questions about exactly what his proposals amount to. That is why I urge the House to reject the motion and support the amendment.

5.21 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I am amazed that the Secretary of State for Education and Science can give such a misguided impression of what is happening in schools throughout the country. In particular, I refer to teachers' impressions of their own worth, especially in view of the pay deal that is currently being examined. I would have liked the Secretary of State to have come clean and said, "Yes, I made a miscalculation when I wrote to Lord Chilver about the pay award for the coming financial year. Inflation is rising, and I recommend a further amount to deal with that." Hon. Members heard nothing like that. We heard only "Wait and see."

One would imagine that the Government have just come to power, that the problems that they talk about are new and have taken them by surprise, and that they have had nothing to do with them. Today's problems are a result of the wasted opportunities of the 1980s. During that decade, we experienced real underfunding by central Government. Education was neglected, and educators at all levels were subjected to abuse by Government Ministers. That is why we have such problems in our education system.

We are spending less of our gross domestic product on education, although the challenges of the 1990s in Europe and further afield will require a far more highly educated and trained work force. Had we been able to maintain the spending level that was much denigrated in 1979, we would be spending a further £3 billion on education. There has been a drop of 27 per cent. in real terms. We must tell the electorate, "Forget the flannel about the Government's wonderful spending record." Without exception, the real increases in education have been due to spending by local authorities that have cared about their education responsibilities. For example, in the past decade there was an increase in university spending of about about 1 per cent., with the Government responsible for virtually all funding. Where local authorities have made a substantial contribution to polytechnics, the number of students has increased by more than 50 per cent. Commitment has come from Labour local authorities, not from Tory central Government.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman will be able to make his points later.

Throughout the 1980s, teachers' pay fell behind that of other non-manual workers. It is almost £1,000 less than it would have been had the marker that was set down in 1979 continued. Failures are to be found everywhere.

Because of changes in the rate support grant, Welsh local authorities have lost almost £1 billion of central Government funds to finance local government services, of which education takes the lion's share. When Her Majesty's inspectors examined the state of schools in Wales, they found that, as in England, there was a massive backlog of repairs. In my county of Mid Glamorgan, an estimated £25 million was needed to bring schools up to standard. In the neighbouring county of West Glamorgan the figure was £28 million, in Gwent it was £14·5 million, and in the rural county of Powys the figure was £5 million. The results of Government underfunding stare us in the face in dingy schools.

The Secretary of State for Wales had the wonderful idea of the valleys initiative. When the proposal was first aired, Mid Glamorgan county council said, "What a wonderful idea. We badly need six new schools in our valleys." The valleys initiative was published, and it stated that there would be six schools for the county of Mid Glamorgan. However, the initiative failed to state that two schools were due to be opened in a month and that the other four were already planned. Not an extra penny was put into the valleys initiative to build new schools or to improve existing ones, but there was plenty of money to give pubs a new coat of paint. The Government could find money for pubs but not for schools. That is indicative of their thinking.

When we moved from the old Burnham system of remuneration to the new interim advisory committee system, and when it finally put the first award into practice and examined the money that was provided by central Government to fund it, my county of Mid Glamorgan found that it was more than £300,000 short of what was needed. The county had no part in the negotiations for the

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pay award. The Government gave a sum of money to the interim advisory committee that determined the award, but the ratepayers of Mid Glamorgan had to find £325,000 to finance it.

A similar problem can be found in the implementation of the national curriculum. It is all very well for the Secretary of State for Education and Science to say what wonderful things will happen as a result of the national curriculum, but, once again, his Department and the Secretary of State for Wales are failing sufficiently to fund the changes.

There is, for example, the question of the proper teaching of science subjects in primary schools. In Mid Glamorgan, about half of all primary schools were built before the first world war, and they have neither the water supplies nor the power points needed for science to be taught properly in their classrooms. The Government gave Mid Glamorgan £200,000 to start a programme of upgrading those old schools, but the county council has been obliged to find a further £480,000 to implement what it still describes as a modest programme for ensuring that proper facilities are available for teaching the national curriculum.

I asked parliamentary questions of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and of the Secretary of State for Wales about extra funding for implementing the national curriculum in respect of children with special needs, but both replied that no special money would be provided for that purpose. As to the modest primary school programme, Mid Glamorgan county council will have to ask each poll tax payer for £1·25 extra to fund it, when at the same time the Government are putting pressure on local authorities to keep down the level of poll tax.

The theme for the first two years of this decade, as for the 1980s, will be underfunding of our education service. The Secretary of State referred to the importance of teachers, but it seems that their wages will continue not to reflect their importance to the community. When the Minister replies to the debate, perhaps he will explain how the education service is to respond to the excessive inflation that is a consequence of the Government's economic policies.

There are accounts in today's newspapers about the pressures on teachers, who feel that they are of little worth —partly because of the low wages that they are paid—and are leaving the profession. They cannot stand the pressures imposed by an underfunded system and look for easier jobs elsewhere. Although the Secretary of State might deny that there are shortages and say that more people are entering teacher training this year than for a long time, the number for crucial subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and craft, design and technology is below the target set by the Department. The shortages can only get worse.

Wales has never been known for having a lack of teachers, but Mid Glamorgan is reporting difficulties in recruiting teachers of modern languages, Welsh, technical subjects and science. That is the legacy of a decade of Conservative rule. I hope that the House will support the motion fully as that is a way of showing the public that there are people in positions of power committed to improving the country's education service. We shall prove that by voting for the motion.

5.33 pm

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I shall be brief, and so that others of my right hon. and hon. Friends may participate I am not prepared to give way to any interventions.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) spoke of the legacy of a decade of Conservative government. Anyone who has been involved in education for a number of years will acknowledge that educational legacies take a long time to accrue. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke of the Government's efforts over the past decade, which led to gradual change and implementation of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Anyone involved in education at national level in the 1970s will remember the problems that the service suffered then. I make no apology for reiterating the remarks of my right hon. Friend in respect of the 1976 public expenditure White Paper, which recommended the most draconian cuts in all social services after many promises—some of which have been repeated today—were made. The remarks of Opposition Members today prompt the question, "Haven't we heard it all before?"

The Education Reform Act 1988 will bring massive and welcome changes, but I draw some specific matters to the attention of my right hon. Friend. He spoke of the need to introduce assessment and testing, and said that schemes for that purpose will come on stream in the near future. He spoke also of the need to maintain the impetus of change, with which we would all agree. However, other aspects of the implementation of change should be borne in mind. Records of achievement, for example, can add immeasureably to the value of primary school education. They are welcomed by parents and teachers and are extremely popular with the pupils themselves. I trust that there will be no lessening of my right hon. Friend's commitment to ensuring that records of achievement will be kept.

As to teacher costs following the implementation of local management schemes, it is no coincidence that local authority after local authority, whether Conservative or Labour-controlled, has expressed grave concern about the effects that those costs will have on school budgets. I have the honour to be chairman of a large, group 8 primary school, of which there are not many. It has £12,000 worth of incremental drift per year. The table of winners and losers shows it to be a winner on day one, but it rapidly becomes a loser. The governing body faces severe problems in contemplating what teacher costs will mean for that school. I urge my right hon. Friend to re-examine that aspect. He has received representations about it, and I know that it is a matter of concern to him.

I feel sure that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House unite in the desire to see delivered the Government's education reforms. By and large, they will be delivered by the commitment of teaching staff in our schools.

It is true to say that problems are emerging in many schools. I do not disagree one jot with what my right hon. Friend said about teachers' commitment. I do not disagree one jot with what he said about improved standards for teacher training, which we would all welcome. I urge him to reflect upon what has been said in many quarters—that

the speed of the change, and the extra workload being imposed, is causing strain. That must be recognised and dealt with. It can be done in several ways.

The problems of the interim advisory committee and the question of the restoration of teachers' negotiating rights are causing difficulties in the teaching service, but I think that those problems can and will be solved in the not-too-distant future.

We have certainly not resolved the problem of delivery. I believe that people who are interested in and concerned with education expect the Government's reforms to bring about a considerable improvement in standard and quality throughout the education system. We cannot afford to see the reforms fail because we do not have adequate staff to deliver them. Therefore, we must study the problem carefully.

We have heard a great deal about the way in which we should deal with teachers' salaries. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will remember the time that we spent together on the Association of Metropolitan Authorities' education committee and on the Burnham committee, studying the problems created by the enormous pay hike in the 1974 Houghton award. The Clegg award caused similar problems, with another enormous hike in salaries in 1979. There is universal agreement that that must not be allowed to happen again.

Teachers' morale has been mentioned on many occasions. Morale is affected not just by pay and status, but by an amalgam of factors that lead to an appreciation of what teachers represent and that they alone are able to achieve and to deliver the Government's stated aims. I hope that there will not be any falling-away of the commitment to see those aims achieved in as short a time as possible. However, haste must not be the single determinant, as it is more important to get it right.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider the points that I have raised when he studies how his Department will respond to those important matters in the next few months.

5.42 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister of State will pay heed to the words of the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton). His expressed words, and some of his implied words, will bear careful reading and reflection, and I am aware that he speaks with experience of the subject. He rightly warned of the need to combine urgency with solidity and consistency, and that it is important to deal with the fundamental issues and not superficial concerns.

The Secretary of State comes to the debate after six months in office. We are at the beginning of a new decade, and it is appropriate that we should look at the state of our schools. We should reflect on the past decade and the coming decade as a background to the motion tabled by the Opposition and the amendment tabled by the Government, and we should consider what has happened to the Government's public commitment to education—the public commitment as manifested by the amount of money that the nation commits to education.

Between 1978-79 and 1990-91 the proportion of public expenditure on education fell from 14·4 per cent. to 13·7 per cent., at the same time as other categories of public expenditure increased, most notably defence. I know that the partial answer to that dichotomy is that school rolls have been falling. However, the Government seek to gain credit for the fact that there is a better teacher-pupil ratio. We should have been using the great decade of oil revenue to increase the percentage of our public expenditure on education. If the Government stand to be condemned, it is first by the statistics that show that we give less priority to education in our national expenditure now than we did 10 years ago.

I understand the time pressures today on the Secretary of State, but it is interesting that he did not give way when I sought to intervene when he kept on repeating the point made in the Government amendment, that there has been "increased expenditure since 1979 of over 40 per cent. in real terms per pupil."
I accept that. But what is the ratio per pupil of expenditure in the ordinary state school, compared to the ratio of expenditure per pupil in a city technology college? The answer is that a disproportionate amount is being allocated, and there is massive expenditure per pupil for the elite little group at a CTC, compared with per pupil expenditure on those much less fortunate pupils who are in a state school. That is unacceptable and unjustifiable by any standard.

The Government are also indicted by other statistics. The Secretary of State does not have to take personal responsibility, but the Government must accept that one sign of how bad their policies have been during the past 10 years is the low take-up rate for post-school education or training of pupils in Britain, compared with our competitor countries. Consider the figures in Australia, Canada, France, West Germany and Japan, which are all countries that we must compete with in an increasingly competitive world. The staying-on rate for pupils after the official school-leaving age in Britain is less than half the rate in some of those countries, and the number is rising less quickly.

The educational attainment statistics and targets in Britain have been compared with those in other countries during past debates. For example, during the current Committee stage of the Education (Student Loans) Bill, information has been given that the number of people in higher education in Korea has already reached the figure that the Government have targeted for 10 years' hence. We are falling behind appallingly.

Dr. Hampson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall not give way. It is not that I do not wish to, but many other hon. Members wish to speak.

We are failing to achieve standards and targets that will give Britain the educated community that it needs. The Government have also now confirmed that they are not after all committed to doubling the number of students in higher education. The reality is that we are not attaining the prerequisite of higher education, as an insufficient number of students aged over 16 stay on at school.

There have been new initiatives on employment training, which are welcome, and it is important that we continue to develop them. However, there is no real commitment or coherence in policy.

It would now be appropriate for the Government to reconsider the idea of amalgamating the Department of Education and Science with the part of the Department of Employment that is responsible for training. I know that that has been considered by the Government, and those functions ought to go together. That is what happens in other countries, for example, Australia. If the education

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and training system is integrated, we shall be able to deliver the appropriate curricula and training to produce an appropriately educated work force in the future.

In training, there are many things that we can do and I shall list a few. For example, we could promote more exchanges between staff in schools and colleges and people employed in local industry and commerce, by secondment. We could encourage more technology in schools. We could ensure that teachers have more knowledge of the needs of the local labour market, and we could enable the national curriculum to contain enough flexibility to allow young people to leave school much better equipped for the rapidly changing world of work.

Perhaps the most substantial indictment of the Government's schools policy is the continuing teacher crisis caused by inadequate pay and insufficient numbers, and leading to a tragic lack of morale.

Hidden in the small print of last week's revenue support grant announcement was something rather interesting. Can the Minister confirm that the Government have, in effect, given teachers in the south-east a regional pay advantage? I do not deny that teachers in the south-east —like those elsewhere—need more pay; indeed, my colleagues and I have said so many times in the House. The adjustment in the settlement, however, will not remedy the massive problem of teacher shortages—which is most acute in the south-east, where the cost of living is higher, and most particularly in the more deprived parts of that region.

By eliminating negotiating mechanisms, the Government have limited the amount available for teachers' pay next year. Teachers in other regions are therefore forfeiting part of their pay rise in order to generate scarcely more acceptable salaries for their colleagues in the south-east. I trust that the Minister will agree that that does not constitute an adequate response to the needs of teachers in the most stressed parts of the country.

As the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) said, we are still substantially short of teachers for several core subjects in the curriculum. As is clear from the Central Register and Clearing House survey of the autumn 1989 entry for teacher training, planned entry targets are not being reached in several subjects that the Government themselves consider vital—craft, design and technology, modern languages, mathematics, religious education and science—and that is at least as true today. The cause of the shortage is not just the difficulty of recruiting people with these qualifications across the sectors. Because the appeal of teaching in the state sector is becoming increasingly reduced, given the choice, those with the necessary qualifications tend to opt for a different profession entirely.

The national curriculum is, in part, a good thing: it is wise to ensure that young people are taught all appropriate subjects. It is, however, a major headache for those who are expected to implement it. Teachers are falling behind with their work. The hon. Member for Crosby mentioned the high incidence of stress, and a report produced only today makes clear the importance of this point. Teachers have next to no time to plan, and less and less non-contact time. They are under increasing pressure as they try to deliver all the new initiatives.

Mr. Harry Greenway: That is nonsense.

Mr. Hughes: It is true, and if the hon. Gentleman visited the schools, he would hear as much from heads, deputy heads, departmental heads and all the rest.

Mr. Greenway *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman will not give way because he does not know.

Mr. Hughes: I do know. I visit as many schools as the hon. Gentleman, if not more. I have been into the classrooms, out of the limelight, and have talked to ordinary teachers. I have sat in on whole afternoons of lessons, and have seen the obligations that the national curriculum imposes. Governors and teachers know that what I am saying is true, and if the hon. Gentleman, who is a former teacher, does not agree, that shows how far removed he now is from the profession of which he was once an eminent member. Teachers also have the mounting task of recording and assessing the performance of pupils—a task which, given the pressures imposed by the curriculum, they will increasingly be unable to carry out.

I gather that the Government may be likely to scrap the audit proposals. Apparently the Minister of State made that clear yesterday when she visited my constituency, and I hope that she will confirm it when she winds up the debate. If that happens, it will be a welcome change of plan, as teachers will have one less thing to do.

The Secretary of State talked about local management of schools. The Government amendment commends the enthusiasm with which people are supposedly welcoming LMS, but that is certainly not true of all authorities, including even those that are Tory-controlled. Hereford and Worcester, for instance, considers it a very bad idea. I know that county well—where that friend of Ministers, Dr. Muffett, is chairman of the education committee. According to Hereford and Worcester, where

"all LMS schools should be funded according to average teaching costs in their local authority, but must meet the actual costs of their own teachers",

Hereford and Worcester does not intend to go ahead with the scheme, because its schools

"could lose more than £100,000 from their budgets."

The teaching profession is still in crisis, and we can find no consolation in the up-to-date national figures. The Secretaryof State did not proffer any; the last accurate Government figures were given in a written answer a year ago. We do know, however, that 20,000 teachers left the classrooms last year. We know that, unprecedentedly, the six teachers' unions have united to tell the Government that there is a crisis, and not just in the capital. We know that in some subjects that crisis is worse than ever. We also know that there are now more than 1,000 teaching vacancies in inner London, and I know that there are more than 225 in my borough of Southwark. If that is not a crisis, I do not know what will ever constitute one.

I have been to see the Minister of State with my proposals. I suggested that the Secretary of State should urgently call a meeting of London teachers and listen to their ideas, because they know what they are talking about. I also suggested ways of facilitating teachers from Australia, New Zealand and Ireland teaching here, a mechanism for reviewing incentive payments and a mechanism to ensure that many of the empty properties

that have recently been built at such great expense are made available to teachers in the south-east. So far those suggestions have been greeted with silence. The Government could have come up with some urgent and effective initiatives, but they have not done so.

What, then, is the position at the beginning of the new decade? We are spending a smaller proportion of our gross domestic product on education than many of our neighbours; bizarrely and alarmingly, we are spending even less of our GDP on education than Third-world countries such as Swaziland, Zambia and Zaire. We are making defence spending a greater priority, while we are reducing education spending. The policy to recruit more teachers has clearly failed. LMS and its method of implementation are not acceptable, even to Tory local government. Many teachers fear the implementation of the national curriculum.

There is no vision for the future, just as there has been no successful policy in the past. The Secretary of State and the Minister of State must accept that the policies of the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), have failed: they have not produced successful results. Change is needed urgently if British education is not to have an even bleaker future in the 1990s than it had in the 1980s.

Let me warn the Secretary of State that at the end of his first year he will receive his first annual report. All I can say is that he had better do much better than the previous pupil in his position in the class, and much better than he has done in the first six months of his term of office

5.57 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and I agree on at least one thing—the need for better remuneration for teachers—but I disagree entirely with his remarks about my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), the benefit of whose reforms the hon. Gentleman will see in the not-too-distant future.

Last week the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) described my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister as "fizzing with fury". Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that his speech did not fizz with anything. It contained no inspiration, no excitement and no new ideas; it was all too predictable—dull, boring and far too long.

I suspect that the wording of today's motion would be rather more accurate if it referred to "the failure of the Opposition to produce any policies on schools". It is significant that the part of the hon. Gentleman's speech that referred to his policies lasted less than one minute, and I found his silence eloquent.

We get the same old, tired stuff from the Opposition that we have heard so many times. The Labour party's policies continue to be those of levelling down. Where excellence is seen, they seek to destroy it. They are completely negative and totally destructive. They will abolish grammar schools, grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges. They even seek to denigrate the independent sector. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am not surprised to hear Opposition Members confirm so unreservedly that they would like the independent sector to be abolished.

For Opposition Members, parental choice is meaningless. For them, freedom of choice in education, as in everything else, is meaningless. We seek to improve the quality and the standard of state education, where the majority of our children are educated. We start with the improvement of educational provision for the under-fives. Almost 25 per cent. more children under five years of age attend nursery or primary schools when compared with the last year of the last—and I do mean the last—Labour Government.

Seventy five per cent. of all four-year-olds now go to local education authority maintained nursery or primary schools. During the last 10 years, the proportion of three and four-year-olds going to school has increased to almost 45 per cent., and nine out of 10 attend nursery classes, reception classes or playgroups.

There is even more good news in primary and secondary schools. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] The reforms introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley are beginning to bear fruit. The Education Reform Act 1988, which provided for the national curriculum, the introduction of local management of schools, open enrolment and grant-maintained schools, will be a landmark in British education.

It is significant that the two great Acts of this century to reform education were introduced and piloted through the House by Conservative Secretaries of State. The only new education initiatives have come from Conservative Administrations. The city technology college programme still goes forward, despite the spiteful attitude of Opposition Members and their colleagues in certain education authorities. The politics of envy still exists. The impact of the national curriculum will be felt throughout the education system. It ensures that schools do not waste valuable time or resources on less important subjects. It concentrates on those that are recognised as of real value.

In addition, and confounding its critics, the GCSE examination is proving a substantial success. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science. In speech after speech, she has properly drawn attention to the success of the GCSE examination. It will improve the quality of our children's education. One of the best proofs of the improvement in quality is the increase in admissions to higher education. It is no accident that, during the last 10 years, 200,000 additional students have been admitted to universities, polytechnics and further education colleges.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Mainly to polytechnics.

Mr. Pawsey: That underlines, as perhaps nothing else does, the fact that the quality of education in our schools is improving and that it will continue to improve. There would be little point in seeking to improve access to higher education unless young people leaving school were properly qualified to take advantage of the additional places. That is a measure of the success of the Government's policies. It is one of the benchmarks against which our policies will be judged.

Opposition Members have referred to teachers. Certainly we require the full-hearted co-operation of the profession if our reforms are to bear fruit. Like the love of a good woman, a good teacher is beyond price. Sometimes I believe—to return to a point that was made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton)—that the torrent of paper now overwhelming our schools prevents head teachers and staff from getting on with their primary job, which is to teach. The pace and the extent of the

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reforms have placed a great strain on teachers. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley goes down in history as the great initiator, my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Education and Science will be remembered as the great consolidator. He quite properly believes that there should be a period during which schools can digest the various reforms that we have introduced.

I have made no secret of the fact that I believe that teachers' remuneration should adequately reflect the importance of the work they do. Most teachers in British schools are dedicated both to their profession and to the children who are in their charge. The interim advisory committee has been given £600 million this year to improve teachers' pay. That figure is 55 per cent. higher than last year and double that of the previous year.

It is amusing to reflect on Opposition criticism of teachers' pay. During their last period in office, teachers' pay increased by 6 per cent. That has to be compared with this Government's record: during the last 10 years, teachers' pay has increased in real terms by 30 per cent. That shows the people of this country who actually care about teachers and their level of pay.

A survey of teacher numbers was undertaken by the Department. It confirmed that almost 22,000 students went into teacher training in 1989. That was a substantial increase over 1988. But perhaps the best indicator of teacher numbers was quoted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his opening speech when he referred to the pupil-teacher ratio. I was delighted that, in response to a parliamentary question, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), told me:

"The overall pupil-teacher ratio in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England in January 1989 was 17 and in January 1979"—

under a Labour Government—

"was 18·9".—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. *159*.]

That is a real and significant improvement.

As usual, the Opposition's arguments are long on rhetoric and on criticism but short on ideas. Does anybody, either inside or outside the House, really know what the Opposition's education policies are? Even more to the point, does anybody really care? Perhaps the greatest criticism of the hon. Member for Blackburn and his predecessor, the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), is that nobody knows what they would do, were they to be elected to office. The electorate would be required to sign the usual blank Socialist cheque and take on trust whatever a Labour Government chose to give them.

In the Standing Committee that is considering the Education (Student Loans) Bill, the Opposition's favourite phrase is "as resources allow." That is the inevitable cop-out of Socialism. I do not doubt that the intentions of the hon. Member for Blackburn are good. However, the path of Socialism is always paved with promises—promises which will be honoured, but only when resources allow. The Opposition are as ever long on promises but short on delivery.

6.8 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) is very honest: he profoundly believes in the nonsense that he talks. I propose to deal with reality.

The shortage of teachers is a developing crisis. The general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers told the Select Committee—or it may have been the Standing Committee considering the Education Reform Bill—that it was a developing catastrophe. Every group that we visited described it in those terms.

There is a shortage of full-time teachers; if the Minister believes that the correct figure is 4,000, let him go on believing that. The crisis is on such a scale that it will come to hang around his neck before long and then he will have to look at the real figures.

There are shortages of part-time and supply teachers. The Secretary of State and Conservative Members never mention what happens when applications for teaching posts are invited. There used to be 10, 20 or 30 applications for each position; now there are regularly only one or two. In order to put a body before a class, schools have to select one of those two because of the shortage and the way in which teachers have been treated by the Government.

Our schools are crumbling. Hon. Members do not need to listen to me—they have only to go and look at the state of our schools. All this endangers the national curriculum, which cannot be put in place without enough teachers.

There is a lack of teachers with qualifications appropriate to the subjects that they need to teach. In primary schools, teachers face endless meetings at lunchtime and after school; they also face pressure to go on courses. Stress is endemic in the primary sector, in which teachers are beginning to lack confidence because of the abuse heaped on them by successive Tory Ministers.

Extremely able teachers are beginning to feel inadequate because of the pace of events and the pressures to implement the Education Reform Act 1988. Teachers have faced continual attacks and rudeness from the Government and Conservative Members—but that has suddenly changed because of the shortage of teachers and the crisis in the system. Conservative Members now talk nicely about teachers because they want to recruit them.

At the same time, we are witnessing the fruits of the Government's demeaning of the profession. The Education Reform Act had nothing to do with the private sector. Ministers in the Committee considering that Bill frankly admitted that. The Secretary of State said today that he was asking teachers in the private sector to consider the national curriculum. He did not ask teachers in the public sector; he passed a law making them implement the curriculum.

Conservative Members call the private sector independent. It is not. It is not independent of the wealthy and the rich, on whom it depends. And it gives itself away by taking funds from the public sector of education to give to the city technology colleges and the assisted places scheme. Hundreds of millions of pounds are being poured into those colleges—money taken from the public sector. One such college in Nottingham is costing almost £8 million, yet only £2 million has been allocated for 400 schools in the rest of the area—and Conservative Members think that sensible. Other schools will suffer because of those colleges.

As for teachers' low wages, the Secretary of State knows that the Prime Minister has allowed him only £600 million, which makes little or no difference. Teachers' poor pay and lack of negotiating rights were condemned by the United Nations International Labour Organisation five years ago. The Government continue to mingle in the international fraternity without giving teachers the negotiating rights that all other nations have. That is what the Government have done to the teachers by diktat.

Now the Government are starting to praise teachers, but they have still given them no negotiating rights. Only increased salaries and better conditions will bring back the teachers whom we need. There are 400,000 teachers who are not teaching—the same number as are. They are ready to return to the profession if they are given decent conditions. At present we are raking over the leaves of Europe, bringing in teachers from Denmark, Holland and other nations—countries in which teachers' wages are almost twice as high as here—many of whom cannot speak English. We have all the teachers we need here, and given proper circumstances and wages, they would return.

Teachers need a properly funded major salary increase to give them professional levels of pay. They need incentive allowances, proportionate to the needs of the professionals who have left the service. They need better conditions, better status and respect for the excellent job that they do.

Meanwhile a great deal of money has gone in the direction of the CTCs because the Government want to privatise our education system. The CTCs must be withdrawn; the Government must understand that we shall withdraw them.

If the Government do not take note of what I have honourably and quickly outlined, our children will suffer, parents will suffer, the system will suffer and all this will amount to a recipe for educational disaster. Conservative Members may smile, but they should wait and see what happens when the Education Reform Act and other Government proposals are imposed on our children. The children of Conservative Members do not even enter the same system; similarly, Conservative Members do not use the Health Service that they are destroying.

6.15 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I will not follow the remarks of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), except to say that I am in favour of the maximum possible expenditure on education consistent with the promise of improved standards—which brings me to the point that I want to make, which concerns A levels.

I apologise for resorting to Americanese, but in the interests of brevity I shall. The question I want to ask the Government is: are A levels being "dumbed down"? Is it Government policy to allow them to be dumbed down? We have heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State commend the education system for improving standards by means of the GCSE. I am not an ideological opponent of the GCSE, but I share the doubts of those who have expressed surprise that the number of people gaining top passes in the GCSE has increased by 50 per cent. in two years. This smacks of educational inflation, and I am not alone in taking that view. In this country we have financial inflation and housing inflation, and it seems we now run the risk of educational inflation, too.

The educational establishment is urging on the Government the need to bring A levels into line with the GCSE. In the past, I have always been worried by the rather secretive and autonomous nature of the examination councils. I have recently seen evidence that dumbing down is going on in A levels—an extremely serious matter.

A few years ago, the Government decided against the Higginson committee's sensible recommendation that A-levels should be broadened so that pupils would take five instead of three. On reflection, I believe that the Government were right to resist that, because I suspect that they, like me, do not have enough confidence in the educational establishment broadening the A-level syllabus while maintaining standards.

The establishment is getting its own back on the Government because, out of control of the Government and without reference to them, it is going about the business of dumbing down A-levels under the guise of bringing them into line with the GCSE. My evidence springs particularly from one examining board, which is toning down and debasing the content of the English A-level syllabus. For example, it will include not two Shakespearian plays but one; there will be room for Caribbean poetry, but not for two Shakespearian plays. I could give other details, but for the sake of time I will not do so.

If the Government are to raise educational standards, to put more money into the curriculum, as they should, and to talk up the GCSE, they must be honest with themselves and ask the examining councils what they are doing to A levels. Extra expenditure on education will cause educational inflation in the number of certificates given to pupils, who will be told that they have done extremely well, when in fact they have not because the examination has been simplified or, as the Americans say, "dumbed down". That will produce the same results as financial and housing inflation. Foreigners will eventually find us out. We talk about equalising educational diplomas throughout Europe, but it will gradually become apparent that an 18-year-old English child does not attain the same level as an equivalent French child. That will be bad for the reputation of education in this country.

It is imperative that the Government take my question seriously and do not take refuge behind the etiquette of the education system by saying "This is not for us but for the examining councils." I should like a serious reply from my hon. Friend the Minister. The worst possible thing that could happen would be if the pressures from the Government and education interests to expand higher education, of which I approve, were to be founded on a diminishing intellectual base.

The universities should take that point seriously. If by a stroke of fate I were a Treasury Minister—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I had this experience some time ago—and the Treasury were asked for more money for higher education; if I were to be reminded of the importance of not only vocational subjects but the humanities; and if I had evidence that the intake of universities was based on a debased A-level syllabus, I would laugh in the face of the Secretary of State and refuse him money. What is the point of giving higher education more money if standards are going not up but down?

The question I am asking is crucial. All the good work that the Government have done and all their investment —the Secretary of State made a generally reassuring speech today—will count for nothing if the examination

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system inflates the currency of education and leaves us with an egalitarian policy, to which the Government are supposed to be opposed.

6.23 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I realised that I had not much time, so I quickly tried to cut my speech.

I should like to reiterate the statement made by the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) that morale in the teaching profession has never been lower than it is today. That was an accurate statement. I have visited schools in my constituency, but I have never found teachers so disheartened as they are now. The reason for that is their pay and conditions. They are demoralised and have lost all confidence in the Government.

Teachers' pay is a major issue. I am sure that hon. Members have received dozens of letters from teachers, but I should like to quote from one that I received from a teacher, Jeff Palmer, in my constituency. He says:

"I am the Head of Physics at Washington School. I am 43 years of age and have been teaching for 15 years. Before entering teaching I worked in industry for 10 years. I have a degree in Physics and industrial qualifications. My salary is under £16,000 . . .

The morale in the profession has never been lower. Most of my colleagues are sick and tired at having more and more work placed upon them. They, and I, are fed up with Mr. MacGregor and others telling us what a marvellous job we did in implementing GCSE and how we are going to make a success of National Curriculum, and at the same time deny us a reasonable wage."

That letter is similar to dozens of others that I and other hon. Members have received.

The Teachers Pay and Conditions Act 1987 became law early in that year. The Government insisted that it would be a temporary measure, but it has now been extended until 1991. In 1988, the Government were condemned by the United Nations International Labour Organisation for denying teachers their negotiating rights. The Secretary of State is refusing to comply with international law. He continues to flout international conventions that have been ratified by the Government.

The majority of complaints made by teachers is about their pay and conditions, so let us consider the real statistics. At the present rate of inflation, by March 1990 teachers' pay will have increased by 2·5 per cent. lower than inflation in the period during which the interim advisory committee has been in operation. A teacher at the top of the main professional grade will be £400 a year worse off because of inflation. During the period that the IAC has existed, the pay of teachers at the top of the main professional grade, with an allowance, will have increased by 13·8 per cent. less than the increase in average earnings —a relative loss of £2,100 per year. Is not that the main reason for the shortage of teachers in our schools?

Why does the Secretary of State persist in using selective statistics that amount to misleading propaganda about teachers' pay? He maintains that they have had a 40 per cent. increase since March 1986. He knows that between 1979 and March 1986 teachers' pay increased by 58 per cent., while that of other non-manual workers increased by 76 per cent. The 40 per cent. increase that he claims for teachers since 1986 is merely part of a catching-up exercise. Since 1979, the pay of non-manual workers has increased by 132 per cent., but teachers' pay has increased by only 118 per cent. The Secretary of State should give the full picture, not his partial account.

As the Secretary of State knows, a detailed survey of vacancies carried out by the six teachers' unions—it is not often that they get together to do anything—made it clear that schools currently have about 8,000 vacancies. He knows quite well that insufficient graduates are opting for teaching as a career. Why should they become teachers, with a salary of just £9,390, when they can obtain salaries well in excess of £10,000 elsewhere? Even if the full £600 million that the Secretary of State has allowed for increases this year were distributed entirely to the main scale, it would still give teachers a starting salary of about £10,100 next year. He knows that that money will not be so distributed and that teaching will remain as unattractive as it is at present.

The Government have made numerous promises to disband the IAC, but they have failed to honour their pledges and have made no serious attempt to do so. The truth is that they do not want teachers to have back their negotiating rights. They wish to continue to dictate teachers' pay as part of their policy to control public spending.

For three years, teachers have accepted imposed pay and conditions and education reforms such as the national curriculum, which has resulted in a hugely increased work load for them. We congratulate them on making the GCSE a success. But enough is enough. To make matters worse, if that is possible, we now find that the £600 million planned increase for teachers' pay is being allocated on a regional basis. This change undoubtedly underpins the Government's intention to introduce new differentials in teachers' pay.

Without providing any new money and without negotiating with the trade unions, the Government have put in place preferential financial arrangements for employers in the whole of the south-east region. The publication 10 days ago of the revenue support grant settlement for 1990-91 contained these new arrangements in small print in an annex. Teachers in the south-east can therefore be offered bigger pay rises at the expense of their colleagues in the rest of the country. We oppose this arbitrary imposition of regional pay differentials. It is totally unjust that teachers elsewhere in the country should forfeit part of their pay rise, which is bound to be inadequate, in order to generate scarcely more acceptable salary levels for their colleagues in the south-east.

No explanation has been offered by the Secretary of State. I hope that when the Minister of State replies to the debate she will explain why this has happened. In previous years only part of the south-east received extra grant; now the whole of the south-east will get it.

Teachers are leaving the profession in huge numbers, despite what the Department of Education and Science says. *The Guardian* of 29 December carried the following report:

"Five times more teachers are leaving the profession than official statistics reveal. A report by researchers at Manchester University's school of education found that 20,000 teachers left the classroom in 1989, compared with the government figure of just 4,000. The report blames the scale of the losses on the effects of the Education Reform Act. Work overload, poor pay and low morale were the main reasons given for leaving."

As I said, I have received dozens of letters from disgruntled teachers. I had intended to quote another, not

from a constituent but from someone in Birmingham who had had enough and had written to me, but I shall not do so because another hon. Member wants to speak and I have given a guarantee to you, Mr. Speaker, that I would allow him time.

The teaching force is already disgruntled. Unless the Government take action pretty quickly, the problem will get worse, and more teachers will leave the profession. Our children are losing out. The Government will not be forgiven for the damage that they are doing to the nation.

6.32 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I share Tuesdays and Thursdays on the Education (Student Loans) Bill with the hon. Member for the City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), and I am grateful to him for sitting down promptly and allowing me an opportunity to intervene in the debate. He read out a letter from a physics teacher. As an ex-physics teacher, I found that a good way to get my support.

Although I do not go along with the general theme of doom and gloom that we have heard from the Opposition Benches, at least I agree with Opposition Members that the nettle of teachers' pay must be grasped. I do not know if they will all share my view that, when we consider teacher shortages and other problems referred to during the debate, we shall have to grasp the nettle of differentials and local pay bargaining and get away from the old scales which operated when I was a teacher and which still, I am afraid, operate today. They were not good for teachers' pay, any more than was the old Burnham committee whose return Opposition Members are always calling for. The Burnham committee was very bad for teachers' pay, so whatever way forward the Secretary of State chooses, I ask him not to go for another Burnham committee.

I welcome the calmer atmosphere in which the education debate is now taking place. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to his colleagues for the way in which they have taken a lead in providing that atmosphere in which we can talk about education and its future in a civilised fashion.

I support the aims of the Education Reform Act 1988 and so intend to support the Prime Minister's amendment tonight. In the brief time available to me I simply want to refer to something which will be on the agenda for education in the future—the relationship between national and local government. We have heard a great deal about local government, but no hon. Member has so far spoken about something which is in the minds of Members on both sides of the House: the present unsatisfactory relationship between national and local government when it comes to education.

Under present education policy, more and more the focus is placed on the classroom and the school, but the recent reforms have also strengthened the role and function of the Department of Education and Science. I have no idea if it was the original intention but although, rightly, we are putting more and more power into the hands of governors, teachers, heads and parents, unwittingly perhaps we are putting more power into the hands of the Department. We now have tension between the local authorities and the Department on such matters as the definition of the curriculum and city technology colleges, which I strongly support. Tension also arises on the question of grant-maintained schools—of which I am a strong supporter—and the education support grant.

The role of the local education authority, therefore, has diminished and, probably under any Government, will continue to diminish. This is not to undervalue the good work done by many local education authorities, including my own in Norfolk, but we have also heard this evening about the appalling record of the Inner London education authority, shortly to go, unlamented.

The Government and the local education authorities continually blame each other for the effect of their decisions on, for example, school numbers, the average pay concept and the setting up of budgets in schools. My own view is that the present system is too bureaucratic. Along with many of my colleagues, I prefer a centrally-funded system with a supervision of standards by the Department of Education and Science. There is no time to develop the details of this, but it could be fleshed out if time was available. The great advantage of central funding, particularly relevant to the debates of the past week or so, would be an immediate two-thirds reduction in the community charge.

Mr. Cryer: Good idea.

Mr. Thompson: I am developing a theme and seeing where it leads. The figure of £278 which is presently being quoted would then become something like £200.

I have believed for a long time that education should be funded centrally, before anyone even thought of the community charge, but in view of the time I would like to conclude my arguments without dwelling too long on the community charge itself.

The arguments developed by Ministers against central funding of education are, I think, flawed. If time allowed, I would develop that theme and explain why my suggestion is perfectly feasible. The change that I have suggested could be presented as a major commitment to education and training by the Government. Central funding would mean a small increase in funding by the Exchequer, which would no longer be raised locally. As we are agreed that greater priority should be given to education and training, I can see my suggestion, supported by many of my colleagues, going along with an increased commitment in that regard.

We have heard stories of doom and gloom from the Opposition, but no constructive suggestions. The constructive suggestions have come from Conservative Members. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will accept that my argument for a change in the relationship between local authorities and Government is intellectually sound, has much support and should be seriously considered.

6.39 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): This has been a debate about education standards. It has been about the Government's policies on standards and their lack of ambition in terms of raising this country's education standards to the level in western Europe and other parts of the world.

I should like to pick up two points that were made by Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton), in what I think was his first speech since he became Chairman of the Select Committee on

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Education, Science and Arts, made an interesting and well-informed speech. I hope that Ministers listened to his comments about local management of schools. Labour and Conservative-controlled authorities throughout the country are afraid that LMS will create a set of unmanageable problems which will damage the delivery of education.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) talked about A-level examinations and the possible need to make reforms along the lines suggested in the Higginson report. He talked himself into a certain state of pessimism. It is possible to achieve a broader examination of students at 18 while maintaining standards. Higginson offered the Government a way in which that could be achieved. When the Labour party is elected to office in a year or two, we will implement the Higginson recommendations and reform the 18-plus examination.

The key phrase in the debate was uttered by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), when he said that, as a parent, the key question that he would want to ask was whether the delivery of education satisfied him in relation to his children. The Secretary of State and all hon. Members should ask that question. Would we be satisfied with some conditions that obtain in our education system? The answer is that, if we honestly face those problems in schools to which our children go, we will have difficulty in saying, "Yes, we are totally satisfied."

The Secretary of State often talks about there not being a real teacher shortage problem, but he then admits that there is a problem in London and the south-east. If there is a problem there, I ask the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues whether they would want their children to go to a school in Tower Hamlets. The teacher shortage in that borough is so acute that the local authority is considering recruiting teenagers, not as teachers but as child minders, so that young people do not run around the streets and so that children are not without care during the day. That is not about education; it is just about child minding.

The Secretary of State said today and in his letter to his parliamentary colleagues that, in addition to the geographical problem, there may be a shortage problem in certain specialist subjects—for example, mathematics, physics, chemistry and modern languages. My hon. Friends should make the calculations and tell us what would be left of the national curriculum if those crucial subjects were taken out. It would mean taking out about 40 per cent. of the national curriculum—yet the Secretary of State is satisfied with saying that there is a shortage of those subjects, in the clear and complacent knowledge that delivery of those subjects will be below the standards that parents expect for their children.

The Secretary of State fails to admit a crucial factor —that there is a shortage of qualified teachers in particular subjects. We may get teachers in front of children, but we do not always get teachers with the requisite skills. *[Interruption.]* It is no good disagreeing with that. The Kingman report on the teaching of English and reports on the teaching of mathematics show the extent of the hidden shortage because we do not have enough properly qualified teachers.

This all points to the need for a highly motivated and properly paid teaching profession. Last year, PA Management Consultants studied a comparable range of graduate professions. After five years in a profession, the average salary in that group two years ago was nearly £18,000 a year; but after five years' experience, the average salary of graduate teachers is £13,500. Is it therefore surprising that people will not be attracted into or remain in the teaching profession?

The Secretary of State failed in his remarkably complacent speech to recognise the problems of overload in terms of delivering the Government's education reforms. He should go into any primary or secondary school and ask the head teacher how he or she envisages delivering the national curriculum. He will be told that the head teacher does not know the answer, because the Department of Education and Science does not know it. Those who teach subjects such as arts, music and physical education are worried. Eighteen months after the enactment of legislation, the national curriculum working parties in those subjects have not even been set up. How can a head teacher describe how the national curriculum will look on implementation in a school when the Government have not even set up the appropriate working parties?

There is a problem of overload when teachers are not given accurate or reliable information about how the testing system will work. They do not know about the relationship between testing and the national curriculum. The Minister talked proudly about the technical and vocational education initiative, but when we asked questions in the debates on the Education Reform Bill about the future of TVEI and its relationship to the national curriculum, the Minister of State had no answers. Ministers still do not know how TVEI will fit the national curriculum. All those changes are creating problems of overload. It is about time that the Government recognised that those changes also bring into question the standard and delivery of education.

Some Conservative Members dismiss the notion of good schools in a physical sense. They seem to think that the resources available are not important. I shall give some examples to make my point. Queensbury school in Bradford has such bad facilities that there is a lack of laboratory space in which to teach science under the national curriculum. What does that mean for educational opportunities? Faversham street school in Bradford is more than 100 years old and is part of the Victorian legacy to Bradford. I understand that it is a listed building, but everyone who knows anything about that school lists it as unfit for educational purposes. How can we expect children to learn and work in such conditions?

How do the Government expect children in primary schools in Waltham Forest to work in such conditions? There are 61 primary schools—10 are more than 100 years old and 31 are more than 50 years old. Sixteen schools use mobile classrooms, 24 have no gymnasium or sports room, and 30 have no access for young disabled children. All that makes a difference in terms of the facilities available for our children and the school's environment and ability to deliver good-quality education.

This has been a debate about standards. Our argument is simple: without a motivated teacher force, direction, and investment in the physical resources of education, standards cannot be delivered. The Secretary of State made much play of the impact of the GCSE, but it is worth reminding him that the GCSE has worked not because of

the way in which the Government have resourced it but because of the commitment made by individual teachers, beyond their contracts, to make it work.

The Secretary of State ought to answer a point that he made in what was claimed to be an exclusive interview in last Friday's *Daily Express* with Will Stewart, a home affairs correspondent, who is a reliable journalist. The article said that the Secretary of State was concerned about teacher shortage, and that he was going to run a campaign of television commercials to attract people back into the teaching profession. It also said—I quote the *Daily Express*, not something I do as a habit—

"Mr. MacGregor also asked examiners to take the crisis into account when marking GCSE papers."

Is that not a confession from the Secretary of State that the Government cannot deliver educational standards? It is very much the point that the hon. Member for Buckingham was making: we can get the statistics to look right, but are the Government leaning on examining bodies to ensure that the statistics stand up?

The Secretary of State has made a real confession. For a long time after he became Secretary of State, he tried to hide his talent. Many people thought that he had become the Lord Lucan of the DES, but he emerged eventually. When he did emerge, he made the substantial confession that he has presided over a reduction in standards and in ambition.

The crucial point about the motion is that the Government are presiding over a deterioration in standards and ambition in education. The real indictment of the Government's record is that we have a Secretary of State who is happy to defend the status quo, who has no ambition for the country's education system, and who does not seem to be concerned that the gap between our educational achievements and those of western Europe, the United States and Japan is widening. That is what the CBI said in the autumn. That is the case and the Government continue to preside over the deterioration of education. Above all, they have set low standards and low expectations for children. That is why I ask my hon. Friends to support the motion.

6.51 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): When I was reflecting earlier today upon what I was likely to be asked to answer in the debate, and upon the points that would be made by Opposition Members, I made a check list for myself. I started by noting that they would talk about lack of resources and the disgraceful state of buildings, and that they would go on about the support that local authorities, central Government and the taxpayers should give to education; then they would talk about how bad teacher morale was, being negative about it, with not a single positive suggestion; they would talk too about the pay and conditions of teachers. My check list has been rather good. When I look at the runners for the 2.30 at Wolverhampton or Kempton park, I should like to have the same success that I had this afternoon.

Of course, a great deal has been said by Opposition Members about the state of school buildings and the conditions in which children are learning. There is a point to be made—that this year we have contributed 9·6 per cent. more in extra resources for education expenditure. That is not the whole story. As well as the £485 million in capital grant allocated this year, local authorities can spend money of their own.

It must be said that not all school buildings are in the dilapidated state that Opposition Members allege. One would think that every school was about to fall apart at the seams. It is true that some are in better condition than others, but the condition of many primary schools that I go into is relatively good. We must pay tribute to the teachers who spend a great deal of time making such schools attractive places in which to teach children. It is a pity that we did not hear more about the way in which teachers tackle their jobs.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said that it was not attractive for teachers to enter the teaching profession, yet the starting salary for a good honours graduate is £9,400. That is not bad compared to other professions. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) knows that I was in his constituency yesterday. The point made to me by a head teacher there was that what is needed in the teaching profession is a good career structure. By that he meant incremental pay, incentive allowances for subjects where there were shortages, and local allowances for local difficulties. Those are the very things that my right hon. Friend has put in the remit to the interim advisory committee this year.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey also mentioned another point, also referred to by the hon. Member for City of Durham, that the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association has raised with them, presumably in their capacity as advisers. It arises from a misunderstanding of the allowance described in the revenue support grant distribution report for extra labour costs incurred in London and surrounding areas.

The area cost adjustment for education enhances the standard spending assessment of authorities in and around London to allow for extra labour costs incurred in these areas in respect of all employed in the education service. That adjustment is based on objective evidence derived from the new earnings survey. The variations found in different counties on the edge of the area are dependent on the incidence of extra cost shown by the new earnings survey in the constituent districts. Therefore, it does not imply anything about what teachers ought to be paid in those areas.

I turn to my hon. Friends, whose support I have found most gratifying and whose speeches were excellent. My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) raised several points. He and I have known each other for many years because we have been together in local and central Government. He was right to mention 1976. At that time we heard of the draconian cuts that the Labour Government had inflicted upon us.

He also mentioned local management schemes, and referred to the schemes asking the Government to look carefully at the proposals for Conservative counties and Labour counties; other hon. Members mentioned the same point. It is important to recognise that authorities have prepared their own local management schemes. Authorities have different schemes; they have used different formulae. Some have gone as far as extending more of their executive rights to the schools, but many local authorities have kept a great deal of money to the centre. There is a transitional period of four years in which the money will go to the schools.

[Mrs. Angela Rumbold]

It is the intention of Government that as much money as possible should go from the general schools budget to schools to allow governors and schools to make the decisions that are rightfully theirs about how to spend the money. The principle behind local management schemes is that the money follows the pupil. That means inevitably that the schools that are delivering good education to their children will mean more money for the schools. If one grasps that fundamental point, it means that the market for parents to choose the right schools, in their opinion, for their children will increase the amount of money going to the schools.

As we have talked about choice in education, it is important to underpin what my right hon. Friend has said about it. It is important for children to have the opportunity to go to schools like city technology colleges. That partnership between industry and the public sector is most important. It builds on much of what has been established during the past 10 years in the partnership between industry and the state sector of education. It began with the technical and vocational education initiative and continued with compacts—which, I say generously to the Opposition, came as much from the Inner London education authority as from others.

The idea of city technology colleges is of proven worth and they will undoubtedly be a success. Many parents will want to support them. Grant-maintained schools have also been a great success. There are already 20 of them, and they are attracting more pupils and teachers. It is important to recognise that.

Finally, I wish to refer not only to my hon. Friends the Members for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), for whose support I have been most grateful, but to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), who raised the extremely important point about standards and, in particular, A levels. It is because of the very fears that he expressed about education standards, especially A levels, that we were anxious about accepting the recommendations of the Higginson report.

We felt that it was dangerous to introduce so many changes at one time—the GCSE, the national curriculum, a new system to govern schools and a new system of funding schools. To introduce changes to the A-level examination would inevitably have led to some diminution of quality and of the high level of standards in our schools. That caution has been more than justified by what my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham said today. We shall take note of that and draw the attention of the examining bodies to what he said.

The Government's amendment is eminently sensible, and my hon. Friends have clearly shown that it is worth the support of the House. I hope that all hon. Members will join us in the Lobby to support our amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 224, Noes 285.

Division No. 45] **[7.02 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley

Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*

Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Dorrell and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question,* as *amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its coherent programme for securing lasting improvements in standards in schools through its policies for the National Curriculum, assessment and testing, for increased parental choice, and for greater autonomy for schools; notes the increased expenditure since 1979 of over 40 per cent. in real terms per pupil; contrasts these reforms with the neglect of relevant education policies by the last Labour Government and the absence of any constructive alternative proposals by Opposition spokesmen; notes that the requirements of the National Curriculum, building on the successful introduction of GCSE examinations, enjoy widespread support in the education system; and welcomes the enthusiasm with which governors, teachers and parents are seizing the opportunity to exercise more choice and greater autonomy in the management of their schools.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance? I understand that the normal convention of the House is that, when a Member of the House visits another Member's constituency, he should inform him in advance. It has come to my notice that the Secretary of State for Health has been in my constituency today, although he gave me no notice. He has been at the headquarters of the Northumbria ambulance brigade, where he has been making a propaganda film that puts his side of the ambulance dispute, using vehicles and equipment——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Clelland: My point of order is this, Mr. Speaker: is it in order for the Secretary of State for Health to visit my constituency without giving me notice to make a propaganda film to support his side of the ambulance dispute?

Mr. Speaker: As the House knows, there is no absolute rule on this matter, but the convention is that if a Member visits another Member's constituency, he always informs him.

Disabled People

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Once again, I appeal for brief speeches from both the Front Benches and the Back Benches, as a great many right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

7.16 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move,

That this House notes the disturbing findings of the surveys of disability in Great Britain by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which reveal that 6·5 million people are significantly disabled and that there exists a totally unacceptable gap in income levels, employment and other opportunities between them and non-disabled people; endorses the Disability Benefits Consortium's description of the Ministerial statement of 10th January as a disgraceful response to the poverty uncovered by the Government's own surveys of the needs of disabled people; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government urgently to respond to the Consortium's call for an open, comprehensive and independent review of benefits.

This House is often at its best in debating the problems and needs of people with disabilities. I have no doubt that, as in so many previous such debates, we shall hear concerned and constructive speeches from all parts of the House. There is now, however, a divide in this policy area that goes much deeper than any in our previous debates. Simply to act in good faith to Britain's 6·5 million disabled people and their organisations, with which we consult often and in detail, we for our part must reflect tonight not just their anguish but also the anger and despair with which they view the Government's proposals in the White Paper "The Way Ahead—Benefits for Disabled People".

Our motion supports the justified criticisms of the Government's proposals from the Disability Benefits Consortium, which speaks for more than 250 organisations of and for disabled people, including all their main national organisations. The DBC's objectives enjoy huge public backing and, if the Government's Whips were taken off, the motion would most certainly be carried tonight.

This debate, like all other debates specifically about disability in the lifetime of this Government, takes place in Opposition time. We shall no doubt hear from the Minister with responsibility for the disabled, as from his Conservative predecessors in the post, how wonderfully well disabled people fare under this Government. That is what the amendment seems to say. Its wording gives the impression that disabled people should be holding street parties in celebration of the Government's beneficence.

Yet so confident are the Government of the truth of the claims they make about their record that they have never once, in 10 years of power, offered parliamentary time for any wide-ranging debate on the problems and needs of disabled people. That this debate is taking place this evening is due to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. It is to him that disabled people owe this opportunity for the presentation of their case against a Government whose serene self-satisfaction is almost as hurtful as some of the cuts they have inflicted.

While the Government pat themselves on the back about extra spending, the organisations of and for disabled people are bitterly critical of the hacking away at entitlements hard won from Governments of both parties between 1945 and 1979. The Disability Alliance has shown that there were over 1 million disabled losers from the

social security changes in 1988 alone. Worst hit were those most in need, even people for whom incontinence imposes both added stress and higher living costs.

The Government's self-satisfaction also contrasts with *The Lancet* report of a survey over Christmas which shows that people with mental disabilities

"... are living like feral children in the forest of the city, scavenging for garbage and subsisting from charitable hand-outs."

As a trustee of Crisis at Christmas, I have been a first-hand witness of this growing army of victims of the collapse of the Government's so-called policies for community care.

The death of Beverley Lewis, whose young life ended in malnutrition and hideous neglect, amid unspeakable squalor, also bears testimony to the huge and growing gap between need and provision. The Minister will know that expert opinion has pointed to the relevance of section 1 (3)(*d*) of the Disabled Persons Act 1986 to preventing such tragedies.

Is it not scandalous that sections 1 to 3, and other crucially important parts of that legislation, so ably promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), still await implementation nearly four years after their enactment? As Mary Holland of MENCAP says:

"Good quality community care is about consultation, representation, assessment, service provision, monitoring and accountability. The 1986 Act embodies these. When will it be implemented in full?"

Ministers plead lack of resources for non-implementation. Yet there have been £23 billion worth of tax cuts since 1979, mostly aimed at the fit and fortunate in society. It is thus neither acceptable nor even true for Ministers to say that the money has not been available to implement the Act. The problem has not been, and is not now, one of resources, but of political will and priorities.

Nor is it good enough for Ministers to go on trying to give the impression that they have already won substantial extra resources for improving cash benefits for disabled people. The plain truth is that at least 90 per cent. of the extra spending for which they take credit is due not to any improvement in benefits, but to the increased number of people now claiming the attendance allowance, the mobility allowance, the invalid care allowance and other benefits that were introduced before they came to power. Thus in effect they are claiming credit for not having repealed the mobility allowance and other benefits they inherited from previous Governments.

Ministers should tell the House what the total current cost without loss of value would be had statutory benefits for disabled people remained as they were in 1979. I invite them to do so tonight. Let them state, for example, the total loss to disabled people who do not work of scrapping the link between wages and prices in uprating their benefits.

Let the Government also admit that the Conservatives have cut the value of the attendance allowance and the invalid care allowance, among many other benefits of importance to disabled people and their families, since they came to power 10 years ago with a promise to "single out" disabled people for special help. Ten years on, most of Britain's 6·5 million disabled people say they have been "singled out" for special hardship.

They are angered by the Government's parrot-like claims that increased benefits for disabled people have almost doubled expenditure in real terms since 1978-79, when in fact the additional spending is almost all brought about by the increased number of beneficiaries of allowances that were introduced by previous Governments.

Organisations of and for disabled people argue that the Government's claims are made to mislead the general public into believing that life for their members is getting easier and easier when they know that it is not. Their organisations rightly complain that disabled people—as individuals—are no better off. Indeed, compared with what they received on supplementary benefits, many are poorer in real terms and will become even worse off as their transitional protection loses its value.

The organisations of disabled people were encouraged by ministerial statements to hope that financial hardship among their members would be temporary. They looked forward to the results of the surveys of the OPCS and the review of benefits which they were promised would follow their publication. They felt assured that the Government would consult them before responding to the OPCS's reports, and the total lack of consultation with disabled people about "The Way Ahead" adds insult to the injury of its glaring inadequacies. They have been not just ignored but humiliated by the Government's total indifference to their views.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Morris: I am in some difficulty in that I must refer to a number of policy areas as quickly as possible. I shall help other hon. Members if I proceed quickly. I hope that the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) will understand my difficulty and will be called to speak in the debate.

The OPCS's surveys, while they have been criticised for understating the extra costs of disability and were undertaken before the 1988 benefit changes took effect, are much the best picture we have ever had of disability in Great Britain. The six reports show that most disabled people are locked in a financial vice of reduced earnings and increased living costs. They demonstrate that no new policy can succeed unless it tackles the link between disability and poverty, a link which the Government's policies have reinforced.

About 4·3 million disabled people rely on state benefits as their main source of income with an average total income of £65·20 per week; 4·5 million live in households where there are no earners. When the minimal extra costs of disability are taken into account, the gap between the average incomes of disabled and non-disabled people was over £39 per week at 1988 prices.

Unemployment among disabled job seekers is more than twice as high as the current rate among able-bodied people. They are pushed to the back of the dole queue, which is still the longest queue in Britain, and many are made to sit up and beg from the social fund.

Only 31 per cent. of all disabled adults of working age are actually working. That compares with 69 per cent. of the population as a whole. The ratio for men is even worse —33 per cent. compared with 78 per cent. Those findings shout of discrimination against disabled workers. The Government's own record, in terms of job offered to disabled people, is among the worst of all employers. The earnings of disabled people who find work are substantially lower than those of non-disabled employees, and the same is true of parents of disabled children.

[Mr. Morris]

Referring to the OPCS's reports, the Social Security Advisory Committee said:

"The Government will not have a better opportunity to reform benefits."

The SSAC went on to say that benefits for disabled people could now be matched closely to their needs, as revealed by the reports, and that:

"This opportunity will almost certainly not be repeated for many years to come and must be grasped."

The Government's reaction to the reports was given on 10 January in "The Way Ahead" which Ian Bruce, director-general of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, who co-chairs the Disability Benefits Consortium, has called a

". . . disgraceful response to the poverty uncovered by the Government's own surveys of the needs of disabled people."

In a fuller statement from the DBC, timed for this debate, the reaction of disabled people to the Government's response is summarised as one of "anger and disbelief".

"The Way Ahead" is the final outcome of a review of benefits from which all but Ministers and civil servants were excluded. The mocking title and gross defects of this backward-looking document have led organisations of and for disabled people to describe it as

". . . the biggest insult disabled people have been subjected to in the past decade".

No new help at all is offered to people over 65 on the basis that

"pensioners have experienced a 23 per cent. growth in net incomes in real terms since 1979".

But those are mostly younger pensioners in occupational schemes, not the millions of older and disabled pensioners who have to eke out an existence on state benefits alone. They were fobbed off last October with a tiny increase in means-tested income support.

No extra financial help goes to the severely disabled people, young and old alike, who need assistance to live independently in their own homes. Yet anyone with knowledge of their lives knows that the attendance allowance makes only a modest contribution to actual care costs. The Disablement Income Group—DIG—in an authoritative report, has shown that care costs were understated by the OPCS, but the Government took no notice of its report. Nor have they taken any account of the amounts paid for care costs by the independent living fund which, as the Minister must know, are very much higher than current rates of the attendance allowance.

The Government apparently now accept that some help should go to disabled people who can do only part-time or low-paid jobs. But the proposed disablement employment credit is likened to family credit, which bolsters low pay and has a very low take-up rate. It is not the partial incapacity benefit for which disabled people and their organisations have long been pressing and indeed is a nil-cost measure. In fact, as the Minister revealed to me in a parliamentary written answer last Friday, the Government actually expect to save £10 million on their new benefit by 1992-93.

The choice that Ministers have made in proposing the new credit, when combined with proposals from the National Audit Office to persuade doctors to stop providing sick notes, looks very much like an attempt to ensure that disabled people earn their poverty. Without action to introduce a minimum income, to enforce a proper employment quota scheme, to outlaw discrimination against disabled people, and radically to improve employment services and training, job opportunities for disabled people will remain the scandal they are today.

Another "generous" new benefit in "The Way Ahead" is an age-related addition to the severe disablement allowance. But the older the disabled person, the less he or she receives. People under 40 will get £10 week, those over 40 an extra £6.20; but the over-50s will receive only £3.10 and the over-60s nothing at all.

Ministers claim that the net cost of "The Way Ahead" —billed in advance as a major new deal for the disabled that

"looks forward to the 21st century"

—is £300 million. That compares with tax cuts of £1·9 billion, in a single Budget, for the richest 1 per cent. of taxpayers. Virtually seven out of eight disabled people will get nothing from the Government's proposals. Many will lose and, as we have seen, even severely disabled pensioners are ignored.

To help pay for this "new deal" other benefits will disappear. Savings from benefits that the Government intend to scrap will eventually far outweigh the cost of the pathetically modest new benefits in "The Way Ahead". In fact, the Disability Alliance estimates that the Government will more than break even on their proposals even in the short term. I have never known organisations of and for disabled people to be more united in their criticisms of Government policy. Those organisations include the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Spastics Society, Mencap, the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, DIG and Age Concern among hundreds of others.

I know the Minister shares my deep respect, and that of others on both sides of the House, for the judgment, knowledge and fairness of Peter Large of DIG. Very few people are more qualified than him to judge any Government's record or rhetoric on disability. His view of "The Way Ahead" is that it is

"nothing but a narrowing stony ledge"

and he adds that:

"The future promises to be a worrying mess."

As for Ministers' claims about bringing some coherence into cash provision for disabled people, Peter Large's study of the proposals leads him to conclude that ministerial

"talk about a more coherent system of benefits is a sign of delirium."

Those withering criticisms, from one so well qualified to judge the Government's document, should surely now make social security Ministers see the urgency of a total re-think of their proposals. The Government must also recognise the importance of an urgent response from Ministers other than those from the Department of Social Security to the OPCS reports.

Apart from the perfunctory references in the "The Way Ahead" to some other policy areas, the Government's response to the reports from the OPCS has so far come only from social security Ministers. However, important issues are raised by the reports that affect other Departments. Those issues have not been addressed and that points to a disturbing lack of co-ordination in Whitehall.

When will the Department of Employment respond in detail to the reports? With less than a quarter of firms satisyfing their 3 per cent. quota obligations and the

employment service stating that work with disabled people is of very low priority, will the Department now be enforcing the quota system and expanding the sheltered placement scheme to provide integrated work opportunities at all levels for disabled workers?

As suitable housing is the key to independence for large numbers of disabled people, and especially in view of the repeated cuts in provision of specially designed housing for them since 1979, will there be any response to the OPCS reports from the Department of the Environment? The Minister will know of my involvement in the making of the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act 1978, giving rate relief on essential adaptations such as an additional ground-floor bathroom. This relief is now to disappear and Stephen Bradshaw, the director of the Spinal Injuries Association, has sent two examples of the effect. The first is that of Mr. and Mrs. D. Baron, a couple with a severely disabled son who live in St. Austell. After April they will be paying £900 in poll tax, an increase of £756 on their current rates. The second example is that of Mr. and Mrs. J. Sullivan of Thames Ditton, whose son is a paraplegic. They will have to pay £686·89 more after April.

Stephen Bradshaw's letter to me says:

"We are concerned that the new tax, which does not apply to people living in residential homes, runs counter to the Government's proposals for care in the community. With one hand it purports to encourage disabled people to move into the community and with the other it imposes a disincentive."

Are not the cases that he sent me—and countless more could be cited—proof positive of the need for a full and urgent response from the Secretary of State for the Environment to the OPCS reports?

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that there is considerable confusion among disabled people in Newport with regard to the poll tax and the rebate system? He will be aware that the Government have engaged in a £4 million television and newspaper campaign advertising the rebate scheme. However, that has caused much confusion in Newport because the scheme applies only to England and the fact that separate arrangements apply for Wales appears only in tiny print. In Newport people read the national newspapers and they also watch English television and they become confused by what they see and read about the scheme. Surely they have enough to put up with with their disabilities.

Mr. Morris: I am familiar with the effects of the problems that I have been detailing in his constituency as in all parts of Britain. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) is aware of my special link with Newport as patron of Action Aid in his area, which does such excellent work for disabled people. I am assured that organisations of disabled people are trying their best to emphasise to the Secretary of State for the Environment that he should respond—having regard in particular to the findings of the OPCS—to the effect of his policies in increasing poverty among disabled people.

What consideration has been given to the reports by the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office? Will they be making any response? Again, will there be a considered response to the reports from the Secretary of State for Education and Science? Is he aware of the mounting concern among disability groups that provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 will halt further progress towards the integration of disabled pupils into mainstream schooling as envisaged by the Education Act 1981? Will self-governing schools be required to make adequate provision for disabled pupils?

The special health needs of disabled people are also important. We now have conclusive facts about the extra calls they, compared with other people, have to make on the National Health Service. A response from the Department of Health to the OPCS reports is made all the more urgent by its legislation on the future of the Health Service and of community care. The Association of Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes argues that, unless adequate funding is made available, carers will remain a low priority for hard-pressed local authorities faced with a growing demand from the increasing numbers of elderly and highly dependent people living in the community. How is the Minister responding? The Government must also know that many local authorities, owing to lack of resources, now have to choose not only which of their discretionary powers to use under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, but even which of their legal duties to fulfil. Is that not cause for deep concern?

In regard to the Department of Health's responsibilities, I take this opportunity also briefly to raise the plight of people who have become infected with AIDS as a result of routine blood transfusions. The House knows that people with haemophilia who contracted the virus in the course of NHS treatment are receiving ex-gratia payments of £20,000 each. It is not enough, but even that inadequate sum is denied to people who become infected by blood transfusions. They have exactly the same claim to compensation and should not be told to seek justice through the courts. Thirteen of them have already died, and others will die before there is any prospect of a court settlement. For them justice, if any, will be posthumous, and that is not justice at all. My calculation of the cost of giving equal treatment to these other victims of a killer disease is £2 million. Is that too much for the Treasury to find in the cause of elementary justice?

In sharp contrast to the Government's indifference to the views of disabled people about their policies, we have held a number of consultative conferences with them. We have made it clear that their claims are among our highest priorities. We are pledged to introduce a comprehensive disability income to meet the extra costs of disabled people of all ages whose disability is assessed at 40 per cent. or more. By that and other measures we shall build on the achievements of the last Labour Government who, by the introduction of four new cash benefits for disabled people, gave unprecedented new help.

We shall increase the severe disablement allowance to the full basic invalidity benefit rate for all recipients. We also intend to introduce a carer's benefit, payable at the full basic pension rate, for people who, owing to the care they provide, cannot take paid employment. All that present Ministers plan to do is to reverse the appalling effects of their Social Security Act 1986, which actually cut benefits for carers on income support.

Among our other commitments is one to make discrimination against disabled people illegal. It is a commitment that their organisations see as essential to the achievement of full and equal citizenship for some 14 per cent. of the British people. We could have led the world in outlawing discrimination, as we did in 1970 by legislating on access to buildings, if this Government had acted on the report in 1982 of the Committee on Restrictions Against

[Mr. Morris]

Disabled People which I, as Minister for the Disabled, appointed in 1979. Now we trail behind other countries, not least the United States.

The message from this Government is unmistakable: only an alternative Government will address the poverty and other problems of disabled people so starkly portrayed by the surveys commissioned by Conservative Ministers. They have the resources to do what the findings of their surveys now demand. I say again that the problem is one not of resources, but of political will and priorities. Our priorities are clear: the present Government's lie elsewhere.

7.44 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the fact that social security expenditure for long-term sick and disabled people has virtually doubled in real terms since 1979, to a total of over £8 billion a year; notes with approval the greatly improved coverage of disability benefits associated with this achievement, which has increased the number of Mobility Allowance recipients from 95,000 to 615,000, the number of Attendance Allowance recipients from 265,000 to 795,000, and the number of Invalid Care Allowance recipients from 5,000 to 110,000; and welcomes the Government's proposals for further improvements, involving net additional expenditure rising to some £300 million in 1993-94, to help some 850,000 long-term sick and disabled people by measures which include increased premiums in income-related benefits for both disabled adults and disabled children, a new premium for carers, the extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies and to people who are terminally ill, the extension of Mobility Allowance to those who are both deaf and blind, increases in Severe Disablement Allowance focused especially on those disabled from birth or early in life, improved coverage of help with the extra costs of disability through a new Disability Allowance, and the introduction of a new Disability Employment Credit to assist and encourage those disabled people who can and wish to work."

I am delighted that we are having this debate today. I approach it with no feeling of backwardness; rather, it is with relish that I take on the other side of the House in a debate about disability. That is not to say that I do not hope that at the end of the day there will be a feeling within the House as a whole about the needs of disabled people and about the necessity to make all society more aware of those needs, as well as of the ability of disabled people to make a greater contribution in the future to society as a whole and to achieve greater independence and control over their own lives.

Despite what we heard from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), we on this side of the House have no reason at all to be ashamed of our record in meeting the needs of disabled people. The last 10 years have seen major advances in provision for disabled people in this country, and I am confident that, so long as we keep a Conservative Government, the same will apply to the next 10 years.

The right hon. Gentleman seems to forget that the mobility allowance, which was being introduced at snail's pace by the Labour Government, was enhanced by the Conservatives when we got back into office; that we introduced attendance allowance; that we improved the coverage of invalid care allowance; and that we replaced the old non-contributory invalidity pension with severe disablement allowance, which is a much more generous benefit. These advances have made a real impact on the lives of disabled people over the last 10 years.

Today I do not want to talk just about benefits. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman properly made the point that disabled people need services, that they need the work of other Departments and of voluntary organisations to enhance the quality of their lives. But it would be wrong of me as a Minister in the Department of Social Security not to begin by talking about benefits and not to get some balance into the argument.

When the Labour party left office it was spending £1·8 billion on the needs of the long-term sick and disabled. This year, the figure will be £8·3 billion—an increase of £4 billion in real terms. The right hon. Gentleman fairly makes the point that, of that £4 billion, £3·5 billion is due to increased take-up of benefits and £0·5 billion is due to the increased value of benefits. I have no shame about the increased take-up. When Labour was in office, there were just as many disabled people around, but more and more of them are now getting the benefits to which they are entitled. That is something of which we can be proud.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: Hon. Members know that on such occasions I normally give way, but Mr. Speaker has imposed a tight timetable.

Let me state the comparison in another way. As I said in winding up on Monday night, over its period of government—talking in constant money terms—the Labour party increased expenditure on the long-term sick and disabled by £220 million a year. During our period of office, it has been increased by £370 million a year. Invalidity benefit, which went to 600,000 people, now goes to virtually 1·2 million. Severe disability allowance, or its predecessor, went to 150,000; now it goes to 265,000. Attendance allowance was going to 265,000; now it goes to virtually 800,000. The number of people in receipt of mobility allowance has gone up from 95,000 to 615,000. So we have made tremendous advances in take-up. In other words, we are getting through to the people who really need help. This record is substantial. It represents a sustained provision of extra resources for the long-term sick and disabled under this Government.

But I am conscious that, despite this, and indeed perhaps sometimes because of the changes that we have made year by year, the balance and structure of disability benefits was less than satisfactory. That is why we commissioned the surveys of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The OPCS carried out four surveys, leading to six reports. It really was the most comprehensive survey exercise ever carried out. Unlike the Amelia Harris survey, which was commissioned by the Labour Government, it covered the whole spectrum of disability.

It included sensory and mental impairment, as well as the physically handicapped; it included people in their own homes, as well as those in institutions; and it included children as well as adults. We have considered carefully the findings of the OPCS reports. Unlike the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe, who made allegations, we have listened to the representations and submissions of a considerable number of disability organisations. My right

hon. Friend and I have met the Disability Benefits consortium to listen to its ideas and concerns, and we have now brought forward our proposals.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: As I have said, Mr. Speaker has imposed a very tight timetable, and I should like to get on.

We brought forward our responses. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we envisage a three-stage progress. In October, he made an announcement about annual uprating. He also announced the increase in real terms in the disability premium for adults; the doubling of the premiums for disabled children, thereby giving extra help to about 20,000 families; extending attendance allowance to disabled people and to babies under two; making attendance allowance available without the normal six-month waiting period for the terminally ill; extending mobility allowance to deaf and blind people; improving incentives for rehabilitation for employment by increasing the earnings disregards; and introducing the carer's premium into the system, thus helping about 30,000 carers in society.

Those important changes were widely welcomed. I remember watching Opposition Members' faces as my right hon. Friend announced the proposals and the gloom and doom with which they regarded those considerable advances in meeting the needs of disabled people.

Looking ahead into the longer term, we set ourselves three strategic aims in formulating our proposals. They were to improve the coverage of help available for the extra costs that disability can bring to those of working age and below, to improve the balance of benefits available to disabled people who are unable to work, in particular to do more for those who are disabled at birth or early in life, and to help disabled people who are capable of and wish to work, and to make it easier for them to get and to keep jobs.

The steps that we are taking to provide extra help by the autumn of this year for about 500,000 disabled people and their carers through the existing benefit system will come into effect soon. The Social Security Bill which received a Second Reading on Monday will carry forward the change to make attendance allowance available without any waiting period for the terminally ill.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) raised several issues. I make it absolutely clear that the terminally ill will get attendance allowance for the rest of their lives. The qualification will be a prognosis that life is unlikely to last longer than six months, but, if people live beyond six months, they will continue to get attendance allowance for the rest of their lives.

It will be possible for a third party to apply on behalf of a terminally ill person. I understand the hon. Lady's worry that it might not be sensitive or sensible to tell a person, or even his or her close family, that he or she is terminally ill. In those circumstances, it will be possible for an application to be made on behalf of a disabled person.

This is a sensitive matter. We consulted widely and carefully among the organisations most directly concerned with the terminally ill. I believe that they are satisfied with the arrangements that we are making.

This important measure honours a commitment that we made to the House last summer, and it will be much more than just the extra payment of £37.55 in attendance allowance. Extra payments of invalid care allowance will also be payable, as will extra payments of income support or housing benefit via disability premium and the carer's premium. The Bill will also introduce an age-related addition to the non-contributory severe disablement allowance at the same rates as the present additions paid with contributory invalidity benefit.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe understands the position, but did not quite state it correctly. It is not the age of a person at the time which governs the amount of benefit or enhancement that he gets under the age-related additions: it is the age at which that person is disabled. It is part of the strategy to try to shift the balance of extra help to those who are disabled earlier in life and do not have the ability to build up contributory benefits or occupational benefits and savings in their working lives. We are doing that in precisely the right way.

The current Bill contains two other measures that arise directly from our determination to improve the structure and balance of benefits for the disabled. I refer to the reduced earnings allowance provision and the additional pensions provision. I do not want to go into them in detail today. We will be locked in conflict in Committee in the not-too-distant future. and there will be ample time for discussion.

I now refer to the third phase of the programme that we set out in "The Way Ahead". We intend to legislate at the earliest practicable opportunity to introduce the disability employment credit and the disability allowance. I told the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that I would refer to this matter.

The hon. Gentleman wrote an article in *The Sunday Times* suggesting that, by extending the entitlement to mobility allowance and attendance allowance, the Government were somehow to pay all those in receipt of those benefits at a lower level. That is quite untrue. We will introduce a new lower level of benefit for mobility allowance and for attendance allowance. Those at the top two levels of attendance allowance and mobility allowance will continue to qualify and will be uprated in the normal way. We are taking the threshold further down the scale of disability, so that more people will be able to qualify at the lower level. It is important that that is clearly understood.

The allowance was explained on Monday. I do not want to go into it in detail, except to say that it is important that, when we come to the allowance, which will effectively combine and extend the mobility and care elements of support for disabled people, we aim to improve the assessment——

Mr. Graham: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No, I will not give way, for the reasons that I explained earlier.

The assessment and adjudication procedures should also be simplified and speeded up. The other new benefit of disablement employment credit will make it easier for disabled people to take and keep work.

As I said, I speak first as the Minister for Social Security with responsibility for the disabled, but it is absolutely clear that the Government as a whole are committed to improving the lives of disabled people. I do not want to weary the House by stating the work of every single Department, but, in my role as Minister, I keep in close touch with other Departments and occasionally snap at

[Mr. Scott]

their heels to make sure that they respond to the pressures in society. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe did the same when he was in office. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the importance of employment and action to get people into work and enable them to carry out their employment in a satisfactory manner.

Last year, the Department of Employment spent about £350 million helping people with disabilities to obtain and to keep work. Jobcentres and disablement resettlement offices are increasingly successful in their job of finding work for disabled people. Over the past five years, the figure has increased from 62,000 to 77,000 last year. The Disablement Advisory Service tells employers about the facilities that need to be provided for disabled people. The code of good practice and the sheltered employment placement schemes are all increasingly successful.

Special schemes, too, are run by the Department of Employment and its agencies. They provide special aids and equipment for disabled people to work in employers' premises or at home, help to adapt to an employers' premises if necessary, personal readers, and assistance with fares if people find it difficult to get to work. The job introduction scheme enables employers to give trial employment to people with disabilities. All that is important work and aids disabled people in acquiring the independence that many of them want.

I have time to mention only a few other things done by other Departments. All hon. Members recognise that, in recent years, the Department of Transport has made important advances in bus, coach, air and taxi travel. The Motability scheme has been a tremendous success. Last year, 31,000 disabled people had access to vehicles under that scheme.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): They did not have access to rail services.

Mr. Scott: British Rail is gradually extending its stations and platforms on main-line routes to make them more accessible to disabled people.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): And its carriages.

Mr. Scott: And its carriages, too. There has been a tremendous improvement on the primitive facilities that existed 10 years ago. Towards the end of last year, I re-established the Access Committee for England. We know about the still unsatisfactory access to many public buildings and facilities. I want to make more rapid progress in that matter.

The Department of the Environment will publish a consultation paper soon on building regulations as they affect access for the disabled. Last September, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts launched ADAPT in co-operation with the Carnegie foundation, to improve access to entertainment and artistic facilities. Also, I announced £500,000 for the British Paralympic Association, to encourage sport among the disabled, and I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport is keen on developments in that area. Other Departments are playing their part in enhancing the quality of life for the disabled.

I am delighted that it was possible in the Children Act 1989 to make it clear beyond peradventure that local authorities can pay for young people to receive the benefits of conductive education in Budapest. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that we are making a contribution to the new national institute in Budapest, so that, in the long term, British children can be educated there and British adults can be trained as conductors. In due course, we shall have a facility for conductive education operating effectively in this country.

I am anxious, as are my colleagues in the Department of Health, that we do not simply cope with the disabled but try to prevent disability. Increasing resources are being made available for that purpose.

In the few minutes remaining to me, I shall respond to some of the worries that have been expressed in respect of our response to the OPCS surveys and to the situation as it currently affects the disabled.

The independent living fund was perhaps not as well received as it should have been, but it now has widespread acceptance. It has helped some 3,000 severely disabled since it was launched. Its budget was doubled for the current year and will be doubled again for the forthcoming year. With the introduction of new arrangements for community care in 1991, there may be some overlap between the provisions of the independent living fund and the work of local authorities in producing community care packages. I shall shortly be considering with the fund's trustees the role that they envisage for it in the new circumstances, and I shall make an announcement in due course. I pay the warmest tribute to the fund's trustees and to its staff, who respond flexibly and helpfully to the needs of a wide range of disabled people.

One of the criticisms of our proposals is that they do nothing to help disabled pensioners, but that is far from true. We certainly have not ignored them. The removal of the mobility allowance upper age limit will benefit many disabled pensioners, as will attendance allowance for the terminally ill. Our October package of about £200 million will provide extra help for 2·6 million more pensioners. Our social security expenditure on the elderly as a whole has increased by 25 per cent.—a real increase of £5 billion.

I acknowledge that there was anxiety among organisations representing the blind, but the new disability allowance should prove of considerable help to many blind people. The severe disablement age additions will assist those who were blind at birth or who became blind in their early life. The employment credit should allow more blind people to work, and the mobility allowance for the deaf-blind was widely welcomed, as were the increases in the adult and child disability premiums.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) has asked particularly about what I call the Clarke Act. I think that everyone understands what I mean when I use that phrase, rather than refer to the legislation's full and rather cumbersome title.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): As long as we are not talking about Mr. Kenneth Clarke's acts.

Mr. Scott: I think that the House knows which Mr. Clarke is meant.

Sections 1, 2 and 3 of that Act are the most complex and expensive, and represent the main outstanding business to be implemented. Within a matter of weeks, we shall start consultations with local authorities on implementing those three sections, which I hope the House will widely welcome.

Mr. Clarke: The Mr. Clarke to whom the Minister refers is certainly not the same man who is currently mentioned in BMA advertisements. However, although the Minister's intentions are not in doubt, history supports the view that there remains doubt about whether the Treasury will allow the Minister to go as far as the House would wish. On 11 April 1989, the Minister said that section 11 of the 1986 Act, dealing with reports to the House, would be introduced shortly, but that has not happened. When will that section be enacted?

Mr. Scott: We are going out to consultation on that important issue. Obviously we shall discuss the level of resources that is necessary. We shall also have to examine —as did my Health Department colleagues in relation to section 7, which they decided was overtaken by other arrangements—the interaction of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the 1986 Act with the new arrangements for community care. At least the process has begun, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman is pleased with that.

It has been alleged that there is no new money in the package. There is new money available, amounting to £88 million in 1990-91, £141 million in 1991-92, £214 million in 1992-93, and £300 million in 1993-94. That is real new money. Two of the present occupants of Labour's Front Bench have served in government and know perfectly well that the first things that confront Ministers when they return from their summer holidays are the public expenditure estimates and the Autumn Statement. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security was able to persuade our Treasury colleagues to produce that new money, it was genuinely new money and quite properly included in the Autumn Statement. I give the firm and clear undertaking that it is new money.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe concluded by describing Labour's plans. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) once said, one can promise the earth, and then one delivers the IMF. The cost of the programmes to which Labour has committed itself must be at least £3 billion. Frankly, Labour would never be able to afford that sum even if it got into office. The Opposition are arousing expectations among the disabled that they will never be able to fulfil if re-elected.

Whatever right hon. and hon. Members can do in their own constituency, the House has an important role to play in increasing awareness of disability and promoting a greater understanding of the needs and abilities of the disabled.

A cause was recently launched that some may feel is on the verge of disability, but which relates to a condition that causes tremendous frustration and bitterness among those who suffer from it. I refer to the new dyslexia awareness campaign. I hope that greater awareness of that condition and of the need for diagnosis, assessment and treatment as early as possible in life will remove a great deal of the frustration from those who suffer from that distressing condition. I commend that campaign, as I commend all the campaigns run by the large number of voluntary organisations—many of them generously supported by Government money—to increase awareness of the needs, abilities and potential of the disabled.

Society as a whole must also play a part. I freely acknowledge that this debate in Opposition time will serve to create greater awareness of the matters about which I have spoken. I commend the amendment to the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): It should be clear to the House that, unless remaining speeches are brief, a number of right hon. and hon. Members wishing to participate will be very disappointed.

8.8 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I shall be brief, as I realise that many hon. Members wish to speak. I do not want to generalise, but I wish to draw the House's attention to a certain section of disabled people, as I have done on many previous occasions.

Since 1982, I have presented five Bills on behalf of mineworkers suffering from the dreaded disease emphysema. On each occasion, they went the way that I expected them to go, like most ten-minute Bills. That has not helped the miners in my constituency.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council reported recently, after in-depth investigations. It was unable to recommend that the disease should be prescribed, saying that there was insufficient evidence. I have always refuted that, because the evidence is there in the mining communities, where miners spend their lives in agony and their families suffer. I rely not only on that information, but on in-depth, learned research from the past 20 years. I have presented 20 learned papers to the House. On two occasions I drew the attention of the House to reports in *The Lancet* that stated that miners are 10 times more likely to get emphysema than other members of the public.

Unfortunately, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council seems to think that there should be absolutely implicit evidence—which it will never get in a miner's lifetime. The evidence that I have presented, after in-depth, learned research, is as much as we shall get. Miners are suffering and anyone can see that—if they wish to.

In the Pontefract area, between 1982 and 1986, when I first started this campaign, there were 634 deaths from chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It is realistic to think that, four years on, the figure will now have doubled. From hospital records, we know that 80 per cent. of the 1,200 people who died from the disease were mineworkers.

I was interested to hear the Minister's reference to terminal illness. I should like him to define, as far as possible, what he meant by that. In my view, mineworkers who are suffering from this terrible disease are terminally ill. Evidence shows, beyond a shadow of doubt, that mineworkers are suffering. There have been recent campaigns by local newspapers to draw the House's attention to the state that miners are in—for example, in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* and the *Pontefract and Castleford Express*. Men have to live a lifetime in oxygen masks as a direct result of their work in the mining industry.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council has followed a practice of taking evidence every 10 years, but that has not applied since 1973. Before the 1988 report, the last time that it took evidence was in 1974—a gap of 15 years. In the latest report it says that it will continue to monitor the situation. It said the same in the 1973 report, and since that time thousands of men have died in agony, their families watching in agony, without compensation or financial assistance.

It is worth drawing the attention of the House to the fact that, in recent times, doctors sometimes recommend that these men—used-up men in some cases—should move

[Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse]

to accommodation where solid fuel is not burned because it can affect their chest. However, if their families apply to move to a new tenancy, they are in danger of losing their concessionary allowance because of present British Coal policy. They have to decide whether to move to more suitable accommodation, on the recommendation of the doctor, and lose the allowance. Some of the old lads cannot afford to do it. Some of those people cannot lift a cup of tea to their lips. Once, they were strong and able miners. I could get emotional in the House tonight, because I have seen the condition of some men deteriorate.

The evidence is irrefutable. I hope that the Minister will consider two points. First, will he request the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council not to wait another 10 years while 1,200 more people die? If it does that, the problem will be solved—they will all be dead and it would be bordering on criminal to allow that to happen.

Secondly, will the Minister define "terminally ill"? I suggest that men such as Bert Lee and George Hartnell, who are obliged to live in oxygen masks, and others like them, are terminally ill. I hope that the Minister will be able to identify whether such cases will be covered in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, which may increase benefits.

8.16 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Severe disability is a condition so profound and so complete in its consequences that it amounts to a different way of life, albeit an enforced way of life. Nobody chooses to be disabled.

My only reason for speaking this evening is that I have had some personal experience of sharing that way of life, and that may assist the House to advance public policies that may ameliorate the hurt and the frustrations of disability.

I need not remind the House that disability comes in many different forms, both of mind and body. It is even more important to remember that every disabled person is different and requires different remedies and understanding, not only because his disabilities are different but because, by virtue of being a human being, each disabled person is unique.

One does not cease to be a human being when one becomes disabled. Yet I detect that some people approach the disabled as if they were members of a different species. The disabled become objects of their good works, but are not treated as real partners in the human adventure.

The biggest hurt that can be done to the disabled is to patronise them. At times, I am tempted to adopt the famous outburst of Shylock on the condition of the disabled. I shall forbear tonight because you asked us to be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I commend that famous passage to hon. Members.

Disability has been with us since the beginning of time. It is part of the human condition, and there is nothing new about it. What is relatively new is society's recognition of disability, and its determination to do something about it.

In the 36 years in which I have been a Member of the House, considerable progress has been made in the development of public policies towards the disabled, but a great deal still needs to be done. It is only fair to recognise that progress has been made. I am reminded of the words of Arthur Clough:

> "For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
> Seem here no painful inch to gain,
> Far back through creeks and inlets making
> Comes silent, flooding in, the main."

When I first came to the House there was no attendance allowance, no mobility allowance, no severe disablement allowance and no orange badge. The tide is coming in, and it is in favour of the disabled. If we are to develop more effective policies, however, we must be able to assess better both the scale and the degree of disability in our nation. We must therefore be grateful to the OPCS for the massive survey that it completed last year. Those reports provide ample statistical raw material on which to work, but we must interpret that material carefully and correctly.

The OPCS identified at least 6·5 million disabled people. That is a daunting figure, but we should remember that the OPCS used a relatively low threshold of disability. If we exclude the adults on the lowest two points of the severity scale, the number becomes 4 million—although that is a daunting enough statistic. My particular concern is with the 1·5 million who fall into the four most severe categories. Their disabilities are so severe that their ways of life are very separate and distinct from those of the generality of their fellow citizens. In our desire to help all disabled people, we must not lose sight of the needs of the most severely disabled, and especially those of the quarter of a million or so in the top category. Our priorities must be related to the severity of the disability.

Most disabled people live in the community, as they always have. That applies even to the OPCS's category 10, the most severely disabled, of whom over half live in the community. It therefore follows that we should consider the Government's two recent documents, "Caring for People" and "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People", together. An hour or two ago, my right hon. Friend the Minister and I made a start on that in the Select Committee on Social Services.

The idea of care in the community, which is very much the flavour of the moment, means different things to different people. The Select Committee considered the matter in depth in 1984 and 1985, with reference to mentally ill and mentally handicapped adults, and came up with some firm guidelines. In my view, those guidelines apply to all disabled people—indeed, to all clients of care in the community. The Committee concluded:

> "Appropriate care should be provided for individuals in such a way as to enable them to lead as normal an existence as possible, given their particular disabilities, and to minimise disruption of life within their community".

The House will observe that that definition, although imperfect, has certain immediate policy consequences. First, it must mean providing for the basic needs of those affected by physical or mental disabilities—as far as possible—in ordinary domestic housing, in ordinary occupational settings and through the use of ordinary recreational amenities.

Secondly, the fact that clients are affected by physical or mental disabilities means that they have special needs of different kinds, caused by a wide variety of illnesses and disabilities, which must lead to individual and highly personalised solutions rather than general ones.

Thirdly, care must be provided in many different locations: there is no reason to exclude hospitals or institutions, especially when asylum is needed.

Fourthly, the assessment of those special needs, the provision of skilled treatment and care and, where

necessary, the allocation of appropriate special environments is the statutory responsibility of both the local health and the social services authorities. Although my right hon. Friends intend to place the main responsibility with the social services departments, the role of the primary health care team should not be diminished or bypassed. I still regret the fact that family practitioner committees have not been merged with district health authorities in England; in Scotland things are managed better. We must also have an "open door" policy, especially for the mentally ill and the psychogeriatrics.

It is clear that a common feature of all disabled people is the financial disadvantage from which they suffer. They cannot earn what they could be earning if they were not disabled; furthermore, additional costs are imposed on them as a result of their particular disabilities. The OPCS has made a brave attempt to identify that gap in income. It has demonstrated that, at 1988 prices, the average disabled person—although we know, of course, that no one is average—was nearly £40 a week worse off than an able-bodied person. Its research also shows that that gap in income was much greater for those under pension age than for those who were retired.

I welcome the efforts that the Government are making to bridge the gap: in themselves those efforts are inadequate, but the Government are moving in the right direction. I must tell my right hon. Friends, however, that I shall continue to press them to do more to improve financial benefits for disabled people. Like Oliver Twist, I shall always be there with my bowl asking for "second helpings" for the disabled.

There is also the problem of private carers, who are essential to a severely disabled person's way of life. As I have spoken about them and their needs at length in previous debates, I shall not repeat tonight what I consider to be telling arguments. I am delighted that the Government have acknowledged the importance of the private carer; I am simply disappointed that they have proposed so few new measures to assist them. Let me remind my right hon. Friends of a chilling fact identified by the OPCS: two thirds of the 1·75 million live-in carers receive no help from any of the statutory services. We really must do better than that.

When tonight's debate is over, the vast majority of us will go home and, for tonight, leave all the problems of disability behind us. If we were disabled, however, we should not be able to take off our disability like an overcoat when we arrived home. There is no rest or holiday from disability; disabled people cannot even take a sabbatical. That is what I mean when I say that disability is a way of life, and the understanding that it is a way of life—a disabled way of life—is the key to better and more effective public policies for the disabled.

8.26 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Although the debate focuses principally on benefits, I feel that chapter 8 of "The Way Ahead"—relating as it does to other services for the disabled and those with similar difficulties—is, in its way, as important as questions relating directly to benefits. I hope that the Minister will not allow matters to rest as they are, but will redouble his efforts to ensure that the disabled have access to public buildings, the job market and transport systems. The work done in Scotland—especially by the Scottish Council on Disability—is commendable, but the Government, working in concert with local authorities, could do much more to ensure that both private homes and public buildings are adapted to meet the needs of disabled people. I hope that the Minister will ensure that that happens in future.

In Kelso, in my constituency, disabled people must travel for long distances to use the specially-adapted toilets. A regional councillor told me that they are charged £5 for a key to give them access to a national system of public toilets for the disabled. I consider it entirely unnecessary to charge disabled people such sums for the use of facilities that they are bound to need when they are out and about, and I hope that such matters will not be far from the Minister's agenda.

The benefits for which "The Way Ahead" provides fall considerably short of what is needed. I do not underestimate the difficulties. I welcome the OPCS reports. We shall be able to draw on them in the weeks and months to come. They will inform our debates, which will be better for the information that the OPCS reports provide.

The Government's response has been niggardly in a number of respects. I hope that the Minister for Social Security will say at the earliest possible opportunity that "The Way Ahead" is not the last word. I agree that there is a difference between the machinery that is devised to deliver financial assistance to disabled people and the levels at which benefits are set. I accept that the framework must be right before we can deal with the levels of benefit, about which we might argue. However, we must devise a more comprehensive disability income scheme. "The Way Ahead" is a move in the right direction, with the new credit system and the new disability allowance, but the opportunity that the publication of the OPCS reports provides will not come again for a long time. We must seize it. We must consult the disability pressure groups and those who understand, from their direct personal experience, what the problems are and ensure that the machinery is right. Even if we cannot agree on the money that should be devoted immediately to the problem, the machinery must be right.

The publication of "The Way Ahead" must lead to real consultation. That does not mean that the Minister for Social Security just sits with his door open all the time, as he keeps saying. I am sure that his door is always open and that the central heating system in Richmond house ensures that he does not sit in a draught, but when people come through his door he must listen to them and take account of what is said to him so that the machinery is right and comprehensive and able to deal with the problems.

The existing system is complex. We must try to do away with the many anomalies. The amount of benefit varies, depending on the type of disability, the age at which the disability occurred and the national insurance contributions that have been paid. That leads to vast differences in the amount of benefit received, even though the problems that people have to overcome in their daily lives are much the same. The amount can vary by as much as £200. We must seize this opportunity to get rid of those anomalies. Opposition spokesmen will always argue that the amount of money that is devoted by the Government in the short term to the needs of the disabled is inadequate. A comprehensive system is needed. It will be a crying shame if we do not seize the opportunity that the OPCS reports provide to tackle the problem.

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

The Government have dealt only with the cost of attendance and mobility allowances. Apart from those costs, the need to have a carer and the need to obtain assistance in order to be mobile are urgent and must be provided for. If the Government intend to be fair to the disabled and to allow them to contribute to the life of their local communities, the additional costs that would allow them to do so must be met. They cannot run away from the fact that the disabled suffer from considerable disadvantages if they wish to participate in the life of their local communities.

As for the Government's plans for the elderly, we must not get into the habit of thinking that disability is a normal part of the aging process. It is not. Old age is not a disease. All too easily we slip into the way of thinking that because people are old it is natural that they should be disabled. That is an absurd assumption.

The three steps that the Government have announced for dealing with disability in the immediate future erect age hurdles in the case of some disabilities in a way that is unjustified and completely unfair. The severe disablement allowance levels are far too low. They should be increased at least to the level of the state retirement pension. That would help significantly the elderly who are also disabled.

As for carers, I have spoken to a number of pressure groups that represent the interests of carers. They believe that they have been left completely out of the proposals. The Minister could reasonably point to the £10 premium and to the other ways in which he intends to help them. He acknowledges that there is a problem. However, the carers feel that they have been let down. They were promised that the consultations that would follow publication of the OPCS reports would involve them closely. They are bitterly disappointed that little attention has been paid to their needs. I share their disappointment. The Government will have to return soon to the problem. Other hon. Members have referred to the difficulties that are experienced by carers. I am sure that the point will be returned to again later in the debate.

The carers' organisation has put forward a perfectly reasonable plan. It would lead to carers being recompensed. They are not looking for a real income. However, they do not want to be financially disadvantaged. I hope that the Minister will consider commissioning research that is similar to one of the six OPCS studies. I should like him to examine the financial implications of the cost of caring. The information that is available to me does not enable me to judge how much it would cost to extend a flat rate, non-means-tested allowance to carers. It might amount to a considerable sum of money.

We may be unable immediately to remove age hurdles and to deliver financial assistance to carers. It is dangerous to refer to such changes unless we know how much money is involved. At the moment we do not know how much money is involved, nor does the Department. The OPCS reports have highlighted that problem. I hope that the Government will find an opportunity to remedy that omission.

We need to move as quickly as possible to a three-way financial package for the disabled. It will embrace, first, a pension for those who cannot work; secondly, an adequate partial capacity benefit for those who can work, but only a little; and, thirdly, a full-costs allowance to recognise the additional costs incurred by disabled people because of their disability. If these benefits were set at adequate levels they would guarantee that the disabled would not be denied participation in the communities in which they live.

8.40 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said about carers. The recognition of their role and the increased help that we are giving them featured in the Secretary of State's statement last autumn. Both sides of the House admire the Minister of State's effective concern for the disabled and particularly the position of carers, and I hope that he will be able to respond to the hon. Gentleman at the end of the debate.

I was moved by the speech made by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), and I share his interest in the matter. My maternal grandfather, who died before I was born, suffered from similar problems because he was gassed in the first world war. I remember my mother telling me about the treatment and handling that he needed in the foggy, nasty autumn and winter weather that can occur near Manchester, where they lived. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will be able to respond effectively to the hon. Gentleman.

So far, the debate has been reasonably bipartisan, but allegations about success, or the lack of it, under different Administrations have been made. Over the past 10 years, the Government have greatly improved care for the long-term sick and disabled. Total expenditure on cash benefits increased by almost 100 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1989. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said, the average annual real increase in spending on the long-term sick and disabled was £220 million under the Labour Government and has been £370 million during the 10 years of this Government.

These are important contrasts to bear in mind, although the money is being spent on more disabled people. We need to investigate why this Government have been so successful at drawing out people to claim these benefits.

We should not allow ourselves to be too gloomy, although I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) said in his final words. Seventy per cent. of disabled people told the second OPCS survey, published in November 1988, that they were satisfied with their standard of living. Only 8 per cent. of disabled householders said that they were getting into financial difficulties. However, most disabled adults do incur extra costs as a result of their disability, and we are grateful to OPCS for pointing that out.

The second report also stated that almost 70 per cent. of disabled adults were aged 60 or more, but that disabled pensioners enjoyed roughly the same level of income as other pensioners. It is important to remember that.

The Government have successfully increased provision for the social services, which is a local authority function. Funding for community care services has risen by 68 per cent. since 1979; capital expenditure on social services has risen by 40 per cent. in real terms in the same period.

Community services have been vastly increased. Since 1980, the number of meals on wheels delivered has risen by 11 per cent. and the number of home helps by 28 per cent. The number of field social workers has increased by 22 per

cent. and the number of those treated by district nurses by 14 per cent. Between 1978 and 1988, the number of places in residential homes for the mentally handicapped doubled from 14,000 to 28,500. Those are significant successes.

I am glad that the Government are continuing to give strong support to the voluntary sector. Grants to charities, as a result of tax incentives in various Budgets, have increased by 75 per cent. more than inflation since 1979.

Twenty or so years ago, I worked as a civil servant in the Department of Employment and I want to mention the success of the Department in assisting disabled people, particularly through employment training. Between 1984 and 1989 the number of people with disabilities who participated in the Department's training programmes rose from 10,500 to more than 44,000.

My right hon. Friend mentioned that certain transport facilities are helping disabled people. Certainly, British Rail has introduced facilities for the disabled at InterCity stations and on main line services, but at many stations, including at Taunton, there are still gruesome steps for disabled people to negotiate. I must pay tribute to British Rail. More than a year ago I took up a constituency case of a disabled person being brought down from London with helpers. On the previous journey there had been a mess-up and the person's disability had not been recognised, but as a result of my intervention excellent help was offered on subsequent journeys.

I must also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who cannot be here today, but who is interested in this subject. He is beginning a campaign to ensure that new homes take account of the needs of various minorities with disabilities. For example, many new homes are built with ridiculously narrow doorways that are extremely difficult for wheelchairs to negotiate.

Finally, I wish to refer to how the community charge will affect disabled people, a number of whom enjoyed some relief under the previous, property-related rateable system. Conservative Members must recognise that some will lose their relief and not have it replaced under the new individual, service-related system. I have corresponded about such cases in my constituency. We must, however recognise that disabled people on low incomes who qualify will receive generous rebates and favourable terms under the transitional arrangements, and for that we are grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities.

I want to repeat a point about pensions that I have raised with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State before, but this time in the context of the disabled. It concerns the capital threshold, which has caused problems with rebates for community charge-paying pensioners. This applies particularly to disabled people who own sums of money. Some, for example, may have been badly injured in motor accidents and will thus have been paid —not necessarily large sums of compensation. We all agree that if someone has more than, say, £12,000, he should not qualify for assistance from other taxpayers; but many people hovering around the £8,000 limit do not qualify for housing benefit rebates under the present rules and will not qualify for community charge rebates. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to do more about that.

We must remember that disabled people often cannot take part in community activities for which the community charge will pay. We must, however, point out to them that the charge will substantially fund education, social services, the police and fire services which all members of the community enjoy whether or not they are disabled. I hope that we shall be able to persuade more local authorities to improve access to libraries, swimming pools and other facilities so that disabled people can enjoy them.

I began by pointing out the Government's spending achievements over the past 10 years. Those successes were achieved on the back of major economic success. Only if we retain a Government who can continue this economic success will we be able to meet the high objectives that my hon. Friend the Minister has set himself.

8.49 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): We had a good debate on disablement on Monday. I do not propose to repeat my condemnation of the Social Security Bill, but I should like to consider some of the basic problems faced by disabled people. Their main difficulties are poverty, lack of rights, discrimination and unemployment. The Government have failed to tackle those problems effectively.

We all know that most disabled people are poor. The main source of income for 75 per cent. of them is state benefits. The income of the few who are employed is significantly less than that of able-bodied workers. The Government are at fault for not doing enough for disabled people. The average real value of benefits that disabled people receive has risen by less than 1 per cent. in the past decade, while the value of average male earnings has risen 36·5 per cent. That is a cause for shame and shows the Government's neglect of disabled people.

We need—and this has been spelt out time and again —a comprehensive disablement income, payable to all disabled people according to the severity of their disablement and not according to means.

As important as incomes are rights. The Minister for Social Security assured us that he is in the process of implementing the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986—the Tom Clarke Act, as we call it, which is a major measure on disabled people's rights which should have been implemented fully long ago.

With low incomes and few rights, it is not surprising that disabled people suffer discrimination. Judging from the discussions that I have had with many disabled people and their organisations, they are discriminated against every day of their lives. Discrimination severely affects disabled people. Government statements that there is insufficient evidence of discrimination are pure gobbledegook; I can testify to the damage that it causes. Disabled people are not allowed access to public buildings; they are not allowed to take holidays in the places where they want; they are sometimes not allowed into pubs and clubs; and they are not allowed jobs for which they are fitted.

Such discrimination against disabled people in the 1990s is appalling. How do we deal with it? We do so not by begging, pleading or urging but by demanding that they be given new rights under legislation. Such rights are given by most member states of the European Community. Last year, the United States' Senate passed a marvellous Bill giving disabled people entirely new rights. The United States is leading the world and is not allowing disabled people to be treated as second-class citizens. Those rights are tremendous advances on measures in other countries.

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

The Bill has outlawed discrimination against disabled people and protected them from discrimination in transport, employment, public accommodation, hotels, restaurants, shops, telecommunications and services provided by state and local government.

Why cannot Britain give such a lead instead of falling behind European Community countries and the United States? We have so often led the world in the past, but now we are not even following those countries. Whenever Bills have been introduced to outlaw not only general discrimination but unjustified discrimination, the Government have rejected them. I am sorry that the Government chose to do that, but I hope that the Minister for Social Security and his colleagues will change their minds.

Discrimination is most visible in the realm of employment. No fewer than 70 per cent. of Britain's disabled people of working age have no job. Evidence shows that many of them are unemployed because of discrimination.

The Minister will know—my political opponent but good friend the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) joins me in this—that the all-party disablement group has been anxious to preserve the quota system. For the past 15 years, we have opposed attempts by successive Governments to dismantle it. It is not a perfect system and we do not stick rigidly to it, but we insist that that legislative safeguard should remain in force and should be properly enforced and implemented. That is not being done at present, and we believe that the Government should pay far more attention to it. They should stop throwing permits around like confetti; the Labour Government also showered permits around like confetti. We should like to see the quota system enforced and a few prosecutions of bad employers. We should like Britain to follow the example of Germany, where a levy is imposed on employers who do not fulfil their quota. Those are reasonable demands to make. We are after jobs for disabled people.

My final point—I shall not keep saying that this is my final point—is that in seeking rights and opportunities for disabled people we must include those for whom care and support are vital. We should remember the case of Beverley Lewis, the deaf-blind woman who starved to death in appalling conditions. We must find out how and why that happened and how we can avoid such tragedies in the future. The only way of doing so is to hold a public inquiry. I hope that the Minister will agree to that. I hope that whoever replies to the debate will answer that point.

This is a package of constructive proposals and I offer it to the House with all good will. The proposals are designed to further the wellbeing of disabled people. If they are adopted, we will have gone a long way towards a better deal for the disabled. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will act on them.

8.58 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): I am very pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) in the debate. I would like to have a fiver for every time I have followed him in similar disablement debates in the past 15 years. He has made some valid points with which I agree. I welcome the opportunity to debate the needs of disabled people and I only wish that we had more time available to go into many more of the relevant issues.

I do not, however, welcome the terms of the Opposition motion, which fails to reflect the tremendous improvements that have taken place under this Government: nor does it reflect the opportunities that still lie ahead. When I first became involved in working with disabled people in the late 1960s, very few disability organisations existed and only a handful of benefits were available for people with handicaps. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) pointed out, what a change has taken place in the intervening years.

The all-party disablement group recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. It is worth remembering that the group was established to help promote the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, which was piloted through Parliament by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). Since then we have seen disabled people brought out of the shadows and given their right to play a full role in our community. The Opposition have tried tonight—and I believe have failed—to make a case that under the present Government the disabled have suffered setbacks. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security pointed out in his excellent speech, that is plainly not the case, and the evidence speaks for itself in the huge increase in both the numbers of, and the cash benefits for, the long-term sick and disabled—somewhere near a 100 per cent. increase in real terms since 1979.

It is not just the increased benefits which are important, however—this is a thread running through a number of speeches this evening. The past 10 years have also seen welcome changes in attitudes towards disabled people. The accelerated moves towards independent living and community care have focused people's attention on the less fortunate who suffer from physical and mental handicaps. The historical myths associating inability with disability are gradually disappearing, especially when we think about historical figures who have suffered from such disabilities: people like Beethoven with his advancing deafness who nevertheless produced the Choral symphony, and Van Gogh who, while becoming increasingly mentally ill, painted masterpieces that are now worth a fortune. Last week I helped to launch the National Dyslexia Awareness Campaign in the company of a number of famous people who suffer from that learning handicap—Susan Hampshire, Duncan Goodhew, Beryl Reid and the architect, Richard Rodgers.

With all our involvement with various disabilities, it was therefore no surprise to me that the OPCS surveys showed that some 6·5 million people in this country suffer various degrees of handicap; but the fact that all this activity is taking place is surely a welcome sign that we are making constant progress towards the day when disabled people are not prevented from fulfilling their maximum potential by educational, financial, employment or access barriers.

Welcome changes have been achieved recently. I instance the launch of the accessible taxi, something that we are now taking for granted but which took many years of campaigning and design work to achieve. We have the extension of the mobility allowance to deaf-blind people, and many of us were involved in that campaign for some eight years. We have additional money for cochlear implants under the National Health Service, the carers'

addition in income support, and, the major landmark—and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke)—the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, not yet fully implemented.

The current Session is extremely important for disabled people. The Government are legislating on community care and launching their proposals for community benefits; they will shortly publish the conclusions of the review of employment services for disabled people; and the House will soon have an opportunity to debate the recommendations of the Warnock report in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill and the contributions that such research can make to the prevention of genetically-inherited disabling diseases. We also have the issue of student loans which gives us the opportunity to consider the amount of support currently given to disabled students in higher education.

It is important that these Bills should improve and facilitate the full integration of disabled people and continue to break down the barriers which still abound.

I would like to touch on some current issues and put forward what I hope will be constructive pointers for the future.

On disability benefits, although I accept that there has been some criticism of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for not going far enough towards the goal of a disablement cost allowance, I believe that he has made substantial progress, given the financial constraints on the economy. He personally exerted maximum pressure on the Treasury and gained enough resources to establish the basis for further progress over the coming years. There is now a political consensus across parties and the disablement lobby that independent living is good and should be welcomed and encouraged. However, it is vital that this move is accompanied by adequate income for disabled people, or we could face the same problems that we face with the discharged mentally handicapped in the community.

There is some concern that the White Paper's proposals fall short of the disablement cost allowance which has long been advocated, especially as they do not cover costs for such things as extra heating, laundry, diet and unprescribed medication and do not meet the needs of the severely disabled people, whose costs can be substantially greater than the OPCS reports showed. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has partially recognised that point in the White Paper by stating that supplementary arrangements may be necessary for a small group of disabled people. I hope that there will now be full consultation with the various organisations involved to make this work effectively and become reality.

I welcome also the introduction of a partial incapacity benefit through employment credit. I hope that it will be followed by full consultation with disability organisations to ensure that we get the system right. I welcome the increases to the severe disablement allowance, although they are not yet enough to achieve the level of the equivalent contributory benefit—invalidity benefit. We promised that in our 1979 manifesto, and I hope that it remains the Government's eventual aim. It would be helpful if this and other aims were spelt out, resources identified and target dates set for their achievement, otherwise there is a danger of piecemeal, ad hoc reform of the system. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State does not intend or want that.

I mentioned the student loans legislation. I welcome the Government's commitment to wider access to higher education. Recently, the all-party group had a meeting with various bodies involved in education for the handicapped and with the education Minister. We pointed out that the current arrangements for disabled students were in desperate need of review and that there was a danger that the student loans proposals would inhibit access for disabled students. They face extra costs during their time at university or college and, of course, after graduation. That must be taken into account when judging the level of disabled students allowance and of loan repayments. I am grateful to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science for the consultations that he has set up with disability organisations and for his commitment to review the disabled students allowance. It is vital that more consideration is also given to the proposals for a fourth access fund for disabled students.

We see evidence of the progress being made when we look at community care. The Government rightly recognise that community care services must be consumer-led and must, as they say in the White Paper, "respond flexibly and sensitively to individual needs . . . and allow a range of options for consumers". Disabled people do not want to be passive recipients of services that are determined by local authorities. They want genuine consumer choice, like the rest of society. The Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 would help to ensure that that choice of service exists and that services are sensitive to the needs of disabled people, more appropriate and more effective. Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Act give disabled people the right to consultation and to appeal against decisions taken by the local authority as well as the right to have an advocate acting on their behalf—for example, a member of the family or a friend who can truly represent their interests in all their dealings with the local authority. That surely must be the best method of securing help that is appropriate, effective and efficient for the disabled person.

We have all had constituency examples of the wrong aids and adaptations being imposed upon people. A typical example that I came across recently was of an elderly woman who needed help to get around the house. A social worker insisted that she had rails put on most of the walls. Of course, that involved a great deal of expenditure and labour. The woman did not want that and, even with the rails, had great difficulty in getting around the house. Two months later, after much fuss, she was reassessed and given a simple zimmer walking frame, which was precisely what she wanted. All is well, but think of the waste of resources.

Another example of the sense of good advocacy involved a person who was caring for a disabled person. The carer asked for respite care to be provided. After a joint assessment meeting took place, it was found that all that was needed was a volunteer sitter on Saturday evenings. That was provided. Again there was a great saving of resources.

When I asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health at Question Time yesterday whether he accepted the need for the implementation of the important sections 1, 2 and 3 of the 1986 Act, he promised, as has been reiterated today by my hon. Friend, a speedy review of those sections. I welcome that commitment. I am sure

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that it pleased the hon. Member for Monklands, West, who must be frustrated at having given birth to a baby which is allowed only half the time.

The shortness of the debate prevents my mentioning many other disability issues such as the need for ring fencing of community care grants to local authorities. We have already heard on BBC "Panorama" one social services director stating that he was cutting services to the elderly disabled in order to provide social workers for child abuse cases. If we do not have ring fencing of resources for disabled people, the problem will get worse. The recent tragic case of the 23-year-old deaf-blind girl, Beverley Lewis, highlights the problem. I share the view of the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South that there should be a public inquiry into that appalling case and its implications.

On the preventive side of disability, the embryology issue will be controversial and emotional. I am convinced that properly controlled and monitored research will help in future to detect specific disorders such as muscular dystrophy, Down's syndrome, cystic fibrosis, Huntington's chorea and some 50 types of severe congenital disease which one day may be detectable by pre-embryo screening. We shall be debating that in detail in a few weeks' time. I hope that hon. Members will study all the medical evidence carefully before casting their vote.

As someone who in my disablement work with Rehabilitation International has the opportunity to travel to many countries and talk to disabled people all over the world, I know how advanced we are in our provision for handicapped people. There is still a great deal to be done. I know that my right hon. Friends will continue to push the frontiers outwards, and I give them my full support this evening.

9.12 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I appreciated very much some of the comments of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price). When, just over six years ago, I introduced the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Amendment) Bill to outlaw discrimination against disabled people, I did not have a relative who was disabled. Since then, unfortunately, as many hon. Members know, I have lost my wife. She was disabled and worked in the House of Commons. If the Minister with responsibility for the disabled intends to co-ordinate his activities with those of other Ministers, he might start by approaching the Leader of the House to point out how difficult it is for disabled people who work in the Houses of Parliament to get from the office where they are working even for a bite of food or drink of coffee. There is much to be done for disabled people in the mother of Parliaments.

I have vivid memories of the way in which the Government deliberately thwarted the will of many people, probably a majority in the country, when I tried in November 1983 to outlaw discrimination against disabled people. I was told by the present Secretary of State, who at that time was in a more junior capacity in the Department, that all we needed was education and persuasion. All we needed was to persuade people to adopt a better attitude towards the disabled. All the evidence of the past six years proves that that is not the way to deal with the problem. The problem has not gone away. How much have the Government spent on education and persuasion since November 1983 to convince people that they should have a proper attitude to disabled people?

The Spastics Society has produced two surveys that show that there is massive discrimination in employment against disabled people. The British Deaf Association published a similar report. We know from the evidence of many individual cases that people are discriminated against, either consciously or unconsciously, simply because they have a disability. We know from the labour force survey in the spring of 1988 that, whereas there was 7·9 per cent. unemployment among able-bodied people, 19 per cent. of disabled people of working age were jobless; 360,000 disabled people of working age were, at that time, unemployed, yet some 22 per cent. of them had either academic or vocational qualifications of at least GCE A-level standard, and many had university degrees.

Since 1986, employment for the disabled should have become easier, because there has been an increase in the use of microtechnology and, although we know that the Government have fiddled the statistics, we accept that there has been a reduction in the number of jobless in the country.

There are also demographic changes. We were told by the former Secretary of State for Employment that by the year 1995 there would be 500,000 fewer young people under 25 in the labour force, so there should be plenty of scope to provide employment for the disabled.

We know also that the Government have a campaign to promote a code of practice among employers to ensure that they do their job in taking on disabled people. However, only 120,000 copies of that code have ever been distributed, if the answer given on 13 November by the Secretary of State is correct.

The OPCS surveys have shown that, because of the experience of being discriminated against, many disabled people regard themselves as unemployable. They define themselves as unable to find work. That is because of their experiences of being constantly turned down in their search for a job. Has the Minister read the evidence in the Spastics Society's recent report? If he has, he must come to only one conclusion—that the Government have a responsibility, beyond any code of practice, to legislate against such discrimination.

The National Economic Development Office—a Government agency—published a document last year called "Defusing the demographic time bomb". It said that people with disabilities in employment are not being used to their full capabilities and that employers are doing relatively little to attract people with disabilities. Has the Minister taken cognisance of that evidence? Disabled people realise that the quota system is not being used properly. There have been only 10 prosecutions since the passing of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 and few convictions. The total of fines for all the convictions in that time has been about £4,000.

The message has got across to disabled people. That is why whereas in 1978, the year before the Government came to power, 494,877 people registered under the 1944 Act, last year only 366,768 registered. Every single year since the Government came to office, fewer and fewer people have registered as disabled under the legislation. Yet discrimination continues, and the quota system is not enforced. That is not a reason for abolishing the quota system; it is a reason for enforcing and invigorating the system.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) referred to the Federal Republic of Germany, which has a quota of 6 per cent. If employers do not abide by that system, they are charged a levy which provides revenue for training disabled people so that they can find employment. I should like to persuade my own party of the need for co-ordination such as the French have. In France, there is a Ministry to deal with all the problems of disabled people. I have certainly advocated that the Labour party should make such a system part of its policy. In France, the Government are to introduce an employment Bill that will include a 6 per cent. quota and a levy system, which will be in force by the time the single market is attained in 1992. As a matter of interest, the French Minister for the disabled, Michel Gillibert, was injured in a helicopter accident and is himself disabled, so he can bring his own experience to his post.

We undoubtedly need legislation. It is wrong when a paraplegic is refused access to a theatre. It is wrong when a mentally handicapped person is refused access to a hotel in a tourist resort. It is wrong when a student is refused access to a full course in a polytechnic because certain rooms are inaccessible to him. It is wrong when a deaf person is turned out of a public house because he is deaf and because someone he is with is using sign language. It is wrong when someone in a wheelchair is refused access to Wembley stadium to see the FA cup final even though he has a ticket. Such discrimination is wrong in every case, but unlike discrimination on grounds of sex or race, all those samples of discrimination are still legal. It shames our country that that should still be so.

What we need is an Act of Parliament to give legislative teeth to what is morally right, and to give disabled people real rights. Opposition Members will fight for their policy to outlaw discrimination against disabled people and to give disabled people the same liberties as those enjoyed by able-bodied people. But to disabled people I say that liberty must be fought for. We have liberty, but we were not born with it; we had to fight for it. I believe that disabled people must fight, and fight hard, to ensure that legislation is introduced. For our part, Labour Members can say that such legislation will be forthcoming after the next general election.

9.23 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): The debate is about rights and opportunities for disabled people, and I welcome the constructive suggestions that have been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. My experience of dealing with disabled people tells me that sometimes there is pain and sometimes there are tears, and that sometimes the tears and pain are shared by those who look after the disabled, but that the overwhelming impression that disabled people give is of courage, determination, cheerfulness and generosity of spirit.

I hope that, in battling for the disabled—rightly so—the Opposition will echo those qualities in their speeches. I sometimes think that, while the courage and determination may be there, the cheerfulness and generosity of spirit are not always evident.

As I have listened to the details of the Government's new benefits programme, which is bringing more help to the terminally ill, to the deaf-blind, to disabled babies and carers, and, coming soon, the additional support for the disabled at work, I have felt that I must tell the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) that a little more generosity of spirit would be welcome. By all means let him criticise us for not going fast enough, but he should not say that we have not got anywhere, because the Government's record is there to be seen—for example, in the doubling in real terms of long-term sick and disablement benefits. The fact that three times as many people get attendance allowance and six times as many get mobility allowance is not so much a record to be proud of as a launching pad for further effort. That is the way I judge it, and I hope that Opposition Members will look at it in the same light.

Our commitment as we debate this issue, particularly hon. Members who are present tonight, is without doubt. In fighting for the disabled, we are trying to get across the message that to be disabled is not to be unable. Our task is to enable the disabled to participate in life to the full. When the Secretary of State for Employment talks, for example, about his ambition for a skills decade, I hope that he, and we, include the disabled in that. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) was spot on when he spoke about the need to enable the disabled to participate in job opportunities.

In enabling the disabled, we must consider the physical needs to help people to be independent; the caring needs so that people have folk to care for them when necessary; the mobility needs so that they can get around and make their way to work and leisure activities and so on; and the employment needs.

The physical needs involve all the housing adaptations to which hon. Members have referred, and I particularly support the campaign of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), to which my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) referred. Housing must be suitable for the disabled.

We must pay particular attention to the aids that are provided. I have previously referred to visiting the home of an old lady who was deaf. I found her watching television without the sound on. I asked her if she had a hearing aid and she replied that she had a hearing aid, but she also had arthritic fingers and could not turn up the volume on the set.

We must make sure that the aid is not just the cheapest but is appropriate to the case. It is a matter of horses for courses when giving support to disabled people, and I support everything that has been said about access to buildings and so on.

I support all the measures that are being taken for carers, but I ask the Minister to go even further, because the problems of many carers are not yet being met by society. I think of the young carer, for example, at school who is called from school to look after the mother who has collapsed at home. Such a carer cares without complaint, but that action can interrupt school and a natural youthful life. Such people should receive special attention. We need more respite schemes to enable people to have a break and to go back refreshed and dedicated to the task before them.

I welcome the mobility allowances and improved facilities for access, including access to stations. I think of the many steps leading to the platforms at a station such as Clapham junction in my constituency.

On the issue of mobility, we could do more for the dial-a-ride system. The Minister should talk to his colleagues in the Government who are responsible for the allocation of resources to dial-a-ride so as not simply to

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give more money to that scheme but to encourage the application of that money to schemes where the users have a bigger say in the sort of service that they wish to receive.

In the dial-a-ride scheme in Wandsworth, for example, 1,000 members make 15,000 journeys a year. One third of the people who use that service are wheelchair-bound and the others are disabled, frail or elderly. They choose to use one third of their journeys for shopping expeditions, one third to visit friends and one third for general outings—for example, to visit the hairdressers or the theatre. Seventy per cent. of their chosen journeys should be local and 30 per cent. should be more than five miles.

London Regional Transport stepped in and said, "That does not fit our pattern. Why should we allow Wandsworth to let its users have so many journeys over five miles? That is not the mould that we want, so they cannot have the extra bus that we are going to offer to all the other dial-a-ride users unless they meet our criteria." It should not be "our" criteria. It should not be criteria determined by the House or by the bosses of LRT—although I welcome what LRT does to support the service. The criteria should be determined by the users of the service. If they choose to have more longer journeys, so be it.

I have referred recently to training for employment. Disabled people have many opportunities to participate in the job world. Reference has been made to the shortage of people with skills. Many disabled people are unable to take up skilled positions because they need to acquire the skills —sometimes basic and sometimes advanced. Organisations such as Shared Community in my constituency have a tremendous record in helping people whose cases appeared hopeless to find and keep jobs. Training establishments need to be able to plan for the number of trainee places and that certainty has not always existed. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends can ensure that such a possibility exists.

With regard to job placing, many more employers should be told to have patience. Many disabled people will hold down a job in the long run, but they need a little more time to adapt. All too often, an employer will run out of patience and get rid of the disabled person, and bang goes yet another job opportunity.

I have outlined several areas in which the Government can offer more support. I believe that we are in a new world of public awareness about disability. There is more awareness of care, access, travel and employment opportunities. There are many opportunities for the disabled and also opportunities for the Government to build on their great success to ensure that the disabled have a full role to play in society and come as near as possible to the rest of us in enjoying life to the full.

9.32 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): In the short time available to me, I want to refer to two specific constituency cases about which I have written to separate Government Departments. The cases illustrate the way in which the Government's policy fails to go far enough in offering practical support to disabled people to remain in their own homes while at the same time it actively encourages them to give up their independence and enter institutional care. My constituents and I are very worried about that trend which has been evident over the past 10 years.

I want first to refer to the case of Mrs. Pauline Shaw. She is in her mid-40s and substantially handicapped by multiple sclerosis. Her husband Jim gave up work some considerable time ago to care for her full-time in their own home. Mrs. Shaw received occasional respite care at Pinderfields hospital—and recently that care was jeopardised by the threat of closure. She received visits from a district nurse to assist her bathing and toilet needs and also social work support. I emphasise that Mr. and Mrs. Shaw are fulsome in their praise for the staff who gave their support. However, that support was insufficient. It could not prevent Mr. Shaw's health being affected; ultimately, in the interests of his own health, he was advised to allow his wife to enter residential care.

That was the start of their problems. When she entered private residential care about 20 miles from Wakefield, where they had lived for some considerable time, she developed bed sores. Mr. Shaw, who had given his wife such good care for such a long period, moved her to a different home in a place called Barkston Ash, also some 20 miles from my constituency. Then they faced the financial problems arising from the fact that the benefits available to them were insufficient to meet the cost of the residential care that was required in her circumstances.

I wrote to the Under-Secretary of State for Health asking for some top-up payments to enable this lady to be supported in residential care, on the basis that she required full-time nursing. The Minister replied saying that that simply was not possible.

My constituent Jim Shaw, out of his invalidity benefit and state pension of around £40 a week, is supplementing the fees involved in keeping his wife in residential care. He is now trying to move to the area where she is living. At present, he travels 40 miles each day, and that is costly for somebody on state benefits. He cannot get a council house in that area, because the Tory-controlled council has, of course, sold off all the council accommodation. That is the reality of the problems facing many disabled people.

Mr. Michael Frobisher is another constituent of mine. I raised this case during the debate on Second Reading of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill because I am particularly concerned about it. This gentleman has suffered from multiple sclerosis since about 1970. He is in his early 60s. His wife Pat was a health visitor, but she gave up her employment four years ago to care for him. She has had support from a nurse and has had other domiciliary help. She had respite care for one week in six in the younger disabled unit at Pinderfields hospital, which was threatened not long ago with closure as a result of Government cuts.

Unfortunately, this was insufficient. It was not the level of care required by Mr. Frobisher, despite all the efforts that his wife put in. She says that, in 1988, she begged for more help from the health authority, but to no avail. Indeed, she collapsed in July 1989. Mr. Frobisher was then admitted to a private nursing home some 20 miles outside my constituency. This was the start of their problems. There was insufficient finance to pay £245 weekly, and the Frobishers have now had to sell the house to meet the fees. Once the fees have been paid, Mr. Frobisher has 5p a week left.

At Question Time on, I think, 27 November last, I raised cases such as that of Mr. Frobisher. The answer of

the Minister for Social Security was that he found nothing offensive in relatives helping with care costs. I do not think that I am alone in this place in finding it deeply offensive that somebody who has given care as extensive as that which has been given by this lady over so many years should have to sell her house in order to be able to meet the cost of her husband's care. I think that that is wrong, and I look forward to the Minister's reply to my direct communication to his Department about this case.

In my opinion, neither of the two constituents to whom I have referred should be in institutional care. That is the importance of this kind of case to tonight's debate. There are many thousands of similar cases throughout the country—people who are in institutional care simply because the necessary domiciliary support is not available to enable them to remain in their own homes with their families and communities, where I and they believe they ought to be. It is criminal that people who have cared for their spouses as Mrs. Frobisher and Mr. Shaw have done should be treated in this way, that because their needs are not being catered for at the local level they are suffering separation.

I stress that I am not criticising the local authority or the district health authority. The staff concerned, with the facilities available to them, have done their utmost to assist these individuals. What I am criticising is the lack of resources, both for the local authority and for the Health Service, to provide the kind of service that would enable those people to remain in their own homes.

The ultimate irony is that well over £200 of state funds is required to keep these people in institutional care. It is a fact, as the Audit Commission pointed out, that less than that amount, properly allocated for domiciliary services, would keep them in the community and in their own homes. All hon. Members believe that people such as Mrs. Shaw and Mr. Frobisher should be in their own homes and with their families. It is an appalling indictment of 10 years of Government policy on community care and the disabled that those people find themselves in institutional care 20 or 30 miles from where they have lived all their lives.

9.39 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): For the most part, this has been a constructive debate. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) referred to the speech by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who described the rights of people with disabilities as unique. He was absolutely right. I am sure that hon. Members would wish to highlight the individual needs, rights and demands of people with disabilities and their carers. That is a big priority.

The hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) gave a fine outline of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. So convincing was he that the Chancellor of the Exchequer rushed to the Chamber. Opposition Members welcome the Chancellor's presence. He is a former Minister with responsibilities in these matters. If the necessary political will exists in the Treasury, we can do a great deal for disabled people. In particular, we can implement the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 because the good will that the Minister for Social Security introduced into the debate might be shared by the Chancellor, and, if that good will is matched by political will in the Treasury, we can make real progress.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in addition to good will and political will, he should clearly spell out that the sum involved is equivalent to one-fifth of a penny in income tax and that it pales into insignificance compared with the giveaway Budgets that we have had in the past?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). The Chancellor does not need to be reminded that, in one of the many opinion polls that were held before the 1987 general election, an overwhelming majority said that the Treasury should have found the necessary funds for the implementation of this important measure.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) referred to the Beverley Lewis case. He was right to ask for a public inquiry. There are many lessons to be learnt. The debate has been dominated by the 1986 Act, and I intend to make further references to it. Many organisations, including the Spastics Society and the 40 voluntary bodies in the Act Now Group, support the implementation of the 1986 Act. They take the view that, in at least two respects, the Beverley Lewis case demonstrates that had the Act been fully implemented, some of that tragedy might have been avoided.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) outlined the Labour party's alternatives to the Government's policy. I was sorry that the Minister was somewhat abusive. Hon. Members will recall that, when in office, my right hon. Friend actually exceeded the Labour party manifesto commitments on disability. I look forward to the time when he will repeat that performance.

The motion could not be more appropriate because the House has been considering—at the moment Standing Committee E is actively considering—the Government's proposals on health and community care. There can be no effective policy unless there is a structure involving the consumer. The Government speak of consumer rights, but if consumer rights in terms of the disabled, carers and advocates are truly embraced by the Government, they should accept their responsibilities under the 1986 Act.

The Minister said that the Government will soon be meeting again with local authorities. I hate to sound ungracious, but we have heard that before. It has been said since April 1986. Time after time, we have been told by the Prime Minister and by other Ministers that the 1986 Act will be implemented when resources are available. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) reminded the House that the Government have no difficulty in finding resources for other purposes. Their priorities are clearly not those that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I would endorse. I suspect from the tenor of tonight's debate that our priorities would be endorsed by most right hon. and hon. Members in a free vote.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh, in referring to the uniqueness of the disabled, was conscious of the fact—as are all right hon. and hon. Members—that the OPCS reports reveal that 6·5 million of our fellow citizens experience some form of disability. Many, many carers are trying to cope with the most difficult situations but they receive little support. Their difficulties ought to be recognised. Instead of a strategy for community care of the kind that we are told is Government policy, there is a great deal of fragmentation. Certainly joint planning is very

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much missing in Scotland. Its absence is almost as evident as the absence of a Scottish Minister on the Government Front Bench tonight.

The Government say that, in the absence of joint planning, they are making arrangements to discharge long-stay patients from psychiatric hospitals and to place them in the community. On 12 July 1989, the Secretary of State for Health told the House:

"I will ensure that discharges of seriously mentally ill people from hospital will take place only when adequate medical and social care is available for them outside hospital." —[*Official Report*, 12 July 1989; Vol. 156, c. 978.]

Where are those arrangements?

If section 7 of the 1986 Act has suddenly been dropped, despite previous assurances that its provisions were being actively discussed with local authorities to ensure their implementation, what arrangements are the Government making in their place? During Question Time yesterday, the Government were seriously criticised on both sides for discharging psychiatric patients into community care that does not exist. Apart from the problems that that creates for families and communities, it places a tremendous strain on social services departments.

We are told that local authorities will have to defend themselves in terms of the poll tax, and I hope that the obligations that have been placed upon them will be remembered. I hope that we will hear not about extavagant overspending councils, but about under-servicing councils. If the 1986 Act means anything, it is that we should dispense with the accidents of geography, where assessment and services may be provided in one area but not another. There should be national standards that genuinely respond to the needs of physically disabled and mentally handicapped or ill persons, their carers and their advocates. We believe that the 1986 Act offers that opportunity for individuals' rights.

The Minister referred briefly to education in his opening speech, and I hope that hon. Members will remember the importance of that to young people who live in special schools. It is a traumatic time for them and for their families. We must ensure that proper arrangements are made so that they feel part of the community.

The Minister referred to the Peto institute. The Government were right to ensure that whatever opportunities existed in eastern Europe were available to benefit our people. Many parents, including those who were delighted that their children benefited from going to the institute, asked why that opportunity is not available in this country. Why do they have to go to eastern Europe? Why are those facilities and services not resourced here?

There have been many splendid speeches tonight, but few hon. Members would disagree that my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) made a telling impression on the House when he described disability in a mining community. We should recognise that we are talking about people with rights, including the right to dignity.

In my constituency, in a little village called Crowood which is also a mining community, lives Mary, a lady whose husband was injured in the Auchengeach disaster of 1959. He now has a heart condition and her son, Gerry, is a spastic, in his early thirties. In 1986 she visited the House when the Act was going through. Her sister helped her come to London, and it was her only visit from Scotland since Gerry was born. She told me that her arm was black from top to bottom through coping with her son and because of her commitment and love for her child. She asked—and I conclude by putting it to the House and to the Minister—"What happens to Gerry after I have gone?" That is a reasonable question that many thousands of people ask.

I want a policy for disability and community care that will respond to that question and to the needs of disabled people, their parents—people like Mary and Albert—and others who care so much for them.

9.53 pm

Mr. Scott: I cannot do a traditional wind-up speech in the time available, and the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) was not able to do that in his speech. However, I want to deal with several issues raised in the debate.

I shall begin with the Peto institute, and what I intend to do in relation to that. For the time being, Budapest is the centre for conductive education. We have a modest facility in Birmingham, but if we are to build up a facility which will deliver conductive education properly to the young children in these islands who require it, the conductors will need a period of training. I am trying to achieve that, but in the meantime we expect British children and trainee British conductors to go to Budapest, and to draw on the experience and the expertise there.

In a sense, I share the view of the hon. Member for Monklands, West. This has been a good debate, and a quiet debate. Of course, the Opposition have said that we are not doing enough, and of course I have said that we are doing better than they could imagine. I suspect, however, that the debate has been so good because those who have taken part are a kind of fellowship: we all care about disabled people and want to do as much as we can, as quickly as we can, to enhance the quality of their lives.

I had hoped for a better attendance on the part of hon. Members who are less directly involved in such issues; I expected word to spread around the Palace of Westminster rather more quickly. Nevertheless, let me pay the warmest possible tribute to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and to all the members of the all-party disablement group. They work hard to maintain contact with groups of and for disabled people, and to make hon. Members aware of their needs.

There is, I believe, recognition—mostly among Conservative Members, although it occasionally ebbs from Opposition speeches—of the real progress that is being made, not just through benefits and a more coherent delivery of services, but in a range of ways, some of which I outlined in my opening remarks. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Monklands, West that we must pay increasing attention to the issue of carers: in the coming weeks we shall discuss that with various organisations and campaigners, and we shall listen carefully to what they say.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) mentioned workplace facilities. When, in the summer, I involuntarily rendered myself disabled for two months, I was relieved that Parliament was in recess and that I did not have to hobble around the House on crutches. I shall mention the matter to my right hon. and

learned Friend the Lord President, but I suspect that the possibility of amending the geography of this building may be somewhat limited.

Let me say to the hon. Members for Monklands, West and for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) that I accept the need for a better delivery of services to enable people to live in their own home. The thrust of our present policy on community care is to dispense with the perverse incentive to put people into residential care—at vast public expenditure cost—which is often not what the individual concerned would have chosen. Instead we aim to provide packages of individually tailored care in the community to enable such people to live their lives as they wish. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) will recall, I spent this afternoon discussing that with the Select Committee.

The hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse)—whose speech demonstrated his passion and commitment to the cause as well as his expertise—talked about the sufferers, especially miners, whose needs are not being met on the advice of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. According to the definition of terminal illness in the new arrangements for attendance allowance, it will be necessary to show that someone is suffering from a progressive disease and that his lifespan is unlikely to exceed six months. We are taking the advisory council's advice on the matter referred to by the hon. Member, but I shall take an early opportunity to draw its chairman's attention to his speech and to ask for it to be given careful consideration.

Several hon. Members mentioned the Beverley Lewis case. A local inquiry has been carried out, and the social services inspectorate is considering the lessons to be learnt from it. Although there are no plans for a public inquiry, I can give an absolute undertaking that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health is also considering the lessons to be learnt, as well as the recommendation by the coroner's inquiry that the law relating to mentally disordered people and mandatory care be re-examined.

Some important points have been made about the problems and needs of disabled people. We have listened to them all. I cannot reply to them now, but I shall read carefully the report of the debate.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 221, Noes 273.

Division No. 46] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry

Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McFall and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the fact that social security expenditure for long-term sick and disabled people has virtually doubled in real terms since 1979, to a total of over £8 billion a year; notes with approval the greatly improved coverage of disability benefits associated with this achievement, which has increased the number of Mobility Allowance recipients from 95,000 to 615,000, the number of Attendance Allowance recipients from 265,000 to 795,000, and the number of Invalid Care Allowance recipients from 5,000 to 110,000; and welcomes the Government's proposals for further improvements, involving net additional expenditure rising to some £300 million in 1993-94, to help some 850,000 long-term sick and disabled people by measures which include increased premiums in income-related benefits for both disabled adults and disabled children, a new premium for carers, the extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies and to people who are terminally ill, the extension of Mobility Allowance to those who are both deaf and blind, increases in Severe Disablement Allowance focused especially on those disabled from birth or early in life, improved coverage of help with the extra costs of disability through a new Disability Allowance, and the introduction of a new Disability Employment Credit to assist and encourage those disabled people who can and wish to work.

Local Government Finance (Wales)

10.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): I beg to move,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1990-91 (House of Commons Paper No. 53), a copy of which was laid before the House on 20th December, be approved.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the next three motions on the Order Paper:

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (House of Commons Paper No. 54), a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th December, be approved.

That the Welsh Non-Domestic Rating (County Share and District Share) Report (House of Commons Paper No. 55), a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th December, be approved.

That the Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (House of Commons Paper No. 56), a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th December, be approved.

Mr. Walker: The reports confirm that this is an excellent settlement. Total standard spending for 1990-91 is up by 7·1 per cent. over last years' budgets, and by no less than 9·4 per cent. over 1989-90 provision. Aggregate external finance for 1990-91 is increased by 8·6 per cent. over the comparable figure for 1989-90. This means that charge payers in Wales should expect to contribute only 15 per cent. of local government spending, with the balance being met by business ratepayers and Government grants.

Wales has benefited in this way because local and central Government have worked together in partnership. There has been no deliberate challenge to the Government's expenditure plans. There has been no creative accountancy and there has been no rate capping. This has been a remarkable success story from which the whole of Wales has benefited.

Local authorities in Wales know that they have been given a real opportunity to ensure a level of community charge averaging £173. They can achieve it if they budget responsibly in line with the settlement and in the interests of their charge payers.

Opposition Members have claimed that total standard spending of £2,114·5 million is less than the amount required. They have voiced similar unfounded claims in response to all previous Welsh rate support grant settlements. But where is the evidence? There is none. The fact is that Welsh local government has been given the resources needed to maintain and develop services.

I was very surprised when the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), in responding to my statement on 18 December, made the extraordinary claim:

"There is no room for efficiency savings after 10 years of Conservative Government."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. 28.]

It is a remarkable thing that, if today he were Secretary of State for Wales, he would be telling local authorities that, after 10 years of Conservative Government, he did not expect any further improvements in the efficiency of local authorities.

The fact is that the Audit Commission has estimated that some £52 million of efficiency savings are achievable by Welsh councils purely on those services which the Commission has so far examined. Some of these have

[Mr. Walker]

already been realised and Welsh councils are commendably seeking further savings. I hope that the Welsh local authorities will continue to recognise, as I believe they do, the scope for greater efficiency.

The settlement is also an excellent one for non-domestic ratepayers. Their contribution to local government spending has been held at the same level in real terms as in 1989-90. I have honoured my commitment to ensure that the introduction of the uniform business rate will not lead to an increase in the burden on business. As a result of these new arrangements, which will remove the inequitable distortions caused by variations in local poundages, the business sector now has certainty that the maximum increase in its contribution in future years will not exceed inflation. The revaluation will remove the inequity caused by using out-of-date rateable values.

It is important also to recognise that the contribution required from Welsh businesses amounts only to around 20 per cent. of local authority spending and that the transitional arrangements I have introduced will phase in the changes faced by individual businesses over a number of years.

The combined effects of the revaluation and the introduction of the unform business rate will serve to reduce the rates burden on industrial property.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the Secretary of State regard it as reasonable for village shopkeepers in Wales to have to pay 100 per cent. more than they are paying at present? They tell me that that is the consequence of UBR.

Mr. Walker: In any revaluation, careful consideration is given to the value of the buildings. In certain aspects of retailing which have not been revalued for many years, adjustments have been made when the value has increased. Similarly, there has been a reduction for a range of manufacturing and industrial concerns. I have created a system whereby the inequities caused by a lack of revaluation are removed.

I am glad to say that the combined effects of the revaluation and the introduction of UBR will benefit industrial properties. That can only be beneficial for the reinvigoration of Welsh industry, especially in the valleys, where the rate burden of industries will be about £11 million lower.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Does not the revaluation to some extent benefit manufacturing industry because of the decline in manufacturing industry over the past 10 years? That is not something to crow about—it is something to feel very sorry about.

Mr. Walker: Surprisingly, the right hon. Gentleman is talking a load of nonsense. Quite a lot of manufacturing industry owns elderly buildings. As the right hon. Gentleman knows from his constituency, inward investment has increaed on a colossal scale. I am glad that the industries of the valleys are benefiting from these proposals by £11 million a year.

Transitional provisions will also operate to reduce the effect of the new system on community charge payers. I have provided £20 million for a scheme of community charge transitional relief in 1990-91, over and above aggregate external finance. The overall effect is that the average charge actually payable in Wales—assuming that authorities spend in line with my plans—should be £165, and certainly less than £173. The scheme will continue in 1991-92 and 1992-93. I have today placed my latest estimates of the distribution of these resources in the Library.

The scheme will ensure that all charge payers in communities where community charges implied by the settlement are more than a specified threshold above the average rates bill per adult payable in 1989-90 will have their charges reduced by an amount equivalent to that excess—320 out of 860 communities in Wales will benefit, including all the communities in the Rhondda and a very high proportion of the communities in other valley areas.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Secretary of State accept that the way that the system works is rough justice? Dwyfor, which the Department has identified as an area of low per capita and family income, has not one community that benefits from this safety net. Why is that happening? What can be done about it?

Mr. Walker: I consulted local authorities, and they were agreed that this was the best way of getting the fullest benefit from the available money. I am very much in favour of the system. It will mean low administrative costs and will be a benefit for charge payers. Some 750,000 charge payers will benefit from the scheme. Because there is extra money outside aggregate external finance, charge payers in areas gaining from the new system will not be required to contribute towards an area safety net.

For those on the lowest incomes, community charge benefits will be available to meet up to 80 per cent. of the charge—although, because of the low level of community charges in Wales, those who are on income support will actually enjoy an effective rate of relief higher than the 100 per cent. rate rebates that they obtain at present. *[Interruption.]* More than 100 per cent. I have taken steps to ensure that people know about these benefits and are encouraged to take them up. This will bring positive cash benefits to 300,000 of the lowest income people in Wales. There have been a number of reports that some Welsh councils are planning to increase their expenditure very substantially and therefore to set high community charges.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly) *rose*——

Mr. Walker: No, I will not give way. This is an important point. Those councils mistakenly believe that their charge payers will assume that the Government are to blame.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West) *rose*——

Mr. Walker: Let me remind the House that the settlement allows for an increase in expenditure of 7·1 per cent., but we learn that, among the counties, South Glamorgan, Powys and Gwynedd are planning to increase spending by between 12 and 13 per cent.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): On rates, is not the maximum only 80 per cent? Would the Secretary of State care to think about that? Perhaps there is a note waiting for him on the Bench behind him.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman is going back to the rebate point. I do not need a note. I am saying that the

people on the maximum rate rebate scheme, because of low incomes, will be substantially better off financially as a result of what we are doing.

The hon. Gentleman is trying to avoid the serious point that I am making, so I shall repeat it. South Glamorgan, Powys and Gwynedd are planning to increase spending by between 12 and 13 per cent. Among the districts, Newport is planning an increase in expenditure of over 20 per cent. and Cardiff of over 30 per cent. In the latter case, this follows increases in the previous two years of 13·4 per cent. and 19·7 per cent.—well above the average increase for all Welsh districts.

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. Walker: No; I want to continue.

These increases are outrageous and totally irresponsible. They represent quite unjustifiable demands on charge payers, and pre-empt charge payers' decisions as to what they can afford.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Walker: They are, in fact, putting quite unnecessary burdens——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. There is a point of order.

Mr. Rogers: The business before the House is complicated. I think it would further the debate substantially if the Secretary of State would give way and reply to points of detail——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman, if he catches the eye of the Chair, will have his say eventually.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is important. The Secretary of State has said himself that it is a very important matter that he is dealing with. The questions that my hon. Friends want to ask him are about the explanations that he is giving. In regard to your ruling about hon. Members catching your eye, you will appreciate that the debate will last only one and a half hours. All of us have an interest in the issue, so we cannot all hope to catch your eye. Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, perhaps you will impress upon the Secretary of State that it is important for him to give way.

Madam Deputy Speaker: May I impress upon the House that points of order, which are not as genuine as I wish, usurp the time of the House? I hope to call as many hon. Members as possible.

Mr. Walker: I hope that the charge payers in Wales will note that two bogus points of order have delayed the debate.

I repeat that the increases are outrageous and totally irresponsible. They represent quite unjustifiable demands on charge payers, and pre-empt charge payers' decisions as to what they can actually afford. They are, in fact, putting quite unnecessary burdens on the charge payers they purport to represent.

Until local accountability takes full effect, I will have to consider how to protect Welsh charge payers from excessive spending and outrageous community charges. Rate capping was never used in Wales: it was never necessary to do so. I had hoped that this would be so with charge capping. But if spending is not reduced from this extravagant scale, the councils concerned will force me to consider using my powers to limit charges to reasonable levels in order to protect their charge payers.

Let me make it plain that the crucial difference between England and Wales in recent years has been the better performance of Welsh local government in budgeting sensibly and containing spending to responsible aand affordable levels. That has led to a succession of realistic, indeed generous, settlements that have recognised and rewarded the performance of Welsh authorities. However, on the basis of the figures that I have quoted, I can assure the House that the Welsh local authorities are helping to ensure that, quite simply, such generosity will not be forthcoming in future.

I was shocked to read in the press that the chief financial adviser of one Welsh council has apparently advised it to create a new baseline for spending. In doing so, he is quoted as saying that this might be the last of the favourable years for local authorities in Wales. I have to advise those who might peddle such views that, if their advice results in extravagant spending increases, that could be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This debate is not just about the reports we have before us; it is also about the responsibility of the House to ensure that the interests of our community chargepayers are protected from the extravagant and unnecessary burdens that some councils at present seem willing to inflict on them. It is also about the need for local government to avoid taking short-term political decisions.

Perhaps some local authorities think that, as there is no election this year, they will put up the charge now and then take advantage when the elections occur. If that is their motive, they will be exposed. There is time for them to think again and for the wiser politicians among them, including members of the Welsh Counties Committee and the Council of Welsh Districts, to curb those who appear to be set on inflicting such damage.

Local government recognises that the Government have delivered a settlement that should be beneficial to Welsh chargepayers, and that authorities can best serve their chargepayers by containing their spending and keeping the community charges low. There is no need for charges to be higher than those I have published, and an average of £173 is achievable. This is an outstanding settlement for Wales, and I commend it to the House.

10.32 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The subject of this debate is important; it affects our children's education, our housing, the homeless, the care of the elderly and our local environment. The Secretary of State set out only half the story. In a nasty, indeed extraordinary, speech, he launched unjustified attacks upon responsible county authorities. I remind him that he could not have better local authorities with which to deal. He need only ask his officials and they would tell him that that was the case.

It is not an excellent settlement. The total standard spending and aggregate external finance are inadequate. The figure of £173 is unrealistic. It is likely to be about £210; £173 it is not. After the right hon. Gentleman's recklessly sanguine hymn of praise for his wretched poll tax—a tax that the people of Wales do not want—I can do no better than to quote W. B. Yeats:

"A Statesman is an easy man,

[Mr. Barry Jones]

He tells his lies by rote;
A journalist makes up his lies
And takes you by the throat".

The right hon. Gentleman can ponder on that.

The Government are engaged in an elaborate exercise in buck passing. Time and again, Ministers cite a misleading and inaccurate standard community charge or poll tax. The figure is an illusion. So when the poll tax demands fall through the letter box in a few months' time, people in Wales will wonder why the figure is so much higher than the figure that the Government have publicised so widely and vigorously.

Already, the Government are trying to pin the blame on local councils, and the aim of the right hon. Gentleman's speech tonight was to furnish the Government with an alibi in advance. I want to tell the Secretary of State that the buck starts and stops with Ministers at the Welsh Office, and with the motions that the Government are trying to railroad through the House.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No.

The major defect is the shortfall in resources as represented by the figure of total standard spending. The finance directors and treasurers of local authorities in Wales believe that the total standard spending figure falls short, by 4 per cent., of the sum required to maintain existing services and to cope with the considerable volume of added burdens being imposed by the Government under recent legislation—specifically, the implementation of the national curriculum, local management of schools, the proposals contained in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill and the vital requirement to safeguard our assets—our buildings and roads.

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ron Davies: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jones: I shall not give way to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin); I shall give way briefly to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies).

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to an hon. Member who represents a Welsh constituency. He has been speaking with great authority about the problems faced by Welsh valley authorities. Can he explain to us why, according to the figures given by the Secretary of State, the poll tax payers of Rhymney valley will be faced with bills of £166 after discount, whereas, according to the treasurer of Rhymney Valley district council, the council will have to levy a poll tax of about £225 if it is to maintain existing standards of service? Is not the figure given by the Secretary of State an Alice-in-Wonderland figure?

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Devlin *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Jones: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly has destroyed the alibi of the Secretary of State for Wales. With his cogent intervention he has exposed the paucity of the right hon. Gentleman's case. My hon. Friend will agree that there are more English Members than Welsh Members on the Conservative Benches. Where are the Welsh Conservative Members?

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Jones: No.

We have about 400,000 dwellings in Wales with a rateable value of less than £100. That is more than one third of the total. In addition, 225,000 dwellings in Wales have a rateable value of £75 or less. Many of the families living in those dwellings will watch their household bill double or quadruple over the next four years. In valley communities and some rural communities with the lowest domestic rateable values, the community charge for one-adult households will be about the same as the present rate bill in four years' time. For a two-adult household it will be double, for a three-adult household it will be treble and for a four-adult household it will be quadruple. Those are the estimates of the much respected Association of District Councils in Wales.

Reaction to the news about the business rate has been understandably angry, to say the least. Even bodies traditionally supportive of the Conservative party, such as the CBI, have voiced alarm. Many economic analysts have warned of the effects that it will have on investment and the fundamental health of businesses.

As for the effect of the community charge on the domestic front, there has been hardly a voice of sympathy for the move.

Mr. Devlin *rose*——

Mr. Jones: No, I will not give way.

John Banham of the CBI has even accused the new business rate of subsidising, as it were, the community charge. That was stated by *The Western Mail*, which is usually supportive of the Secretary of State's policies. I wish to examine the impact of what is proposed on small businesses and retailers, and I believe that it will be considerable, despite the transitional relief arrangements.

In the next few years, businesses face massive increases in business rates. In Cardiff, for example, a newsagent's shop on Cowbridge road faces a 97 per cent. increase in rates, from £1,616 to £3,183 when transitional relief ends. Also in Cardiff, our capital city, a petrol station on Cathedral road faces a massive increase of over 200 per cent., from £3,500 to £10,900 when transitional relief ends. In Newport, the Panasonic electronics factory faces a 24 per cent. increase, to £111,000, with the end of transitional relief. Also in Newport, the Westgate hotel——

Mr. Ian Bruce: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. Will it be in order at the end of this debate for hon. Members who represent English constituencies—even though, as I am, they may be of Welsh birth—to vote on this matter and thereby put British Treasury money into this instrument, bearing in mind that I shall have great difficulty in taking part in the debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That convoluted point of order has nothing whatever to do with the debate.

Mr. Jones: I repeat, there are more English Conservative Members on the Government Benches than there are Welsh Conservatives.

Mr. Devlin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Quite aside from whether the hon. Gentleman wishes to give way, and of course it is his privilege not to give way, will you confirm that it is in order for English Members to take part in the debate and to seek to question the hon. Gentleman?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is, of course, perfectly in order for English or Scottish Members, should they catch my eye, to take part in the debate.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): Further to the point——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that I dealt with that point of order very adequately.

Mr. Coleman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is clear to my hon. Friends and me that Conservative Members are intent on interfering with a debate that particularly concerns Welsh——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. So far as I am concerned, no hon. Member will interfere with the debate. Mr. Jones has the Floor.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Wilshire: Is it in order for English Members to learn from the Welsh why the community charge is so much cheaper in Wales than in England?

Madam Deputy Speaker: We are all here to be persuaded about all kinds of issues.

Mr. Jones: A shop in Oxford street in Swansea currently paying £33,000 in rates will pay £54,000 with the end of transitional relief—an increase of over 60 per cent. In Alyn and Deeside my local newsagent currently pays £684 in rates. Next year, under the new non-domestic rating system, the rates will be £847. When transitional relief ends, the rates will rise to £1,869.

A Chinese restuarant in Shotton currently pays rates of £2,987. Its rates will more than double to £6,000 when transitional relief ends.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: The impact on local authority rates bills will also be great, but local authorities are not compensated for that in the revenue support grant settlement. Therefore, the impact will mean higher poll taxes.

My local authority—Alyn and Deeside—currently pays £103,000 in rates on Deeside leisure centre at Queensferry. In the first year of the uniform business rate, the rates bill will rise to £134,000. Without transitional relief the rates payable wil be £202,000—an increase of 95 per cent. The full effect will mean that the council's rate bill for next year will rise by 25 per cent., and with the end of transitional relief the figure will be 82 per cent. The Government are not pointing all that out and local authorities must explain to their communities the damage that will arise from a supposed enhancement.

The Government claim that industry will benefit. Under the revaluation, Shotton steelworks stands to gain a £1·5 million cut in its rates bill and that is the equivalent of about 140 new jobs. I thank the Secretary of State for that. However, under the system of transitional relief, the steelworks must wait years before it receives the full benefit.

It is totally unrealistic to claim that the poll tax in Wales will work out at £173. The likely figure is £210. The settlement that the Secretary of State seeks to impose is £80 million, or 4 per cent., short. All the financial professionals agree on that.

The Government also ignore the high rate of inflation, high interest rates and the white and blue-collar salary increases which local government must bear. They underestimate the costs of collecting the poll tax and they overestimate the numbers who will pay it. As the settlement is defective, there will be severe pressure on the schools service, social services, housing and local environmental services.

The impact of the business rate on small businesses will be considerable. There may be bankruptcies, there will be hardship and there is disillusion. Already the rate of liquidations and bankruptcies has risen amazingly. The situation is now worrying throughout Wales.

The poll tax will bear down very hard on the Gwent valleys, on Mid Glamorgan, West Glamorgan and Dyfed. That is what politically impartial professionals in local government tell me. The poll tax is a poor reward for people who still bear the scars of deprivation and economic difficulties.

In 1987, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said that the poll tax

"will be known as a Tory tax."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1141.]

With a dignity that few others can attain, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) said that the Prime Minister had foisted the unworkable poll tax upon us. That is Conservative Members' definition of electoral poison in Wales.

Last week, the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) said that the poll tax is "wholly unfair", "Orwellian", and "illogical". He also said that it is "expensive," and "difficult," and "difficult to collect."

On transitional relief, welcome though it is, I note what the Secretary of State said tonight. The figure is the same as that which was given last December. What is new?

Opposition Members will vote against the revenue support grant report and the revenue support grant distribution report. There are seven Welsh Conservative Members. It appears that war has been declared on two knights of the shires, but I predict that the poll tax will put severe pressure on the remainder. There is discernible panic in Conservative ranks because of the poll tax—*[Interruption.]* I advise Conservative Members who are trying hard not to listen that the poll tax does not relate to ability to pay. The bigger one's house and the wealthier the citizen, the better the poll tax suits.

The people of Wales always demand fair play. We are a democratic and fair-minded people. The poll tax cannot be right in Wales. There is no support for the poll tax in

[Mr. Jones]

Wales. Last year, in two parliamentary by-elections, the county elections and the European elections, the Welsh electorate delivered a resounding rejection of the poll tax.

Tonight, Her Majesty's Government will impose the poll tax upon the people of Wales. In effect, they propose a £173 confidence trick. The reports will only confirm an anti-Tory mood in Wales. That mood has been growing steadily, and it will sweep away the Conservatives. A Government who impose a poll tax on Wales deserve to be defeated.

10.52 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) began by wondering, in a rather naive voice, why some of the Welsh community charge figures about which we have heard will be at an excessive level. The hon. Gentleman knows the answer as well as I do, but he refuses to give it. There is only one truthful reason why any council in Wales will levy an excessive community charge, and that is because it will choose to do so.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: I should not like it to be thought that there is no welcome in Wales, so I shall give way.

Mr. Smith: I, too, recognise that the Secretary of State's claims are premised on the assessment of Welsh authorities' spending requirements.

Before they start using the language of rate capping, I remind Conservative Members that on Monday, the Vale of Glamorgan borough council levied a community charge 36 per cent. above the Welsh Office's target. That is one of only two Conservative district councils in Wales. Incidentally, one of them has in the past—mistakenly, I believe—observed Government spending guidelines. If they——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a speech, not an intervention.

Mr. Jones: I promise the hon. Gentleman that I fully intend to refer to his own council, if he will only allow me to make progress.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State delivered an excellent settlement and has steadily improved the position. In November he said that the average community charge in Wales would be £174. On December 18 he told the House that the figure would be only £173, or £165 after allowing for the rebate scheme. Wales is doing better in every way. Sixty-seven per cent. of all council expenditure there is coming from central Government, which compares very favourably with a contribution of 56 per cent. in Scotland or of only 46 per cent. in England.

The new business rate of only 20 per cent. in Wales will bear down much more easily than the 28 per cent. that will apply elsewhere. Some 85 per cent. of all Welsh council expenditure will be covered, leaving only 15 per cent. to be raised by the community charge.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales ever finds himself looking for a new job, that of Secretary of State for Dorset should certainly be open to him? He is asking community charge payers in Wales to make only a 15 per cent. contribution, whereas in Dorset, the Government contribution will be only 38 per cent., leaving local authorities there to raise the remaining 62 per cent.

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend makes his point effectively. Meanwhile, the people of Wales are doing better in every way.

Who then is letting down the people of Wales?—[HON. MEMBERS: "The Tories."] Who is causing the anger that has been created at the unnecessarily high level of community charge being imposed in some parts of Wales? The answer to that question is the local councils, which are best depicted here by hon. Members opposite.

The settlement provides Welsh councils with a 7·1 per cent. increase—not on Welsh Office figures, but on the local council's own figures.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Does the hon. Gentleman condemn the total irresponsibility of the Vale of Glamorgan council in ignoring that wonderful gift from the Secretary of State?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman should apologise for wasting the time of the House. I have already said that I shall be referring later to Vale of Glamorgan council.

Eighty-five per cent. of Welsh councils's spending will be met from central Government, leaving them to find only the balance of 15 per cent. themselves. They have chosen to set community charges that are far too high, purely for crude political advantage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, said when winding up last Thursday's debate on local government finance, Labour councils in Wales, as in England, are following the instructions from on high to set a rate as high as they can get away with. They are blatantly exploiting the confusion that has naturally arisen in the change from rates to community charge, by blaming any increases on the Government.

If what is happening in my constituency is typical of the rest of Wales, as seems to be the case, many Welsh people are justified in being furious at their local councils. South Glamorgan county council is proposing a community charge of £175 when it ought to be no higher than £147, and could easily be lower. That represents a 20 per cent. increase. Cardiff city council's community charge should be £31 but it proposes a figure of £78—a 152 per cent. increase.

If South Glamorgan is bad, Cardiff is crazy. Remember that Cardiff is the more extreme, more Left-wing council. It is not just a Labour council, it is supported by its allies in the Liberal party. If anyone has ever doubted whether the Liberals are a party of the extreme Left, I invite them to look at the situation in Cardiff, where the Liberal and Labour parties jostle with each other to show which is the dafter.

I know that they have been desperate to soak up the extra spending that has been proposed in this ridiculous 152 per cent. increase—£78. The Vale of Glamorgan council next door, which provides virtually the same services, is proposing a community charge of £24. That is the difference. People who live in an area administered by a responsible, Conservative-controlled council, get a community charge of £24. I understand that the Vale of Glamorgan county council does not expect any rise to be necessary next year.

The latest dodge is that Cardiff is selling back to itself land that it already owns so that it can charge the charge payers an extra £20.

I am sure that all hon. Members will accept that there may be variations between the figures, perhaps of 1, 2 or even 5 or 10 per cent., but 55 per cent. is the scale of the increase we face from April, and that is over and above what we know needs to be charged in Cardiff. That is way beyond any amount that is sane. It is crazy.

[Mr. Jones]

The settlement is very good. We had a 7·1 per cent. allowance for increases. The councils only had to find 15 per cent. They have now come up with a community charge of £253. They know that it is a political con, and they are trying to take advantage.

However, I remind the Opposition that "you can't fool all of the people all of the time." In Cardiff we have had that experience. The last time that Labour was in control in Cardiff it went in for increases on this scale and put up the rates up by 94·5 per cent. We had local elections a year later and Labour was swept from control.

The people of Cardiff will realise that they have to pay £90 a year more per person—the price of having a Labour or an extreme Left-wing council in charge. There will be elections next year, but that is a long way off. In the meantime my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is the last line of defence for the people of Cardiff and the people of Wales.

How mad or bad do councils in Wales have to be before my right hon. Friend uses his powers and acts? I was glad to hear the firm commitment that he made this evening. He is absolutely right, and I encourage him to move in that direction. Unless some sanity comes to Cardiff and to similar crazy councils, he must consider capping them.

11.2 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I shall try to be brief, as so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends wish to speak.

The uniform business rate is one of the many idiocies of the poll tax. At Question Time on Monday, and again this evening, the Secretary of State made much of the fact that manufacturing industries and factories, many of them in the valleys and throughout south Wales, will benefit because the valuation of those properties will be lower after revaluation. That is a fact, but perhaps he should not crow too much about it, as the valuations are lower because of the decline in manufacturing and industry in Wales during the past ten years.

B and Q will pay more, Great Mills will pay more and all the other temples of consumerism selling foreign goods will pay more because they make more profits. Maufacturing industry will pay less, not because its property is dilapidated, which is what the Secretary of State said, but because there is no profit in manufacturing industry. It is because of the decline in manufacturing industry in the past ten years.

The Secretary of State need not smile at my remarks. It is a fact that 10 years of Tory Government have caused a massive decline in manufacturing industry in Wales. It is nothing to shout about—we should feel sorry about it. That is why the revaluation is having that effect.

The uniform business rate will make matters worse. As I understand it, it does not matter how many factories or manufacturing units a district or county council area contains; what matters is the number of people it contains. Manufacturing industry rating goes first to the Treasury and then back to the Welsh Office before being distributed per head of population. Why should planning officers in Llanelli, Cardiff or anywhere else put land aside for industrial development if it can be put to better use—if houses can be built on it, and people put into those houses? That will mean more money, in the form of both poll tax and uniform business rate.

The reforms militate against manufacturing industry. The planning officer is in charge; the industrial development officer has nothing to do, because his land is worth less than the land earmarked for residential housing. The uniform business rate is a crazy tax, which will lead to a further decline in our manufacturing base. It is symptomatic of the 10 years of the present Government that property has always come first and manufacturing second, and the uniform business rate will exacerbate the problem. The sooner it is abolished and we bring back a community-based industrial tax, the better.

The link between industry and local government will be broken; no incentives will be left. South Wales does not possess many flat industrial sites, and we are particularly short of large sites for large industrial investment. Such sites will be used increasingly for housing purposes—as they have been over the past five years—and particularly for housing at the upper end of the market, as people living in such houses do not draw on local resources so much. The uniform business rate is one of the most idiotic aspects of the whole idiotic poll tax.

11.6 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I shall not be voting against the orders. Unfortunately, I ran into my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) in the Lobby, and he told me with tears in his eyes how much it would upset my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State if I did. Being—as my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls)—has so delicately put it—a member of the spineless tendency, I decided to take refuge in abstention.

I cannot withhold my admiration for the brazen cheek with which my right hon. Friend shamelessly raids the coffers of the Treasury for the benefit of poll tax payers —I have the Prime Minister's authority to use the term "poll tax"—of Wales. I also admire the immense skill with which he has handled local authorities of all political persuasions throughout Wales, and has managed—up to now—to induce them to behave in a reasonable manner; I do not want to do anything to make his task more difficult.

My brief tells me that the new system of local government finance is simpler and fairer, and that it will lead to more political accountability. I must say that I find "fairer" a little difficult to accept; I know that it is a cheap example, but I find it hard to understand why the Duke of Westminster should pay the same sum as an elderly couple who have retired to a small cottage precisely because of its lower rateable value.

"Simpler" is a bit more complex. Perhaps the scheme had simpler elements when it was first announced—it had, at least, the merit of rough injustice—but now we have rebates for the poorest, which I welcome; exemptions for some handicapped people, but not for others; safety nets, and then transitional cushioning for the introduction of the safety nets; and, on top of all that, the near-certainty that the level of non-payment, whether through deliberate refusal or through the impossibility of keeping track of migrants, will hugely exceed the estimates. It no longer looks quite so simple as it did at the beginning. It is now beginning to look as though the uniform business rate will give rise to some problems of its own.

There is a great deal of unjustified moaning about the uniform business rate. I take the point made by the right

hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), but, because of the delays over revaluation—neither side of the House can take great pride in that—many businesses have been paying far lower rates for a great many years than they ought to have done under any equitable system. There will therefore be large increases, and they will be a shock.

There is a delightful pub in my constituency, the Blue Lion at Cwm. At the end of every polling day, my wife and I like to have a drink there. We certainly intend to have a drink there after polling at the next general election. The landlord of that pub told me with some dismay that his business rate will increase from £4,700 to £7,300. I understand his shock. Although it will be spread over three years, it is nevertheless a very substantial increase.

It is a little awkward for the Government to argue that a sharp rise in the business rate for some is not unreasonable, since revaluation would have led to such an increase, even under the old rating system. My recollection is that the Government used the pretext of revaluation as some kind of scare—to suggest that retention of the existing rating system would be quite impossible.

As for the new mechanism for the revenue support grant, I thought that, if not more equitable, it would be easier to explain. By and large, I suppose that it probably is. To some extent, however, we are in Red Queen territory, too. Rhuddlan borough council, under the leadership of its exceptionally able chief executive, who is also the borough treasurer, and has been for a long time past, finds that it will get £745,000 less in revenue support grant than it received last year, entailing a poll tax increase from £35 to £53.

That does not mean that the borough council has been extravagant. All it means—we have the explanation from the Welsh Office—is that the reduction

"results from a revision—fully discussed with and accepted by the Council of Welsh Districts—to the formula for the current expenditure component of SSAs. Whilst this revision inevitably affects the SSA of certain districts, including Rhuddlan, it is important to set this change within the context of the excellent Settlement for Wales for 1990/91."

I accept that it is an excellent settlement for Wales, but it is pretty cold comfort for poor old Rhuddlan, just because the formula changes, to find itself £750,000 short, having to increase its poll tax element by 50 per cent. and risking being clobbered for so doing.

What about accountability? The first thing that leaps to mind—it is something that Ministers have been claiming, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales claimed it just now—is that local authorities will be raising a much smaller proportion of the money that they will spend than they did under the old system. Previously, it was nearly 40 per cent.; now, it is about 16 per cent. I do not understand where the accountability comes into it, according to that formula.

Under the uniform business rate, there is a further removal of accountability. Not only will councils not fix the rates; they will not even derive any benefit if they treat local businesses well. Once again, I cannot see the logic of it.

My right hon. Friend has excellent relationships with the Welsh local authorities. Until recently, they have responded well. Despite the huge defects of the system, I hope that they will continue to do so. That is one reason why I shall not vote against the reports tonight. If, none the less, after all this explanation I am asked by Opposition Members why I am not going into the Division Lobby, I shall have to confess that, frankly, I am stumped for an answer.

11.9 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): It is a pleasure and a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer). He has a style which has long been lost in the Conservative party, and we congratulate him on his recent campaign.

The best way to analyse what the Secretary of State is doing is to look at individual parts of Wales and see how they are affected by the revenue support grant, how that affects the level of the poll tax, and how they will be affected by the uniform business rate.

We need to examine specific circumstances. As the Secretary of State decided to bash Powys a little in his speech, I want to give some figures for that area.

Mr. Morgan: A loony Left council.

Mr. Livsey: As the hon. Gentleman says.

The Secretary of State should congratulate Powys on having come up with a poll tax that is almost bang on the average £173 that the right hon. Gentleman said was the right figure to go for. The only problem is that Powys's poll tax is likely to be the lowest in the whole of Wales, so it cannot possibly be the average.

The Welsh Office firmly predicted in November that the county of Powys would pay a poll tax element of £109; and, adding on the appropriate district and community council costs, the end figure for the poll tax would be £120 for Montgomery, £129 for Radnor and £130 for Brecknock.

The only problem with these predictions is that they showed a £3·5 million shortfall in expenditure compared with what the Welsh Office itself assumed the county would need to spend in the coming financial year to provide an average level of services—that is, the assumption for total standard spending. Local government treasurers in Powys were astonished by the Welsh Office's poll tax predictons. They rightly said that the £3·5 million shortfall had to be made up. That done, they predicted that the poll tax would between £175 and £200 a head.

Yesterday, Powys, along with the district, set its poll tax. The county poll tax ended up at £147, not the £109 forecast by the Welsh Office in November—an increase of £38 per head. Radnor district set its poll tax yesterday at £175, not the £129 forecast by the Welsh Office in November, an increase of £46 a head just to keep services——

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Livsey: No, I will not.

As I said, all this was just to keep services equivalent to Welsh Office targets. In this exercise, the Welsh Office sets up figures only to knock them down again.

Powys will have the lowest poll tax in Wales, at £175. That was the average poll tax predicted by the Secretary of State last autumn. I can confidently predict that every other council in Wales will have a much higher figure.

All these false figures are nothing more than a con trick. The Welsh Office predicts that wages will rise by 6 per cent., but the Secretary of State for Education and Science has predicted an increase of 7·5 per cent. for teachers. The

[Mr. Livsey]

figures do not add up; no allowance has been made for such increases. The legislation for implementing the national curriculum and for local management——

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Mid Glamorgan has already found that, under the last settlement, the money provided by the Government was £350,000 short of what was needed. To provide water and extra power points in old primary schools, the council will have to spend almost £500,000 that the Welsh Office has refused to provide. That one small item is equivalent to another £1·25 on the poll tax. Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Livsey: It was a disgrace. The hon. Gentleman makes his point well: the level of the poll tax was grossly under-estimated.

New burdens will be placed on community care by the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, and the green Bill, which contains provisions on litter and adds the burden of collecting it on districts, and will add an estimated 6 per cent. to the costs of districts.

To shorten my speech, I shall give two brief examples of problems that will arise under the uniform business rate. At present, a newsagent's shop I know in mid-Wales pays rates of £1,239, but under the uniform business rate it will pay £1,533—an increase of almost £300, or almost 24 per cent. A tourism complex in the south of my constituency currently pays £19,000 in rates, but under the uniform business rate it will pay £35,000—an increase of £16,000, or almost 100 per cent.

The uniform business rate will have a devastating effect on small businesses. The Treasury's contribution will be only 2 per cent., yet business rate payers in Powys will contribute 40 per cent.—not 20 per cent.—which was the figure that the Secretary of State gave. This is a good deal for the Treasury but a lousy one for small businesses. Added to those figures must be high interest rates, which, with the uniform business rate are a right and left hook to small businesses. Small business people who used to vote for the Conservative party will not do so again under any circumstances.

11.20 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): If the Labour party has any sense, it would not oppose the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) at the next election. Only he makes the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) sound exciting.

Tonight, I heard the most synthetic opposition that I have ever heard in the House. The Labour party knows that Wales is getting a better deal on the community charge than Scotland or England. We are benefiting from the expertise of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

I welcome the community charge system. I do not understand how it can be considered fair for 50 per cent. of the electorate in Pembrokeshire to vote in local elections but not make a direct contribution to the services that they receive, while the other 50 per cent. carry the burden through the rating system. Everyone over 18 who is eligible to vote in local elections should make a direct contribution to local authorities for the services that they receive.

It is nonsense for the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside to claim that people who live in bigger houses have bigger incomes. Many of my constituents who live in large houses, but whose husbands or wives have died and whose children have moved away, are on low incomes. They do not wish to move from the home in which they have lived for 40 or 50 years. I do not believe that they should be driven out.

The community charge recognises that not houses but individuals use local authority services. Individuals use street lighting, dustbins, swimming pools and public libraries, not houses. They should therefore contribute to the cost of the services that they receive.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bennett: No, because the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside would not give way to Conservative Members throughout his speech. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) had a fair crack of the whip in the earlier debate on education.

The community charge will make local authorities more accountable. It cannot be right that a minority in many local authority areas picks up the bill for the services provided to the majority. Local authorities will be more accountable if every voter in local elections makes a direct contribution to the cost of local authority services.

We should be aware of the position in Wales. This year, we are receiving a 7·1 per cent. increase from the Government in local authority grants, based not on Welsh Office figures but on the previous year's spending of local authorities. In addition, relief will be available to one in three community charge payers, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones).

Some community charge voters will get an 80 per cent. rebate on the total charge that they would have had to pay, had they been on average earnings. It is important to acknowledge that the Government have taken into account people's ability to pay, not only in the fact that those who pay income tax and are on the highest rates will pay 16 times as much anyway in their contributions to central Government, but in the community charge itself, with relief of up to 80 per cent.

On the uniform business rate——

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn) *rose*——

Mr. Bennett: The Leader of the Opposition, who rarely graces the Chamber during debates on Wales, wants to say something. Perhaps he would like to come in at this point?

Mr. Kinnock: The House will sympathise with my not being here more often, if I have to listen to hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett). What does the hon. Gentleman mean by the term "community charge voters", since I have not heard it before? It is a candid expression for him to use. Since he is trying to draw a connection between the liability for taxation and the right to vote, will he tell us whether he should celebrate the fact that people will get up to 80 per cent. rebates? Should that mean a reduction in their civil right to cast their vote?

Mr. Bennett: Only the right hon. Gentleman's logic would get him to that final point. On his first point, as community charge payers will be the same people as the voters, there is clearly a correlation between the two. At

the moment in some cases, the voters are rarely the ratepayers; in future, those who vote will also make a contribution to the services.

On the uniform business rate, it seems to me that Opposition Members are selective in their memories. They were in power from 1974 to 1979. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside was a junior Minister in the Welsh Office. The Labour Government cancelled the revaluation in 1978. Admittedly, the present Government also cancelled a revaluation, which only goes to show that when it comes to facing up to challenges, Governments of both parties have been in dereliction of their duties; but at last the nettle has been grasped, and it is important to recognise, when the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside says that since 1973 there have been large increases in rateable value, that there have also been increases in rental value.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I assume that there will be a wind-up for this debate and, in fairness to both Front-Bench speakers, I think that we should have a little time for them. I take it that the Division will be called at 11.44 pm.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is barely a point of order. We ought to proceed with the debate.

Mr. Bennett: I have been generous in giving way to Opposition Members and I have been speaking for five minutes.

Rental values have increased tremendously since 1973 and it is not surprising if rateable values have also increased in the same period. A lot of nonsense is talked about the increase in rateable values. A headline in my local paper says, "Rates Shock for Traders", and goes on to say:

"One trader in the town's High Street has seen the rateable value on his property jump from £64 to £1,450—a staggering 2,265 per cent. increase"—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member who has the Floor should not be interrupted in this way.

Mr. Bennett: We have to ignore the intellectual tendency on the Opposition Front Bench because at this time of night they are a little more exuberant than they might otherwise be.

To return to the *Tenby Observer* of 19 January 1990, it says that one trader in the town's high street has seen the rateable value of his property jump from £64 to £1,450, an increase of 2,265 per cent. If it was really £64, that must be the lowest rateable value for any business in Wales. But even after the increase to £1,450 and without transitional relief, that business will ultimately pay £533·60. That hardly seems to me an unreasonable figure for business premises in a town in my constituency.

But that is the sort of publicity that we get in the local papers, when reporters do not explain what the amount will be under the business rate, but refer merely to the rateable value. The figures show that on the whole businesses in Wales will enjoy a good deal as a result of the settlement. With the transitional relief, no business will face an increase of more than 23 per cent. if inflation runs at 7 or 8 per cent.

My final——

Mr. Ray Powell: At last.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman says, "At last." The House will know that he always makes bogus points of order in Welsh debates on the Floor of the House or during sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee. He does not have two pennies to rub together when it comes to a brain. If he wants me to make a short speech, I suggest that he keeps quiet.

I shall conclude my remarks by referring to the dog that did not bark in the night. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside spoke for a considerable time, as did the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) last Thursday, but they did not mention what the Labour party would do about local community charges and local business rates. It is political dishonesty that neither of them has the guts to tell the British public what the Labour party would do if it formed a Government. What would it do about domestic rates and business rates?

Mr. Wilshire: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Opposition do not have a clue what they would do, they cannot tell us?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend is right.

Unfortunately, between the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham on Thursday on the English revenue support grant reports and the speech of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside this evening, a report appeared in *The Times* on 22 January. In that report we are told that the Labour party

"is preparing to unveil"—

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Conservative Members have already taken 46 minutes out of a 90-minute debate and Labour Members have taken only 25 minutes. You will know that 25 Labour Members represent Welsh constituencies while only seven Welsh constituencies are represented by Tory Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Bennett: I have spoken for 10 minutes, during which there have been several interruptions. I am trying to bring my remarks to an end. I know that Opposition Members do not like it when I and my hon. Friends say that they have no policy.

We are told in *The Times* that the Labour party

"is preparing to unveil plans to abolish the community charge and replace it with a property tax levied according to people's ability to pay."

Apparently the hon. Member for Dagenham will announce that at a conference in Cardiff next month.

The most important part of the report—it has not been confirmed or denied by any Opposition Member—is that the

"proposals will include the possibility of people living in large shared households receiving separate bills based on a proportion of the value of the property."

That sounds suspiciously like the principle of the community charge. It is time that the Labour party came clean by telling us what it believes to be right.

11.33 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I shall begin my contribution to the debate by asking the Secretary of State to listen with care to a quotation from a report in today's edition of *The Independent*—

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

"Why does the Government insist on ignoring what authorities have been spending, relying instead on fictional figures? The Government figures arise from the wrong information being put into the computer in the first place." That statement was made by Alan Ward, the Conservative leader of Bracknell Forest district council, not by the treasurer of Gwynedd, Powys or South Glamorgan. Even Conservative council members are saying that the wrong information has been used to set poll tax levels.

The poll tax is abhorrent, unjust, inequitable, iniquitous and regressive. I believe that the Secretary of State takes te same view. Unfortunately, he has not on this occasion had the courage of his convictions, and he will not be joining us in voting against the measure.

The Welsh public oppose the poll tax partly because they have been misled by Welsh Office Ministers and the Government about its level. The figures produced by the Welsh Office in December are a serious under-estimate. The Welsh Office said that the average poll tax would be £174. A month later, we find that every district says that the figure will be substantially more—perhaps 40 per cent., 50 per cent. or 60 per cent. more. In my district, Ynys Môn, it will be 50 per cent. more.

The reason is that the Government have got all the figures wrong. They have under-estimated expenditure this year, never mind the fact that inflation is running at 8 per cent. Their figures include 3·4 per cent. for inflation next year. The Government have totally misunderstood the position in Wales. Now they say that it is the fault of local authorities that the poll tax will be more. Local authorities in Wales are to be held responsible for the way in which the Government have let the people down.

I remind the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) that there will be a heavy political price to pay. He and his hon. Friends should have the courage of their convictions, like the Tory rebels last Thursday night. They will pay the price unless they join us in the Lobby tonight.

11.35 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): We all thought that we would have more time to discuss this important matter. However, whatever antics the Tories get up to in the Chamber or anywhere else do not hide the fact that this is the most unpopular tax ever to hit the Principality of Wales. They are wholly responsible for it.

We all agree that the overall settlement is totally inadequate. It is 4 per cent. short of what is needed to maintain existing services. The Secretary of State keeps telling us that year after year local authorities grumble about the settlements. In Wales they have every right to grumble because over a decade they have been robbed of millions and millions of proper rate support grant.

The Secretary of State has said that local authorities in Wales are extravagant. He has given them £78 million for improvement grants in the valleys and elsewhere, but he has not told us in his empty promises that he has not given them a single extra penny to process those improvement grants.

Many hon. Members have mentioned transitional relief, as they should. Although the system was agreed with local authorities, its implementation by the Welsh Office is flawed. Councils have already told the Secretary of State that not every poll tax payer in Wales will pay the tax, as is happening in Scotland. They have told him that his assumptions on council spending, on which the relief is based, are unreal. Under the so-called relief system, out of 855 communities in Wales, only 255 will receive relief. In South Glamorgan, out of 54 communities, only one will benefit. Thousands upon thousands of people will suffer as a direct result of the so-called relief system proposed by the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State has boasted about the unified business rate, but he has not told business people in Wales that new businesses will have no relief, that businesses which move will lose their relief, and that, out of 100,000 business properties in Wales, 70,000 will be losers and only 30,000 will be gainers.

Nor has the Secretary of State revealed the full facts about the poll tax. He has not revealed how he has robbed our councils of nearly £80 million which will go directly on to the shoulders of the poll tax payers. He has not told us about how he refused to listen to Welsh councils in meeting after meeting over the last three or four months. The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) talked about Abraham Lincoln. Local authorities in Wales cannot all be wrong all the time about the level of their poll tax.

The Secretary of State has made the most disgraceful attack upon local authorities in Wales that I have heard. At least his predecessor, Lord Crickhowell, did not pretend to like councils in Wales. This Secretary of State came to Wales and said that local authorities were doing a good job. Today, Welsh local authorities will know what he really thinks of them. He has hinted darkly about inefficiency, overspending and irresponsibility. He cannot have it both ways and he is now in an awkward spot. He knows that his Back Benchers are opposed to the poll tax and he is trying to shift the blame on to the Welsh local authorities. The people of Wales will see through him. We know that there is only one person in Wales to blame for the poll tax, and that is the right hon. Gentleman. He has a great deal to answer for, and I urge the House to vote against the measures.

11.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): From all the sound and fury tonight, one would not think that the Labour party, when it was in office in 1976-77, was responsible for cutting the rate support grant in real terms by 4 per cent.; in the next year by 8 per cent.; and in the year after that, by 4 per cent. Labour Members claim that their hearts bleed for local government, but I for one do not believe it. If this Government had continued with the Labour Government's policy, this year Wales would receive only £650 million instead of £1,000 million. That shows the difference in the achievements of this Government compared with the Labour Government.

Cardiff is the capital city of Wales and sets the tone for so much of life in the Principality. The community charge that the Welsh Office believed was right for Cardiff was £167, a reduction of 22 per cent.—£43—on the average rate bill for the current year. It was the largest reduction in Wales. What has happened? South Glamorgan has raised the rate by £47 and Cardiff has raised it not by the £29 that we predicted, but by £78, a difference of 168 per cent. I do not think that any hon. Member could believe that that was anything but unfair.

Cardiff's capital expenditure budget this year rose by 35 per cent., and receipts were down from £25 million to £3·5 million. They paid for it this year to paint the picture for next year. The total spend in Cardiff this year is up by 20 per cent. Councillor Mungham, chairman of the finance committee, is now predicting an increase in the budget for next year of 30 per cent. How on earth can he predict such a rise? He is playing fast and loose because politics is involved: there is to be a city election next year. That is the long and the short of what Councillor Mungham and the Labour party are doing.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) has obviously never understood what the total spending assessment included. It included an allowance of 7·5 per cent. for the teachers' pay rise; the personal social services were covered for the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and the disabled persons legislation and for training needs in social services; rises in police pay were included, as was highway maintenance; and some £32·9 million was made available for the cost of the community charge administration and benefit. Opposition Members obviously did not read their papers to discover what was happening. There was an 8·2 per cent. rise for those sectors.

There has been some misunderstanding about the unified business rate. Opposition Members do not appreciate that the amount of money to be raised from business in Wales has not increased: it has been reallocated according to the revaluation. For all the large increases, there have been gainers, too—a fact that people seem to overlook.

Of course, since 1973, there has been a change in real values and rents of properties, and everybody knows that: everyone who runs a shop or business will know how values and rents have risen in the past few years——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question necessary to dispose of them, pursuant to order [19 January].*

The House divided: Ayes 252, Noes 206.

Division No. 47] **[11.44 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John

Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1990-91 (House of Commons Paper No. 53), a copy of which was laid before the House on 20th December, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (House of Commons Paper No. 54), a copy of which was laid before the House on 20th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Walker.]*

Resolved,

That the Welsh Non-Domestic Rating (County Share and District Share) Report (House of Commons Paper No. 55), a copy of which was laid before the House on 20th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Walker.]*

Resolved,

That the Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (House of Commons Paper No. 55), a copy of which was laid before the House on 20th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Walker.]*

European Community Documents

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(5) (Standing Committees on European Community documents).

EUROPEAN SCHOOL

That the draft European Communities (Privileges of the European School) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 25.

Division No. 48] **[11.58 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Eadie, Alexander
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hoyle, Doug
Lambie, David
Loyden, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Pike, Peter L.
Primarolo, Dawn
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of Order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Motions Nos 6 and 7 on the Order Paper relate to two statutory instruments, one a definition of treaties order and the other a national Order in Council, which were debated yesterday morning in a Standing Committee.

I participated in that Standing Committee, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), and some Conservative Members were present —including, I think, a Foreign Office Minister.

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

We have just taken a decision on the first motion. I do not contest that, but are these proceedings in order and does that decision remain valid, because the proceedings of the Committee are not available in the Vote Office?

I had thought that there was a convention tht such statutory instruments were not laid before the House until the proceedings were available, so that hon. Members can find out the merits of what was discussed. I do not think that was easy to do on this occasion, except by word of mouth.

The special attention of the House was drawn to these matters by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, the matters were discussed in Commitee, but they are not available in print for the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of Order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In view of the circumstances, should the Government not withdraw the second motion, because the two are linked? One refers to the European Communities Act 1972 and the other is an order used under those powers.

It seems absurd for the House to have a Standing Committee to discuss the merits of the instruments, which are not discussed by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, as you know—it only discusses the technicalities. The Joint Committee feels that there is doubt about the vires of both of these instruments, but unless the record is available, hon. Members patently cannot make a judgment about the merits of the instrument.

Therefore, it seems wrong that the House should proceed with the expense of a record that is compiled and printed, but is not available to hon. Members. Once the votes have been taken, the instruments will not come back to the House—it is done and dusted. It is a complete waste of taxpayers' money to provide a record for hon. Members to make a judgment about the merits of the case, and for it not to be available.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of Order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will have noticed that the Leader of the House has just clocked in. Since he has some responsibilities in these matters, and since he is a lawyer by profession, I should have thought that he would have understood what my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) have said about these two orders. To put it in a nutshell, in legal terms, they are ultra vires.

I suggest to the Leader of the House, through you Madam Deputy Speaker, that it would be a good idea if he came to the Dispatch Box, accepted my hon. Friend's suggestion and withdrew the second order as a consolation prize.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I may be able to assist the House to some extent. I bow to the superior learned wisdom of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), and I concur in all that he has said about the legal interpretation of these two statutory instruments.

I recall that when we discussed the matter in Committee, yesterday, the two orders—which were interlinked in this sense; the first paved the way for the second, and therefore had to be enacted forthwith—had waited for more than four years from the time of the judgment of the European Court in Luxembourg, which forced the change. The relevant judgment, which I am sure is constantly on the lips of the Leader of the House, was the European Court judgment of Hurd against the Inspector of Taxes, which was determined by that court on 19 January 1986. I am sure that, in many constituencies, scarcely a moment of the day passes without a constituent referring to that judgment.

The Government had allowed more than four years to pass after the relevant judgment without taking any action. It is therefore a little puzzling that they should now proceed with such precipitate haste—the day after the sitting of the Committee—without even doing the House the courtesy of making a report of the Committee's deliberations available. There is a considerable contrast between the dilatory nature of their initial response and the speed of their proceedings now. Surely it would be best for them to withdraw the matter for a short time, so that they can reflect and put it in order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: May I respond first to the first question? The issue of "ultra vires" does not concern the Chair. The original point of order was perfectly in order, legitimate and informative; but, although it informs the House, it does not stop it from proceeding with the business, and I have a responsibility to see that business is carried out.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for that ruling, which was probably expected. Since the first point of order, however, my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has also referred to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. May I draw your attention to another procedural matter which may be of interest to the Leader of the House?

We have just approved, through a Division, a domestic statutory instrument that implements an international treaty. That treaty, however, has not yet been ratified by the House, because the ratification of the treaty that obliges us to pass certain domestic legislation is the Question that you are about to put.

Irrespective of what records of the Committee's proceedings may exist, Madam Deputy Speaker, is it in order for the House to pass a domestic statutory instrument purporting to fulfil the international obligations of a treaty that the House has not yet approved—and, indeed, may not approve, if the Division that may be called does not receive a response from the Ayes?

I have put the point as clearly as I can. It may have a significant bearing on matters even more important than the orders.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I see that the Leader of the House, the Chief Whip and the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household are considering the matter. Surely there is a distinction between the point on which you ruled earlier—the question whether the report of the proceedings of a Committee that happened to sit yesterday should be available to us—and the much more substantive point raised, quite properly, by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). The hon. Gentleman

asked whether it was possible for us to approve, as secondary legislation, a measure that requires the passage of primary legislation not yet approved by the House.

This is a matter of general rather than specific law. I am not aware that, in any instance—whether or not it relates to European Community business—we can vote on secondary legislation before the primary legislation has been approved. I should be grateful for a ruling. I realise that Government Front Benchers may not be prepared to comment immediately, but, as this is a matter of serious concern, I wonder whether the Leader of the House could do as he and the Whips have done on occasion in the past week, and arrange for the withdrawal of the motion that raises these procedural anxieties.

If the motion is in order perhaps we can be told as much, and return to it tomorrow. Surely, however, it would help the House to retain its dignity, save the Government from potential embarrassment and avoid irregular proceedings if the motion were withdrawn and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were not put in the embarrassing position of having to make a ruling before the matter had been properly considered.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are clearly being asked potentially to vote on something that we have no right to vote on. You have accepted that the earlier points of order were legitimate points of order for the Chair. By what means can the House not decide these matters? Will the Leader of the House have to withdraw the motion, or could you accept a motion requesting withdrawal of the orders so that there could be a separate vote upon them when they have been properly published?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Chair has to deal with the business that is before the House. The motion that is before the House, motion No. 7, is perfectly in order. It is a matter for the Government, not the Chair. It is for the Chair to carry out what is on the Order Paper and has been agreed by the House.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I refer to the original point of order by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). There is an aspect that has not been considered: that the House has no means formally of knowing what happened in the Committee that considered the instrument. What appears on the Order Paper is unaffected by any vote that may have taken place in Committee.

If, for example, the Committee was dissatisfied with the instrument and voted against the Government, nothing would have happened; the matter would still have been reported to the House. All that the Committee vote on is whether to report it to the House. Even if the motion had been defeated, it would still have been reported to the House that the Committee had considered the instrument. Therefore, today's Order Paper is significantly uninformative. It is not associated with the report of the Committee's proceedings.

I had not realised until the hon. Member for Bradford, South pointed it out that the proceedings had not been printed. That illustrates my point: that the Order Paper cannot tell us what happened in Committee and whether the Committee was dissatisfied with the instrument. Only the report of the Committee's proceedings can tell us that.

On recent occasions, which have been even more embarrassing to the Leader of the House than this small matter, we have had to rely on the report of hon. Members as to what took place in a Committee. You will recollect that we had quite a long and angry debate one afternoon a week or so ago about who said what and about what the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) did or did not say in a Standing Committee.

In this instance, we are again being asked to rely upon the evidence of hon. Members, not much of which has been proffered so far, as to what happened in the Committee. I put it to you that it is quite unreasonable for the House to be asked to vote on a matter such as this, when it does not know what happened in Committee.

I recognise that all that it is within your power to do is to put the Question on whatever the Government lay on the Order Paper. Therefore, it is the Leader of the House who is putting the Chair in an embarrassing position. Not content to ride roughshod over the rights of hon. Members, he puts the Chair in the embarrassing position of having no means of responding to their legitimate concerns.

The Leader of the House is affecting seriously to study the Order Paper but there is no apparent outcome of his study. Is it not time that he relieved you, Madam Deputy Speaker, of this embarrassment by rising to his feet—it may be late in the day and he may be a little unwilling to put you to this embarrassment, and why he is unwilling to remove the order from the Order Paper until the House has had an opportunity to be told what happened in Committee? Will you give him that opportunity, lest he should think that you might not call him, or that he might not catch your eye?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct. Those who sit on the Treasury Bench have heard the concerned words that have been made on points of order. However, as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, I have no alternative, and it is my duty, to put the motion on the Order Paper, which is perfectly correct.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(5) (Standing Committees on European Community documents).

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (European School) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 6th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 28.

Division No. 49] **[12.24 am**

AYES

Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Devlin, Tim
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Dorrell, Stephen
Bevan, David Gilroy	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Boswell, Tim	Dover, Den
Bottomley, Peter	Dunn, Bob
Bowis, John	Durant, Tony
Brazier, Julian	Eggar, Tim
Buck, Sir Antony	Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Burns, Simon	Fallon, Michael
Burt, Alistair	Favell, Tony
Butler, Chris	Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Butterfill, John	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Franks, Cecil
Carrington, Matthew	Freeman, Roger
Colvin, Michael	Garel-Jones, Tristan
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*	Gill, Christopher
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*	Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Cran, James	Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*	Gregory, Conal
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*	Grist, Ian

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Norris, Steve
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Greg Knight.

NOES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Beith, A. J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cohen, Harry
Cryer, Bob
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Haynes, Frank
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Livsey, Richard
Loyden, Eddie
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Nellist, Dave
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Wallace, James
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was pleased to note during the Division that the Leader of the House sought the advice of the Clerks at the Table, but it would have been helpful—although I do not ask you to rule on this—if advice could have been taken earlier and the House could have avoided setting the precedent of considering an instrument before it knows what has been the outcome of the Committee sitting on the instrument. I raise the point, Madam Deputy Speaker, knowing that there is little more that you can say about it, but hoping that something may be learned from it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The point has been noted.

Residential Homes (Income Support)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

12.35 am

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I welcome this opportunity to raise the subject of the difficulties that people on income support now face in meeting their fees in residential homes and, more particularly, in nursing homes. First, however, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) whom I am pleased to see in her place, who, I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, may catch your eye later, and who sat through the night until 7.55 am on 20 December in order to be last hon. Member to speak in the Consolidated Fund Bill debate before time ran out. Her most pertinent questions on elderly people in nursing homes were not answered by a Minister then and have not been answered since. I hope that they will be answered tonight.

Through the early part of the past decade the Government have encouraged, through the provision of grants, the change from looking after old people in large geriatric hospitals to caring for them in much smaller homes rooted in the community. While local authorities have marked time because of financial constraints, the private sector has expanded fivefold during the period of office of this Government from 35,000 places in 1979 to nearly 200,000 places today—figures given to me by Help the Aged, which celebrates its golden jubilee this year. Currently, however, Government grants are well below the level required to meet even the ordinary running costs of a home providing the minimum laid-down standards of staffing and care.

Today we have a rising population of elderly people with an ever-lengthening life expectancy. "Social Trends" figures show that there are now 8·75 million people in Britain over the age of 65. Half a million require some form of care; three quarters of a million need residential care and 125,000 require nursing care—and this later group will grow as people live longer.

To meet this growing demand there has been a massive and very welcome increase in the provision of pleasant, homely, modestly sized nursing and residential homes throughout the country. There are several in my constituency like Colbury house, Totton, whose owners, Mr. and Mrs. Saunders, saw me only last weekend to lobby me about Government funding. Many of these homes are run by charities, whose usual policy is to charge only the direct operating costs against fee income, bearing the burden of general overheads, capital improvements and depreciation themselves. Such homes are caring and well run.

First, I would like to deal with nursing homes. Before 1988 these institutions could just about make ends meet on the basis of income derived from the Department of Social Services' contribution to the fees. Over the past two years, however, the situation has changed completely. By the middle of this year the Government will have awarded salary increases to nurses totalling approximately 50 per cent. in four years. We all applaud this move as right and fair; but if one considers that increase in the context of the cost of running a nursing home—where nursing and nursing-related salaries comprise almost 60 per cent. of total direct operating costs—one does not have to be a

mathematical genius to see that the Government have imposed, at a time of increasing shortage of nurses, additional operating costs of some 30 per cent. in four years. Nursing homes have no option but to pay these increases. They cannot pay less than the NHS and often they have to pay more, and they have also to meet the staffing levels that are laid down by the health authorities. In the same four years, inflation has exceeded 22 per cent. in all, and that has an effect on all the running costs of a nursing home.

The Government's response to the major increases in costs, which they have awarded or presided over, has been to increase the contribution to nursing home fees provided by the Department of Social Services by 3 per cent. in 1986, 5·7 per cent. in 1987, 2·7 per cent. in 1989 and 5·3 per cent. in 1990. The total increase in four years is only 17·7 per cent. as against a 39 per cent. increase in costs that are outside the control of nursing home operators.

These facts and figures are confirmed by a number of well-known, well-run charities providing, or involved in, nursing home accommodation, including the Royal United Kingdom Beneficent Association—RUKBA—Methodist Homes for the Aged, Help the Aged, the Abbeyfield Society and Age Concern. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to Lady Jean MacKenzie, a constituent of mine, who is the chairman of RUKBA, and the association's director, Mr. Bill Rathbone, who have spoken to me about these difficulties and whose work in this area is second to none.

Methodist Homes for the Aged says that the direct costs in its nursing homes without charging capital expenditure, depreciation or overheads were £265 a week in 1989, against a DSS contribution of only £190 a week. RUKBA reckons that its average cost a week was £229, slightly lower than that of Methodist Homes for the Aged because of differences in location and size. We are talking about a fees gap of £40 to £75 per week per head, which will grow as the announced DSS increase of £10 a week from April 1990 does not even meet inflation.

How does someone who is so poor that he needs income support find more than £2,000 a year? Does the DSS really maintain that its increased support meets the rising nursing costs imposed by the Government over the past two years, not to speak of inflation?

The position of residential homes is similar, even though the Department's response appears to be more realistic. They received an increase of 7 per cent. to £140 a week in 1989. A further 7 per cent. has been announced for April this year in the fees that the Department will pay, although on the face of it, no nursing is required. If an old person is fit and well, charities can just about make ends meet on the criteria that I have described, but most people do not move straight from being fit to needing full nursing care. They slip gently down the slope of increasing need for more and more care and nursing, becoming more and more dependent. They have to move a long way down that slope before they can be classed as very dependent and receive the extra £15 a week.

The Government have created a predicament for the elderly and their carers. First, they stimulate the provision of homes, rightly requiring rising standards to ensure that the care provided is what should be provided. Secondly, they create a financial gap as a result of one Department failing to match cost increases that are caused by another.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister realise the difficulty in finding a home whose fees are at DSS levels and which provides proper care? Does she realise the appalling anguish and distress that is caused to those already in homes by fees shooting beyond what they can afford to pay, with that gap becoming too wide for charities to bridge, even when acting together? Does she realise that she is putting people in a position where they will be unable to stay in the home of their choice? In some parts of the country, residential homes—especially nursing homes—are going out of business at an alarming rate.

It is frequently said that the elderly are better off now than they have ever been. That may be so for those who have retired in the past five to 10 years, many of whom have occupational pensions that are inflation-proofed to some degree. It is not true of the generation of elderly people for whom charities such as RUKBA are now being asked to care in ever-increasing numbers. This generation, the over-80s, retired prior to 1975, before inflation took off. Many of them do not have occupational pensions. Even if they did, those pensions were almost invariably not inflation-proofed, and have therefore shrunk in value.

This generation saved for an old age which they thought might extend to their 70s. Today they live into their 80s and 90s, or even to 100. Continued survival is an uphill economic battle and they do not have the savings or the pensions that will enable them to meet the ever-growing gap between the fees that a nursing home must charge to cover its costs and what the Department of Social Services will contribute.

Charities are doing their best to make up the shortfall in an attempt to allow these old people, who have served our community well, to live and die in peace. They ought to enjoy a sense of security and be able to live in the home of their choice—not a home with high fees, but one operating reasonably and efficiently. Here we have a case of the Government's left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing.

Yet the Government owe a duty of care to this generation of old people. It is right to look to charities to do their best, but the massive increase in urgent requests for help from charities to cover the shortfall in fees has grown since 1988 to such an extent that those charities are in danger of being overwhelmed.

I therefore ask my hon. Friend the Minister, first, to acknowledge that the help presently provided is inadequate; secondly, to increase substantially the Department's contribution to fees—I know that we are talking about big money: and thirdly, to give to local authorities the power and resources to top up grants paid by Government so that old people are not turned out of their homes. I urge the Government to face the fact that care costs money.

12.46 am

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I am most grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on securing it, as well as on the eloquence with which he has made his case. The Minister will not be unaware that, in the Consolidated Fund Bill debate in which I had the good fortune to secure the last four and a half minutes, two hon. Members had bid to raise the topic, the other being my hon. Friend. Considering the relatively small number of hon. Members, 20, who were on the list, it is significant that two of us had chosen this topic.

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

I think the Minister will not be unaware that this subject is of concern to a large number of hon. Members on both sides of the House. I do not wish to intrude on the time for the Minister's reply, so I shall keep my remarks brief.

The Minister will be aware that there is an increasing demand for places for old people and that that demand will increase solidly, at least until the turn of the century. One estimate is that we must provide 40 new beds a week in the public or private sector to cope with the demand. That means considerable capital investment.

At the moment, it is impossible for people running private residential homes and private nursing homes to recoup their capital costs, even down simply to paying the interest, through the charges that they levy if they have no means of making up the gap betwen the sum of DSS benefits and the charges which it would be reasonable for them to make.

I draw the Minister's attention again to my constituent, about whom I have written to her twice and on whom I centred my remarks in the debate on the Consolidated Fund. Florence Smith is 93 years of age. She has no means of support whatever other than the benefits that she gets from the state. She is in just about the cheapest nursing home, although a very respectable one, in our area. There is still a substantial gap between the sum of her benefits and the charges being levied. Her only relative is a daughter, herself an old-age pensioner and wholly dependent upon the state pension. From where is Florence Smith to make up the gap?

Perhaps the most depressing thing I have heard today came from my hon. Friend the Minister of Health when she was speaking to the Select Committee on Social Services. She said that, when the National Health Service and Community Care Bill is enacted, although there will be arrangements for topping up for the new entrants in the system entering residential or nursing care, there will be no such arrangements for those already in the system. Do I take it that Florence Smith, aged 93, can look forward to no relief?

12.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on his success in the ballot and on the skill with which he explained his case. I know that he has wanted to raise this issue for some time.

I was sorry not to reply to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) in the brief time that she was given in the Consolidated Fund Bill debate—although, as she knows, I was poised to do so. She will also understand that during this debate I cannot reply in detail to her points about an individual constituent, Mrs. Florence Smith, although a letter to my hon. Friend is being prepared.

In responding to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside and the short intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone, I should like to develop two themes. First, I want to say something about the present social security arrangements. They aim to provide help in a way that is simple to understand and to administer. They are, however, concerned with the generality of cases and they have to operate nationally, like other features of income support. Secondly, I want to explain that we, like my hon. Friends, recognise that the system should be improved, and I shall return to that point later.

I shall first explain a little of the background to public support through social security for the cost of care in homes. Since 1985, the amount of income support payable to residents of independent residential care and nursing homes has been governed by a system of national limits. Before that, each social security office set one maximum amount for fees in residential care homes and another for fees in nursing homes in its area, regardless of the type of care provided. That meant that an elderly person receiving non-specialised nursing care could claim as much benefit as, for instance, a person suffering from a terminal illness who had especially high care needs.

That was clearly not the best use of resources, and in April 1985 we introduced the present system of separate limits for six different types of care. Those limits are tied to the type of care that a home can provide and differentiate between levels of need and levels of cost, thus more satisfactorily targeting the funds available. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has suggested that, through the system as it was before 1985, we encourage a growth in independent provision only to remove that support, capriciously, later.

I should say that it was never really by design that social security became a major funding source for the private or voluntary sectors. The Government's view has always been that the right approach is a mix of private, voluntary and statutory provision, but the first concern of the social security system is to provide personal benefit to individuals in need of it. As a result, many people have enjoyed a wider choice of provision in that area. But the point has been made by others, including the Audit Commission and Sir Roy Griffiths, that the growth in independent provision, fuelled by the earlier social security rules, was not the best way to use public money—a point on which my hon. Friend put his finger. The Government are responding to that criticism in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

The National limits are not rates, but maximum allowances towards fees. In addition, we provide an allowance for personal expenses or pocket money. My hon. Friends will be aware that expenditure on those limits has risen dramatically. In 1979, we were paying benefit to 12,000 claimants in residential care and nursing homes, at a cost of £10 million. Now there are 176,000 claimants resident in that type of accommodation, and they cost the taxpayer £1·1 billion.

That is an enormous increase. The changes in 1985 enabled us better to direct resources to those most in need of certain types of care, but I must stress that the majority of claimants in residential care and nursing homes throughout the country can meet their fees in full from their income and benefits.

As the House knows, we are committed to reviewing the limits every year as part of the general review of income support and other benefits. We take account of representations made to us by interested individuals and organisations, such as Age Concern and the National Federation of Housing Associations. Bearing in mind our responsibilities to other groups of elderly and disabled in their own homes, as well as the changing cost factors in care homes, such as registration standards and nurses' pay,

to which my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has referred, the increases that we have made in the past—and which we propose for this year—are to the Government's credit.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in October proposals for this year's increases in these limits. They will cost £100 million, increasing the money given to the vast majority of residents by an additional £10. I remind the House that, under our uprating proposals, this year will be the first year since 1985 in which all the limits will increase. When taking decisions on increases, we took account of a wide range of information on costs and charges in homes. This primarily came from the Department's own local office returns, independent research and detailed representations from outside bodies, to which I have referred already. We had also to bear in mind the Government's overall public expenditure objectives and to make the decisions in the light of the cash available for the benefit uprating as a whole.

In reviewing the limits, we considered the need for regional variations beyond the existing extension of £23 for London. The London extension was increased by more than 30 per cent. in April last year. We considered other regional differentials, but concluded that there was no sufficiently clear pattern of regional variation in charges to justify them and that it was better to use any extra funds available to improve the scheme as a whole. One of the improvements from 1991 will be that the new arrangements for those entering residential care or nursing homes will include the payment of housing benefit, which will automatically take account of regional variations in cost.

I must emphasise that it has never been the policy of this Government—nor could it be the policy of any Government—to undertake to meet all fees charged by homes, however high they may be. We set the limits with due regard not only to the interests of the residents and the homes concerned, but also to the interests of the taxpayer. I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone about the problems for capital investment and the renovation of homes, but I think that she would agree that those matters have to be regarded as business decisions to be made by those running the businesses, in the context of their knowledge of existing financial provision. I shall deal later with arrangements for the future. We are also mindful of the fact that a prime responsibility for providing nursing and medical care to those in need of it lies with the National Health Service.

It is important to emphasise that income support is only one source of public help for those in need of care. The NHS has powers and duties to provide a place in a hospital or in a contractual bed in an independent nursing home. Local authorities, too, have responsibilities to provide accommodation for those who, through age or disability, are assessed as in need of it if it is not otherwise available.

These arrangements are, of course, for local decision, but I do not think that these very important powers for helping people needing such care should be overlooked in considering care provision. Expenditure on community health services in England alone has also risen—from £370 million in 1978-79 to £1·6 billion in 1988-89.

The social security system, good as it has been—and good as it still is—in providing hundreds of thousands of people with the power to choose residential or nursing care, is only part of state provision. The provision of suitable care services for what, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, is a growing number of elderly people, is a challenge that we are determined to meet. But as my hon. Friends are aware, the income support scheme is a national benefit system and is not geared to respond to the rapidly changing and developing system of care in this country.

We recognise that there are problems with the present system. The Government have given a priority to expenditure on community care, and their record is impressive. We recognise also that the arrangements for people in homes have serious drawbacks. It could indeed be said that income support arrangements have contained an in-built bias towards residential and nursing home care when, perhaps, priority should have been given to developing services to enable people to be supported in their own homes. It is also difficult to assess whether social security payments have been giving value for money. The Government's proposals for reforming the funding of residential care and nursing homes will ensure that, in future people enter a home only when a proper assessment of their needs has been made.

That brings me to my second theme. The Government's White Paper "Caring for People" and the Health Service and Community Care Bill now before the House will introduce fundamental changes to the structure of help we can provide. Local authorities, via social services departments, will be responsible in collaboration with health care professionals for assessing the needs of new applicants for public support for residential or nursing care. If care in a home represents the right choice for an individual, it will be the responsibility of the social services authority to arrange a place in a suitable home.

Social services authorities will be expected to make maximum possible use of independent providers of residential and nursing home care. They will need to estimate the number of places needed and arrange to meet projected demand. There will be no nationally set limits to the level of fees which may be met by local authorities, and each local authority will exercise its own purchasing power to achieve best value for money because authorities are better placed to judge local care needs, and in future will have the authority and resources to respond quickly to change.

It is also worth remembering that in London and other metropolitan areas those same local authorities which are now setting standards in homes will be funding the new scheme. I think that this answers the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside about the source of conflict he sees in locally set standards and centrally set limits.

I should emphasise that the changes are not about making savings. We shall transfer to the local authorities the resources which the Government would otherwise have provided to finance care for those receiving social security payments in residential care and nursing homes. The transferred resources will allow for the projected growth in the number of people requiring support. The Government believe that the introduction of competitive tendering disciplines to the residential and nursing homes will enhance the ability of social service authorities to obtain the best value for public money. They will be in a strong position to use their new-found purchasing power to ensure high quality care for those who really need it.

Our policy on the role of the National Health Service in providing continuous care was also reaffirmed in the White Paper. We made it clear that health authorities will still be

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

expected to provide continuous care services in parallel with the independent sector and with the new system of local authority support. Each local authority and health authority will agree on the proper local balance of provision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone referred to the top-up powers proposed for local authorities in respect of people who are already claimants in local authority homes. As she said, that is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Knowing my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone as I do, I know that she will pursue the matter with her usual vigour.

I am sorry that I cannot offer my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside an easy solution to the problems identified by RUKBA and other organisations. However, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to whom my hon. Friend has written, I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and members of RUKBA in the near future to hear their concerns direct if that would help.

I conclude by repeating that the Government are taking clear and concrete steps to address the structural problems in the system of support which have led to the problems that have been raised this evening. We are convinced that the changes will be of major benefit to those on behalf of whom my hon. Friends have spoken so eloquently, and I am very grateful to both of them for giving me the opportunity to spell this out.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 25 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL
(By Order)

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 1 February.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Monday 29 January.

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL
(By Order)
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 1 February at Seven o'clock.

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 1 February.

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL
[Lords] (By Order)
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 1 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Drinking

1. **Mr. Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions he has been able to draw from the experimental byelaw banning public drinking in parts of Coventry.

The Minister of State, Home Department (Mr. John Patten): The information available so far from the experiment in Coventry suggests that the byelaw is going extremely well. Research is in hand to assess the impact of the byelaw as fully as possible. Later this year we shall be studying analyses of results of the experiments in all the trial areas before deciding on the next steps.

Mr. Thompson: When my right hon. Friend is considering the evidence, he will remember that most drinking takes place on convivial occasions. However, there are times when that is not so. Will he consider allowing magistrates to have a little flexibility, so that they can ban outside drinking for an hour or two hours on a specific day, at a specific occasion, at a specific time and for a specific purpose?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend's suggestion does not surprise me, in the light of his distinguished service to the ministerial group on alcohol misuse. He has made a very interesting suggestion, which had not occurred to me. There is a power already in section 188 of the Licensing Act 1964 for magistrates to take emergency action of that sort when there is a threat of public disorder. However, we shall need to take account of my hon. Friend's constructive suggestion. In addition, it is true that, from time to time, drinking can be very convivial, as I remember with my hon. Friend in his constituency at the Hebden Bridge constitutional club.

Sir Dudley Smith: In view of the Government's sensible liberation of the licensing laws, would it not be prudent to consider banning open air drinking in open spaces in the towns adjacent to Coventry and in inner city areas throughout the country?

Mr. Patten: I am glad that my hon. Friend welcomes our new licensing legislation. We have in hand seven experiments that are examining the possibility of banning drinking in public places. As soon as the experiments are completed towards the end of 1991, we hope to be able to bring forward further suggestions. There may well be room for a radical extension of the scheme, provided that it proves successful.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

3. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his consideration of the new evidence on the Birmingham pub bombings case.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): I am considering the further material

that has been presented to me by a solicitor on behalf of the Birmingham Six, and will decide as soon as possible whether it justifies any intervention on my part.

Ms. Short: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his answer. I very much hope that he will consider the matter with an open mind, in order to secure justice. These six men were convicted on the basis of two pieces of evidence, the—first, forensic and the second, confessions. By the time that the case returned to the Court of Appeal last time, it was clear that the forensic evidence was rubbish and did not stand, so we are left with only the confessions. The court said that to believe that the men were innocent, it would have to believe—*[Interruption.]* Mr. Speaker, do you think that you could secure order?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady is going a little wide. She must ask a question.

Ms. Short: No, I am not.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must ask a question.

Ms. Short: I am completely in order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will reconsider what I have said. It is a serious matter and Conservative Members should consider it seriously.

The second piece of evidence was based on confessions. The Court of Appeal said that to believe that the men were innocent, it would have to believe that a large number of policemen colluded and fabricated——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must ask a question. She is outlining a case.

Ms. Short: I am asking a question.

The Home Secretary knows that the serious crime squad has now been disbanded and that 11 of the 20 men involved in questioning those men have been disciplined. Hardly anyone in Birmingham believes that they are guilty —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady really must ask a question. It is not fair to other hon. Members.

Ms. Short: I am asking a question, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Home Secretary assure the House that he is interested in securing justice for the six men, and in vindicating our system of justice, as its reputation is being eroded in Britain and internationally by the effects of the case?

Mr. Waddington: Like my predecessor, I shall always be prepared to consider whether any new evidence or consideration of substance may cast doubt on the safety of a conviction. In that light, I am looking at the material furnished by the defendants' solicitor. However, it is an important principle that questions of guilt and innocence are decided by the courts, free of political interference. It is also important to bear in mind that the matter has already been considered at great length by the Court of Appeal, which examined the circumstances in which the alleged confessions were made and the forensic evidence to which the hon. Lady referred.

Dame Jill Knight: Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear it in mind that many people in Birmingham still regard that crime, which killed and injured so many people, with utter horror? There have already been two inquiries and two appeals. One inquiry looked into the matter with great care. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is outrageous that persons such as the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who claim to have more evidence, have repeatedly refused to make that evidence available to the police or to the relevant authorities?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend will not be surprised —and the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is present to hear it—that I find it quite extraordinary that anyone who criticises the convictions should be unwilling to co-operate with the police and to furnish the police with the evidence that he says casts doubt on the convictions. I hope that even at this late stage the hon. Member for Sunderland, South will realise how thoroughly irresponsible is the attitude that he has adopted.

Mr. Mullin: The Home Secretary is obviously unaware that at the request of his predecessor I was interviewed for four hours by two senior civil servants at the Home Office and by an assistant chief constable of the West Midlands, who told me that he was dragged here by the scruff of the neck by the Home Office. May I put it to the Home Secretary that the fact that the men were convicted partly on the basis of confessions obtained while they were in the custody of the West Midlands serious crime squad and that officers of the West Midlands serious crime squad, including a number of those involved in the original investigation, have since been caught red-handed forging confessions, without any other evidence, is sufficient reason to refer the case back to the Court of Appeal?

Mr. Waddington: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's question was mere flannel, because he failed to address himself to the point that I was making. He says that he knows who committed those diabolical offences, yet when asked to disclose their names, he flatly refuses to do so. He knows perfectly well that an inquiry is being carried out in the west midlands by West Yorkshire police, who are considering what has occurred since 1986, which gave rise to the complaints leading to the inquiry. I have made it plain on many occasions that if the Yorkshire police find any evidence or matters that lead them to believe that they should consider earlier matters, they are perfectly at liberty to do so.

Mr. Lawrence: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that if the European Parliament continues to make inquiries into matters such as this, it will give itself a bad name?

Mr. Waddington: I gather that the legal affairs committee of the European Parliament has not yet decided whether to delve into this matter. It is absolutely certain that it is entirely outside the competence of the European Parliament and nothing whatsoever to do with it.

Mr. Hattersley: If the West Yorkshire police, who are inquiring into the conduct of the West Midlands crime squad since 1986, discover that since the offences have been committed by officers who were previously involved in the investigation of the Birmingham pub bombings, will that, in the Home Secretary's view, justify a new inquiry, because it certainly will in our view?

Mr. Waddington: If new matters or considerations are put before me that may cast doubt on the safety of the convictions, I shall look into them.

Mr. Roger King: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the people of Birmingham have put up with the arguments for and against in this case for 15 years, but the issue still will not be decided until all the evidence is available from all the sources, and is not withheld, and a decision is made on whether the case against the Birmingham Six is to be upheld?

Mr. Waddington: The case against the Birmingham Six was upheld; a jury of the land found against them. I remind my hon. Friend that as a result of an inquiry carried out by Devon and Cornwall police, the case was passed to the Court of Appeal, which carried out a most protracted inquiry. Literally days were spent considering the strength of the forensic evidence, and further days were spent considering whether the confessions could be relied on. Therefore, the House should bear those matters in mind before leaping to conclusions. I have said—and I say again—that I know my duty. If new matters and considerations are put before me that might cast doubt on the convictions, I shall take the appropriate action.

Visas

4. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards a common visa regime within the European Economic Community after 1992; and if he will make a statement.

12. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards a common visa regime within the European Economic Community after 1992; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): European Community immigration Ministers have agreed to a common list of countries whose nationals require a visa to enter a Community country, to the adoption of common questions to be put to applicants for short-stay visas and to exchange information about people to whom visas should not be issued. Those and other relevant developments are described in more detail in the immigration declaration, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Haynes: Does the Minister agree that the refusal of visas for two teenagers to attend their murdered uncle's funeral was nothing short of disgraceful? Will the Minister tell me about the stupid question that they were asked—how many water buffalo their father had? I want to know what will happen in the future. The Government brag about compassion from the Dispatch Box. They should get off their backside and let us have some real action.

Mr. Lloyd: In the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred, the decision was reversed following further investigation, and the two were allowed into this country. The hon. Gentleman will agree that immigration officers have an extremely difficult task, which they set about with objectivity, honesty and fairness. The very fact that last year 3,000 overstayers and illegal immigrants had to be removed shows that a great many people seek to get by immigration officers dishonestly.

Mr. Ron Davies: Can the Minister really justify a visa system for people seeking asylum? Does he recall that when he deported two Tamils back to Sri Lanka, they were brutally tortured on their return? Does he not think that, in view of that, it would be far better to have an independent appeal system so that all applications can be considered objectively and independently?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman's last point does not match his first because an appeal system would come into play when an application had been processed and turned down. Visas have been introduced for quite a number of countries in the past few years but still the number of applications for asylum has increased. That suggests that the demand for visas has not prevented people from making asylum claims when they have grounds to do so.

Sir John Stokes: On visas and passports, can my hon. Friend explain why, when a Frenchman returns to his own country he goes through an exit marked "French passports" whereas when an Englishman returns to England he goes through an exit marked "EEC passports"? What has happened to the British passport?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend knows more than I do about the notices posted in French entry areas, but "EEC passports" naturally include British passports. British passports remain exactly what they were, as reliable as ever and just what my hon. Friend would like them to be.

Mr. John Greenway: I recognise that the free movement within the Community of European Community nationals is an important part of the single European market, but does not my hon. Friend agree that the combating of drug trafficking and terrorism is of far greater significance? Will he ensure that post-1992 we maintain proper controls against drug traffickers at our ports and airports so that the fight against drug trafficking—as evidenced by the recent seizures, for which the country and the House should be grateful to the police and Customs and Excise officials for their work—can continue?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is essential that we should retain our own frontier checks to ensure that we exclude terrorists, drug pushers and illegal immigrants. We intend that that will be done after 1992. Our colleagues in the EEC understand, appreciate and, I believe, support our determination.

Mr. Darling: Does the Minister accept that there is a need to review our procedures before 1992? In that connection, can he tell us why the Government decided to pay compensation to three Kurdish refugees who alleged ill-treatment at the hands of immigration officers when they sought asylum in this country? Will he set up a full independent inquiry, and does he accept that there is now a need for an independent watchdog to look at the immigration service in the light of the growing number of abuses and also in the light of the fact that the amount of information-swapping between European countries is now growing and is beginning to get out of control?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's contention. I do not believe that there is a growing number of abuses. We have certainly accepted that in four of the cases under judicial review the original decision should be set aside, but as these are still part of the judicial process, I think that it would be wrong for me to comment further now. If there is anything more to be added at the end of the process, we shall certainly say so.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I thank the Minister for his Department's careful scrutiny and subsequent lifting of two deportation orders on prisoners in Dartmoor—one on grounds of political persecution and the other on personal grounds. Will he confirm that the current system, which is very fair and good, will remain?

Mr. Lloyd: I can confirm that to my hon. Friend. The system works both ways. We hear only when people complain about the results, but there are many applications which, after careful inquiry, we can concede, and we are very happy to do so.

Director of Public Prosecutions

5. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what was discussed.

Mr. Waddington: I do not meet the Director of Public Prosecutions on a formal basis. Ministerial responsibility for the Crown prosecution service rests with the Attorney-General whom I meet from time to time to discuss matters of mutual concern.

Mr. Smith: Will the Home Secretary discuss with the Director of Public Prosecutions the collapse of the charges against Mr. Kevin Taylor? Does he recognise that public accountability and confidence in the rule of law can now be upheld only by a full and independent inquiry into the whole Stalker affair, both in Greater Manchester and in Northern Ireland, because the public sense that there is something very wrong about the whole business, and the truth must out?

Mr. Waddington: Certainly not. Allegations were made that resulted in Mr. Stalker being sent home on leave and later suspended by the Manchester police authority. In view of those events in Manchester, he was taken off the Northern Ireland inquiry and replaced by Mr. Sampson. The document that Mr. Stalker says that he is going to bring to my office will presumably arrive this afternoon. My officials asked him to produced it earlier, but he could not and I do not criticise him for that. I have no reason whatsoever to believe that anything improper occurred. Indeed, after the suspension of Mr. Stalker in Manchester because of the allegations made against him, it would have been extraordinary if he had remained in charge of the inquiry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Norris: While it is regrettable that so much public money was devoted to the prosecution, which in this case so sadly lapsed, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that sad waste of public funds, regardless of the innocence or otherwise of the person accused, is something that happens every day in British courts? Does he further agree that it is far more important that if the chief constable of Greater Manchester wishes to investigate the circumstances, as the DPP has advised him, and wishes to call on officers of another force to assist him in that investigation, it is entirely up to him to do so?

Mr. Waddington: Part of the case against Mr. Taylor rested on documents disclosed by the Co-operative bank as a result of an order made under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which was obtained from the recorder of Manchester, but doubt was cast on the truth of the evidence that was given to get the order. There is no connection whatsoever between those events in Manchester and the withdrawal of Mr. Stalker from the inquiry in Northern Ireland. Opposition Members should use a little common sense for a change and should not for ever be hunting for conspiracy theories, which are entirely inappropriate in this case.

Mr. Shore: When the Home Secretary next meets the Director of Public Prosecutions, will he raise with him the appalling three-year delay in bringing charges against the police officers who are accused of violence in the Wapping dispute in 1987, which as I have said, is now three years ago——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that the case may be sub judice.

Mr. Shore: All that I am raising with the Home Secretary is the delays in bringing forward the charges. I particularly wanted to ask him this: does he agree that it is unfair to those accused to have such long delays between the charges being brought and the hearing of them in a court? Does he further agree that it is a matter of major grievance for those who have been injured and who have brought the charges against the police? Does not the whole affair greatly undermine the authority of the independent Police Complaints Authority?

Mr. Waddington: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman did not understand the significance of my first reply. Ministerial responsibility for the Crown prosecution service rests with the Attorney-General and that is, of course, why I do not have official meetings with the Director of Public Prosecutions. I have no intention of having any such meetings and there is no reason why I should. When hon. Members talk about Wapping, while it is obviously important that people should be brought to trial as quickly as possible, it is also important that no mythology should surround what in fact happened at Wapping. The police came under regular and violent attack throughout the dispute—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Home Secretary will know better than I do whether this case is sub judice.

Mr. Waddington: I am not talking about a particular date or about 24 January. I am pointing out that over a year no fewer than 162 police officers were injured.

Mr. Shersby: When my right hon. and learned Friend next meets—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down.

Mr. Shersby: When my right hon. and learned Friend meets the Attorney-General, will he make available to him any information that may come into his possession about the theft, and subsequent leaking to the BBC, of information from the Northamptonshire police about the Wapping incident three years ago? Is he aware that the leaking of such information is an offence under section 86 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984?

Mr. Waddington: I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is assessing the possible impact of media reports on the criminal proceedings. It is for him to consider what action, if any, should be taken against those responsible.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the Home Secretary accept that the Opposition are not talking about conspiracy theories

either in Northern Ireland or in Manchester? Is he aware that there is a great deal of confusion in the public mind, and certainly in the minds of Opposition and Conservative Members, about what went on in Northern Ireland and in Manchester? Will the Home Secretary, as a first step, come to the House and make a full statement so that he can be asked why £1 million of public money was wasted in the Manchester trial and about what is in the document that Mr. Stalker has presented to him today?

Mr. Waddington: I am not responsible for confusion in the minds of Opposition Members. It is as plain as a pikestaff that if a police officer in charge of an inquiry in Northern Ireland is removed from his duties in the force of which he is a member, he can no longer remain in charge of the inquiry. That is what happened in this case. After the removal of Mr. Stalker from the inquiry in Northern Ireland, Mr. Colin Sampson took over his duties. Anyone who has followed the history of the inquiry thereafter will know that Mr. Sampson did not shirk his duty. Hon. Members will recall what he eventually reported to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and the resulting statement by my right hon. and learned Friend to the House.

Young Offenders

6. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to bring forward his proposal to make parents liable for the criminal activities of young offenders.

Mr. Waddington: Our proposals on parental responsiblity will be included in a White Paper setting out our plans for criminal justice legislation which will be published in the next few weeks.

Mr. Taylor: Such proposals will be extremely welcome. Will my right hon. and learned Friend note the belief of Conservative Members that parental responsibility is a vital part of family life and that the exercise of that responsibility is more likely to keep families together than allow them to drift apart? Will he therefore oblige parents to turn up in court if youngsters are brought to trial? If they are sentenced, will he make parents liable for the fines, should they be levied, but will he also ensure that they are means-tested fines?

Mr. Waddington: All right hon. and hon. Members will agree that one of the first duties of parents is to instil in the child an understanding of the difference between right and wrong, and to teach the child to respect and abide by the law and not to lie, cheat, steal or bully. There should be absolute agreement about that. It is slightly astonishing, therefore, that anyone should discuss the problem of what reforms may be necessary in our criminal justice system without acknowledging the central part of the parents. The so-called White Paper issued by the Labour party is entirely silent on this matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) is right. I believe that parents should have to come to court with their children when their children face charges. I also believe that the parents' means should be taken into consideration when a decision is made on the appropriate fine to be imposed on the child, so that if the child does not pay, the parents have to pay a realistic penalty in the child's stead.

Mr. Rooker: Will the Home Secretary take this opportunity to condemn the bailiffs Crilley and Sons, who earlier this week were reported as saying that after the introduction of the poll tax, when they go hunting for youngsters to get their goods and chattels, and the householder says that they cannot come in, although they, the bailiffs, have no right to enter their staff should try to get inside the house because, "once you are in you cannot be thrown out"? Is it right and proper for bailiffs to operate in that way when seeking young people?

Mr. Waddington: I cannot for the life of me see what that has to do with parental reponsibility.

Mr. Alexander: Is it not the case that by making parents criminally liable and thereby inculcating in them a sense of responsibility it is highly likely that we shall have far fewer youngsters sleeping rough in our streets at night?

Mr. Waddington: The possibility of making parents criminally liable has been considered, but I do not think that it is necessary. What is important is that parents should be reminded all the time of their responsibility when their child falls foul of the law. Parents can be reminded of that most efficaciously by insisting on their presence and by taking their means into consideration when deciding on the fine to be imposed on the child.

Mr. Randall: Is the Secretary of State aware that much informed opinion outside the House is concerned about a number of statements on this matter by the Government? What seems to come through is the Government's wish to punish the parents of children whose behaviour is not acceptable to them. Does he realise that that could make the relationship between children and parents far more difficult, when that is the last thing we want? Will he give consideration to the Labour party's position, which is to base such a scheme on the Scottish children's panel which has a successful record?

Mr. Waddington: It would be best to draw a veil over the emanations from the Labour party. The proposals that I am outlining will encourage parents to offer more support to their children and to take a constructive interest in their lives.

Mr. Malins: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the level of juvenile crime worries hon. Members on both sides of the House? Does he further agree that it is the duty of a parent to spend time with his or her child and to provide an atmosphere of love, security and respect for the law? Does he further agree that those qualities are sadly missing from today's society? May I therefore urge him to bring forward quickly proposals to make parents responsible for the fines of their children?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend has heard what I have said. He and I are obviously thinking along the same lines, but the House will have to be patient and wait until our White Paper is published. That is not so far away.

Prison Officers Association

7. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met officials of the Prison Officers Association; and what subjects were discussed.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Mellor): My right hon. and learned Friend met members of the

Prison Officers Association on 18 December. The terms and conditions of service for prison officers, resources, the possibility of agency status for the prison service and the possible use of the private sector to escort prisoners and to run remand centres were discussed.

Mr. Cox: I note the Minister's reply. Is he aware that Fresh Start, which has been working in the penal system for some time, is coming under increasing criticism not only from the Prison Officers Association but from prison governors because it has not resulted, as we and they were led to believe that it would, in extra staffing? If it is the policy of the Home Office to get inmates out of their cells —many of them are banged up for 20 hours or more a day —into work projects and into association, how will that be done without extra staffing?

Mr. Mellor: I hesitate to take issue with the hon. Gentleman because I know of his close interest in prison work, but over the past two years there has been a net increase in prison officer staff of almost 2,500. That is entirely consistent with the Government's commitments under Fresh Start. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will let me have further details of his comments so that we may try to remove the difference between us.

Mr. Conway: Has my hon. and learned Friend had representations from the Prison Officers Association about the delays in processing applications to purchase homes from prison officers in service? Is he aware that for three years I have had lengthy correspondence with his Department about the matter? Prison officers in Shrewsbury have asked me now to refer it to the parliamentary ombudsman because of the disgraceful delays in his Department.

Mr. Mellor: I am sorry that up to now we have not been able to give my hon. Friend satisfaction. I shall look at the papers personally to see whether we can do better.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister agree with the premise of the Justice report, in the name of Lady Ralphs, that prison should be a penalty of last resort? In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the guideline sentences from the Court of Appeal and their failure to deal with the problem of disparity of sentencing and overlong sentences, will the Minister and the Government, in the forthcoming White Paper, consider favourably the Justice proposal for a sentencing council and the introduction of sentencing guidelines?

Mr. Mellor: It is common ground that prison should be a sentence of last resort. I think that the hon. Gentleman will find a great deal to his satisfaction on that in the forthcoming White Paper. He may be interested to know that the answer to a question, which unfortunately has been unstarred but would have been due for an answer this session, reveals that the proportion of prisoners who have been sentenced for what we all regard as the most serious offences—crimes of violence, sex crimes and so on—is 50 per cent. as against 33 per cent. in 1979, suggesting that we are making progress in our legitimate ambition to ensure that prison sentences are reserved for those who commit the most heinous crimes.

Special Constables

8. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of special constables now attached to police forces in England and Wales; and what steps he will take to encourage chief constables to recruit further, particularly among ethnic minority communities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of June 1989 there were 15,625 special constables in England and Wales; 453 of the total were from the ethnic minority communities. We shall discuss further measures to improve recruitment with members of the police advisory board at its next meeting in February.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful reply. Does he agree that special constables should not be regarded in any way as second-class coppers? Will he confirm that there is no ceiling on the recruitment of specials? Is there any area where recruitment is difficult? Will he consider a major national campaign to get more specials to assist the police with policing?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right. Special constables are not second-class policemen; they are first-class citizens who give freely of their time to assist and support the police at points of unusual pressure. There is no ceiling on the number of special constables, and we certainly want more to be recruited. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we are considering the idea of national advertising. We have run a pilot test in Suffolk and we shall be evaluating its results shortly.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

9. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Foreign Minister of Ireland to discuss the Birmingham pub bombings case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I met Mr. Collins on 8 January for discussion on a range of subjects. Mr. Collins asked me about the further material which had been submitted to me on behalf of the Birmingham Six. I told him that I will decide as soon as possible whether that further material justifies any intervention on my part.

Mr. Sedgemore: In view of the indelible and dishonourable stain left on the British legal system by the conduct of the Court of Appeal in this case, could not the Home Secretary make amends by telling the British public and the Irish Foreign Secretary that he will release the Birmingham Six forthwith and then invite the Director of Public Prosecutions to present the case to the Court of Appeal in such a way that their Lordships have no option but to allow the appeal of those innocent people?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. The House knows perfectly well what my duty is. I have already made it absolutely plain that if new evidence or new considerations that were not before the court of trial were brought before me, I should be prepared to consider such new evidence. If it cast doubt on the convictions I would not be afraid to take the proper action. However, it is absolutely improper and ridiculous of the hon. Gentleman to cast aspersions on the Court of Appeal, which carried out a long and careful examination

into the evidence given in the case, including the confessions and the circumstances in which they were made, and the forensic evidence.

PRIME MINISTER

Q1. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Fatchett: Now that Lord Justice Taylor has joined football supporters, players and the police in condemning the Prime Minister's ludicrous ID scheme, will the Prime Minister confirm that is her intention to drop the proposal? Will she say whether anybody in the country, apart from her, thought that it it was a good idea in the first place?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary received Lord Justice Taylor's report on 19 January. It is obviously right that the House should have the complete report before it is discussed. It will be printed and published as soon as possible—I hope by Monday—so that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary can then make a statement about it.

Q2. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fishburn: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the increasingly unsatisfactory state of leasehold law in this country? It is unsatisfactory for hundreds of thousands of flat owners and landlords alike. Will she give a fair wind to the Law Commission's draft legislation to permit flats to be owned on freehold? That reform has already been undertaken in Australia, Canada and the United States, and is overdue in England and Wales if we are to have full home-owning communities in our inner cities as well as elsewhere.

The Prime Minister: I am aware that, in the view of many, the present law on the matter is unsatisfactory. The Law Commission is continuing its work and we hope to have an opportunity soon to consider its proposals. We shall then bring forward any measures that we think necessary.

Mr. Kinnock: Does not the shambles over the football identity card scheme prove that the Prime Minister's personal obsessions and ignorance are not a sound basis for Government legislation?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman was trumped by one of his hon. Friends who has asked that question. As the right hon. Gentleman has repeated it, may I say that the House should have the full published report, with all its recommendations—from hooliganism to safety—and have a chance to consider it. We hope to get it printed and published by Monday, which is very quick, after which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will make a statement. I should have hoped that the right hon. Gentleman would agree that it is best to read the whole report.

Mr. Kinnock: We look forward to the statement. Since this scheme was, without doubt, the Prime Minister's obsession and her scheme, does she agree that it would be appropriate if she came to the House next week and made the statement about the scheme? Meanwhile, may I invite her to make a little history this afternoon and simply say that she was wrong?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend will make a statement on the whole of the Taylor report. In the meantime, the right hon. Gentleman has the assurances that we gave to the House during the passage of the Bill. He knows that the measures that we have brought forward over the years to restrict the sale of alcohol at football grounds, to impose exclusion orders, to have closed-circuit television at most league grounds, to have segregation of football supporters, and the statement that the former Home Secretary made immediately after Hillsborough that football grounds should become all-seater stadia, have had an effect and have improved matters. There is a good deal more to do and we must consider what Lord Justice Taylor has said before coming to a conclusion.

Mr. Kilfedder: In view of my right hon. Friend's commendable concern for the environment, will she consult other Heads of Government about air pollution, which has been highlighted in the latest report of the World Watch Institute? It has pointed out that one fifth of the world's population, including the United Kingdom, is adversely affected by air pollution which causes the death of about 50,000 people a year in the United States?

The Prime Minister: I understand my hon. Friend's concern about air pollution caused by aircraft. We usually discuss this issue at international forums because we must deal with it on the basis of an international network. It will probably come up at the next economic summit and at future European Community summits. We do not have the full report on the matter. We shall consider it most earnestly when we receive it.

Q3. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ashton: Is it not a fact that despite the Prime Minister's wriggling, Lord Justice Taylor has said that her law is an ass? She brought in a verdict of guilty before she had heard all the witnesses. Is it not also a fact that the right hon. Lady has consistently confused safety with hooliganism to score points on a law and order issue and try to make political capital out of a disaster?

Will the Prime Minister now give two promises? First, will she drop the demand that British teams cannot play in Europe until we have an ID card scheme, and support their application to play in Europe? Secondly, will she try to find a way to use the £250 million tax that she collects from football pools to pay for ground safety and give to football the same sort of cash as she gives to the ballet, the opera, the arts, museums and all the other upper-class pastimes?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps it would have been better had the hon. Gentleman waited until he had read the report. In the meantime, he will be aware of the assurance given during the passage of the Bill that there would be two opportunities for both Houses of Parliament to debate any football membership scheme.

On the question of finance, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the considerable sums spent on transfer payments, which last year amounted to about £70 million. He will also be aware of the considerable sums that come to the football clubs from television—about £11 million from ITV last year and about £6 million from the BBC—and of the further sums given by the football pools for the use of the fixture lists. Those are very considerable sums, added to those that come from the Football Trust. It is perhaps a pity that more has not been spent on the stadiums in the past by the football organisations. Perhaps they will consider spending a bigger proportion on behalf of the people who come to watch football rather than on transfer fees and other things.

Q4. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gill: May I remind my right hon. Friend of her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 16 January, and urge upon her the necessity to dismantle green currencies, which are causing British farmers unacceptable losses and give rise to inadequate investment, which in its turn is fast eroding their ability to compete in the future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is correct. It is our policy that all the green currencies shall be dismantled by the end of 1992. They do not give our farmers a fair deal. We are in favour of their dismantling, as are most other people in the European Community. I hope that they will be fully dismantled and that those opposed to it will nevertheless agree to its implementation.

Mr. Ashdown: Now that the Prime Minister has had the difference between fantasy and reality forcefully pointed out to her on the identity card scheme, will she assure the House that she will not penalise the banks for pointing out to her that her student loans scheme is equally flawed and equally foolish? After many years of being told that she is not for turning, have we reached the point where the lady is at least for learning?

The Prime Minister: The student loans scheme will enable a number of people to go to university who otherwise could not do so. It will enable them to have loans guaranteed by the Government if their parents do not meet their contribution towards the student grant. Many of them will welcome it. It is a disappointment that the banks are not taking part. That will not damage the scheme, but merely make it more difficult for students to have access to the bank branches.

Q5. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is genuine concern about the political and economic implications of the reunification of Germany? Does she further accept that there is likely to be even more concern surrounding the break-up of the Soviet empire? Will she therefore assure the House, in her usual forthright and robust way, that the defence of the United Kingdom remains safe in her hands?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the implication behind my hon. Friend's question—that times of great uncertainty are just those times when we need to keep our defences, both conventional and nuclear. They will be safe in the hands of this Government and NATO.

With regard to German reunification, the Strasbourg summit of the Economic Community, fully supported by Germany, agreed that that could come about only having regard to the other obligations that have been assumed the four-power agreement on Germany and the Helsinki accord. Reunification could take place only against a background of stability and security, and having regard to NATO, too.

With a regard to the problems that my hon. Friend mentioned—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister must be allowed to answer the question.

The Prime Minister: With regard to my hon. Friend's point about the Soviet Union, we all have great sympathy with Mr. Gorbachev and the problems that he is facing. We fully support him in his progress towards economic and political reform.

Mr. Foot: May I offer the Prime Minister some assistance with the fiasco of the football identity cards? Why does she not follow the example that she set with so many previous fiascos, and put the blame on somebody else? What about the Leader of the House? Should she not ask him why he did not faithfully report to her that, on every occasion that this matter has been debated in the House, the Government's case has been torn to tatters? Or is that what the previous Leader of the House told her, and is that why he had the chop?

The Prime Minister: May I gently inform the right hon. Gentleman that I no more need his assistance now than I did when he was Leader of the Opposition and had the chop?

Q6. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the very existence of a democratic society depends upon the general and total acceptance of the rule of law? Is it not unacceptable and damaging for anyone—irrespective of political opinion—and especially for hon. Members of this House to refuse to pay the community charge, which has been passed into law and is enshrined in an Act of Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. The rule of law is indivisible—one cannot pick and choose those to obey and those to disobey. That would be anarchy. We are a democracy. The law was passed by Parliament, in full Session, and should be obeyed.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I ask the Leader of the House to tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 29 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Employment Bill.

Motion relating to the Welfare Food (Amendment) Regulations.

TUESDAY 30 JANUARY—Opposition Day (4th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock, there will be a debate entitled "People trapped in poverty". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "Implications of the Taylor report for safety at football grounds". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Motions relating to private medical insurance regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 31 JANUARY—Opposition Day (5th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock, there will be a debate entitled "The European Community and developments in eastern Europe". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "Small businesses and the self-employed". Both debates will arise on motions in the name of the Social and Liberal Democrats.

THURSDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock, debate on procedure motions. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Remaining stages of the Civil Aviation Authority (Borrowing Powers) Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

FRIDAY 2 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 5 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on the Royal Navy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

[Relevant documents:

Tuesday 30 January

Private Medical Insurance (Disentitlement to Tax Relief and Approved Benefits) Regulations (SI 1989, No. 2389).

Private Medical Insurance (Tax Relief) Regulations (SI 1989, No. 2387).

Thursday 1 February

Procedure Motions:

Private Members' Motions

Motions for Leave to Bring in Bills, Etc.

New Writs

Public Petitions

Motions for Leave to Bring in Bills, Etc. (Budget Day).]

Dr. Cunningham: Given the continuing serious damage to manufacturing industry, business generally and family incomes caused by the Government's economic policy failures and the continuing high interest rates, will the Leader of the House say when we can have a debate on the Government's public expenditure plans and the economy?

Next Thursday's business is an attempt to create a new climate for private Members' time during business in the House. Will the Leader of the House assure us that the Consumer Guarantees Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), will not be blocked by Ministers in the House tomorrow?

Is the Leader of the House aware that, during the last Session of this Parliament, against all reasonable evidence and argument, we were obliged to spend 110 hours of parliamentary time and great sums of public money on the Football Spectators Act, which is nothing more than the unreasoning obsession of a domineering and out-of-touch Prime Minister?

Is it not now abundantly clear that Ministers, and the Prime Minister in particular, ought to have taken the advice and waited for Lord Justice Taylor's report so that all that parliamentary time and all that public money might not have been expended needlessly? In addition to the promised statement on Monday, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure us that no further work will be carried out, at public expense, on football authorities to be set up under the legislation or on the identity card scheme? Will he ensure that, when his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary comes to the House on Monday, he will make it clear whether or not the Government have proposals to compensate football clubs for the large amounts of unnecessary expenditure that they have been obliged to incur?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friends will have ample opportunity to advance those last points, both by way of questions to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on Monday and, of course, in the debate for which they have asked on Tuesday, which I have already announced. I hope that they will take into account the underlying and most important aspect of all this—the fact that there is widespread, deep national anxiety about the problems to which this legislation was directed, that the problems are much more wide-ranging than those touched upon by the Taylor report, and that a very heavy responsibility rests on those whose duty it will be to implement the recommendations of the report and on the House generally for remedying those situations. All those matters can be investigated in the debates that will take place next week.

So far as the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) is concerned, the hon. Gentleman will have to await the outcome of tomorrow's proceedings.

As to the debate on the public expenditure White Paper, we have already this week had one excellent debate, in which the Chancellor very effectively presented his economic policies to the House and to the country. As I told the hon. Gentleman last week, I hope to arrange, in the relatively near future, yet another debate of that quality on the public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Will my right hon. and learned Friend please give consideration to early-day motion 346?

[That this House notes that 89 per cent. of the doctors in Brentwood and Ongar who responded to a Liberal Democrat survey of general practitioners believe that patients will lose from the proposed health service review and that the same percentage are against general practitioners being able to buy hospital care for their patients in the hospital of their choice, and that 89 per cent. of them also believe that the reforms will place restrictions on their ability to cater for patients with special needs.]

[Mr. Robert Hayward]

Will he also note that early-day motion 347 has been withdrawn today? Will we have an opportunity in Opposition time next Wednesday to discuss the remaining motion on the Order Paper in the context of the SLD motion? The vast majority of hon. Members consider the presence of either of those motions on the Order Paper at any time distasteful.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. The whole House should welcome the fact that early-day motion 347 has been withdrawn. I am sure that the House does not need to be reminded that, although these motions are in order, there are well known conventions about the way in which hon. Members deal with each other in relation to their constituencies. I think that hon. Members on all sides would deprecate the practice of using early-day motions of this kind in the manner complained of.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 367?

[That this House calls upon the Secretary of State for the Home Department to publish the report of the Northamptonshire Police into the policing of Wapping on 24th January 1987.]

The territorial support groups at Wapping were out of control and acted indiscriminately and with sickening brutality and violence. Since then, there has been a three-year cover-up. Does not this show that the idea of the accountability of the Metropolitan Police to this House is a myth, that senior police officers are not answerable to anybody—have, indeed, appeared to do what they like—that they act outside the law, and that when things go wrong, they are not accountable to anybody? Will the Leader of the House please see that this report is published as soon as possible, so that we can have an early debate?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman does not present a fair statement of the position regarding the accountability of the police and the police authorities. This was a confidential report that was prepared and submitted to the independent Police Complaints Authority, the body to which police authorities are accountable. Subject to the need not to prejudice outstanding criminal proceedings —that, too, is a legitimate consideration—the authority intends to publish a full summary of the report, in accordance with its usual practice, as soon as possible. It is right, however, that these other matters should be taken into account. Once the report has been published, the question of a debate can be considered.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the infernal increasing nuisance, particularly to the people of Cambridgeshire, of these wretched acid house parties, the menance of which is growing in many parts of the country, and certainly in Cambridgeshire? Can my right hon. and learned Friend assure me that the Government will place no impediment in the way of the excellent private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) which is designed to stamp out this menace?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I have told the House before, the Government share my hon. Friend's concern about the impact of acid house parties. They made an impact some months ago in my constituency. We shall certainly give the most favourable consideration possible to the Bill to which my hon. Friend refers.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made next week by the Secretary of State for Health on a report today that attendances at a big chain of opticians have dropped by 36 per cent. since charges were introduced nine months ago? Does he recognise that this is something else about which the Government were warned by hon. Members on both sides of the House and that a statement is needed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman draws attention to one aspect of that matter, as he sees it. It is open to him and to his party to raise matters of that kind in the House in the ordinary way.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As the Chinese Government have said that they will make it more difficult for those who are issued with British passports to remain in Hong Kong after 1997, when it is the Government's intention to encourage those people to stay in Hong Kong, could we have an early statement as to the necessary changes in Government policy—in particular how the new policy will accord with the Conservative party's manifesto commitments at the last five general elections?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary addressed that question with clarity and distinction in the House only a few days ago.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that there is an incredible backlog of 90,000 people injured by criminals, who are waiting for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to assess their claims, some of which are urgent? Does the Leader of the House agree that their cases demand immediate attention? May we have a debate next week, please?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman characteristically brings his question fully within the rules of order by asking for a debate next week on the subject. I cannot promise him a debate. However, I understand his continuing concern about the effective operation of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. I shall therefore draw the matter to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): To return to early-day motion 346 and the withdrawn early-day motion 347, is it not totally contemptible that Liberal Members should have exploited the serious illness of two of our hon. Friends? Is there no depth to which the Liberal party will not sink in order to grovel for votes? Should not the whole House condemn the Liberal party? May we have a debate on the subject, in which we can make it quite clear that we are appalled that on their Supply day next week they have not chosen to talk about that early-day motion which they have so contemptibly tabled?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend has made his point forcefully, and I think that his view is widely shared by hon. Members in all parts of the House. When I answered the original question about the matter, I noticed, as other hon. Members will have done, the right hon. Member for

Tweeddale, Etterick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—the erstwhile leader of the Liberal party—nodding his head in agreement with what I was saying. Therefore, I half expected, when he rose to his feet to question me, that he would have made the very point that my hon. Friend has just made. There are still two further opportunities for that.

This is a serious matter. We are talking about our colleagues in this House. All of us are fair game for motions and comments from every direction, subject to certain conventions. In my judgment, and in the judgment of the whole House, what has happened in this case goes beyond those conventions. I am glad to see that the right hon. Gentleman is nodding his head in agreement.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Although I welcome the facts that the Government will be making a statement on the Taylor report on Monday and that there will be a debate initiated by the Opposition on Tuesday, is the Leader of the House aware that for some of us it is not simply a matter of ID cards? More than 90 people in my area were killed in the Hillsborough disaster, and some of us want a full day's debate on the matter.

It is not just a matter of ID cards, as some of us argued against them from the start. We want to ensure that never again will there be such a disaster in which people from Liverpool and elsewhere are killed at football matches. We want a full debate on safety and not just on ID cards. My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench should have asked some of us before they agreed to a half-day debate, as some of us feel that a full day's debate is necessary.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Nobody under-estimates the importance of the matter to the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues who represent Liverpool. However, it is a matter of general national importance. That is why so much time of the House was devoted to it in the last Session, despite the complaints of Opposition Members. The debate next Tuesday will provide an early opportunity to consider the matter very widely in terms of the Opposition motion. We can consider thereafter what further action, by way of debate or anything else, will be necessary.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Can my right hon. and learned Friend arrange an early opportunity for the house to debate the constitutional position of Scotland vis-a-vis the rest of the United Kingdom? The Scottish press is full of stories that taxes in Scotland will be different from those in England and Wales. That is a constitutional matter. There is also the problem of Scotland becoming a guinea pig. Before the Labour party gets the chop for attempting all those things, will my right hon. and learned Friend arrange for an early debate on the matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand my hon. Friend's continuing concern for the welfare of his constituents and the people of Scotland. The press north and south of the border is regularly full of reports of taxes in the minds of Opposition Members. The nation should beware of them in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Scottish Office has now published a consultation document on the management of the North sea white fisheries in 1990? As that document contains complex and detailed recommendations on technical conservation measures, including substantial lay-offs of the fisheries this year without any compensation, and as those recommendations have to go to the European Commission very quickly, will the Leader of the House arrange next week at least a statement of the Government's view, or preferably a debate?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot give such a precise undertaking at this stage, but I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to the views expressed by the hon. Lady.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Could my right hon. and learned Friend arrange for an early Government statement on the Channel tunnel, in view of the financial irregularities and other matters disclosed in today's edition of *Contract Journal*? Is my right hon. Friend aware that Mr. Peter Costain, chairman of the Costain construction company, wrote a letter to the chairman of Eurotunnel accusing Eurotunnel of having made a statement to shareholders which was

"incomplete, inaccurate, and calculated to mislead"?

As that statement resulted in approximately £50 million-worth of gains to Eurotunnel's shares immediately after its publication, and as the statement now appears to have been misleading and inaccurate, does my right hon. and learned Friend not consider that it would be appropriate to draw these matters to the attention of the regulatory authorities, such as the stock exchange and the Department of Trade and Industry?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend realises from the nature of his question, the Channel tunnel is a private sector project and the matters to which he refers arise between the various contractors involved. If and in so far as they deserve further investigation, I shall bring them to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Transport and the regulatory authorities.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Is the Leader of the House aware of the increasing anger throughout the international world about the Prime Minister overruling the Secretary of State for the Environment and allowing the stockpile of ivory in Hong Kong to be sold? Is he aware that half that ivory was illegally poached? As we have lost all credibility with the international environmental movement, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that a statement should be made, enabling us properly to debate the issue, to ensure that the African elephant does not become extinct because of the increasing awkwardness of the Prime Minister in refusing to listen to her Secretary of State for the Environment?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The whole House is concerned about the preservation of he world's elephant stock and understands the importance of the matter, which was not well stated by the hon. Lady. The exception made for Hong Kong is of limited duration and applies to stock already there. It is entirely without prejudice to the more extensive measures designed to ensure the protection of the species.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): My right hon. and learned Friend will not be aware of the tragic case of my constituent, Martin Allsop—he was married, aged 22 and had a child of six months—who was knocked down and

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

killed on a zebra crossing by a drunken driver. At Maidstone Crown court last week, the driver of the car was found guilty of careless driving, fined £250 and banned for two years. In sharing my constituents' disgust at that lamentable sentence, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that time should be made available for the issue of the sentencing of drink-driving offences to be dealt with properly in the House in a thorough debate?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Nobody can doubt the seriousness of the case raised by my hon. Friend, and everyone will extend their sympathy to his constituent's family. I hope that there will be an opportunity before too long for the matter that my hon. Friend raised to be debated, but I cannot say precisely when that will be.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): Will the Leader of the House consider arranging an early debate, or at least a statement from the appropriate Secretary of State, perhaps next week, on the serious issue of the costs to many thousands of people arising from coal-mining subsidence? Many millions of pounds are in the claim pipeline. The Select Committee on Energy reported to the House three years ago, when the time scale for claims had been considerably longer than three or four years. Will he say whether British Coal will at last be moved to act by some pressure from the House or from the Secretary of State?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot promise an instant reaction, because the report was made some time ago. I shall certainly arrange to discuss it at an early date with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): As a fair number of people, some of whom should know better, are beginning to believe that perhaps, given the destabilisation in eastern Europe, NATO and the Western European Union are superfluous, does my right hon. and learned Friend think it important to have a debate before long on the future of NATO and the Western European Union and our involvement in them?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no doubt that the general importance of the subject raised by my hon. Friend is well understood by Conservative Members. He may have an opportunity to raise the matter in next Wednesday's debate, or conceivably in the debate on the following Monday.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): May we have two statements next week on theft? First, may we have a statement on the Government's position following the latest collapse of the insider dealing legislation, which is now a complete shambles after the case at Southwark Crown court earlier this week, which was clearly closely connected with the Government? We need to know whether it will ever be possible to change that legislation so that at least a successful prosecution can be brought for what is out-and-out theft, although the victims are not clearly identifiable.

Secondly, may we have a statement on the organised loophole that the Government deliberately inserted in the poll tax legislation to allow private landlords to pocket the rates of their tenants but not reduce their combined rent and rates? It is not fair that housing benefit should be paid on that basis or that private landlords should be allowed to pocket the rates. That cannot be right, yet that loophole was knowingly left in the Bill, as we know, because it was raised with Ministers in Committee. There is just enough time to clear the matter up. If we do not, private landlords will pocket tens of millions of pounds illegally from 1 April this year.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not able to answer speeches made at business questions; nor is it my function to do so. On the hon. Gentleman's first point, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General will be answering questions on Monday and the hon. Gentleman may have the opportunity of raising the matter with him then.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that Members should ask one question and—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Order. I also remind the House that we have an important debate today. I would therefore ask for brief questions to the Leader of the House.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend say when we shall have a chance to support the Government's wholly justified policy on Hong Kong?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot tell my hon. Friend when there will be a further opportunity to debate this matter, but it has been the subject of a recent report to the House by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who will no doubt keep the House informed.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I press the Leader of the House once again for an opportunity to discuss the Crown immunity that exists in this building, especially in view of the news that Central Lobby has just had to be closed because of the danger posed by the weather? In the interests of the health, safety and welfare of all those who work in the building including our employees, is it not time that we had a debate on Crown immunity?

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): We should adjourn the House—it might fall in.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As the hon. Lady knows, I am already considering particular anxieties—for example, in relation to insurance for Members' employees. She also asked about safety today. A sizeable piece of masonry was blown from the Central Tower into the corner of the hut on the roof down to an inner courtyard. There were no casualties, and that hut was cleared of all occupants. Central Lobby is also closed until the Property Services Agency has ensured that there is no more risk of danger from the Central Tower, and the Parliamentary Works Officer is investigating that with the utmost urgency. I must, however, express the view and hope that today's weather conditions are entirely exceptional.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will be distressed to learn that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) was bitten by a rottweiler early this morning and my right hon. and learned Friend will no doubt wish to give his best wishes for a speedy recovery to my hon. Friend—and to the dog. This raises an important matter, because people are buying ferocious animals for no

other reason than as a status symbol. If not controlled, such animals can maim and savage young children. May we have a debate on this matter reasonably soon?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The whole House will join me in expressing sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), although we may have reservations about the dog. The matter was considered by the House during the passage of legislation last summer. We shall wait to see whether my hon. Friend feels impelled to bring the matter back to the Floor of the House on his return.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Mon): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Wales or the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement to the House in early course about Rail Freight Distribution, a subsidiary of British Rail, and in particular about the conduct of a container service between Holyhead and Dublin which has recently opened and which is being run with a German crew and a German ship? Many of us who are concerned about local employment have been seeking information from the company but it appears to be stonewalling. It will not answer my letters or even return my telephone calls. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman ensure that the company undertakes its responsibilities seriously? It is answerable to the Secretary of State for Transport, and he should conduct an immediate inquiry into its activities.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I can certainly ensure that that point is brought to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Wales.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend find the time soon for a debate on traffic levels, the proposed new road schemes and on public transport generally in south London? Many of my constituents in Norbury, SW16, are worried by the threat to their homes and businesses from possible changes to the A23, so an early opportunity to debate those matters would be greatly appreciated.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I can understand my hon. Friend's anxiety to represent his constituents' anxieties on that matter. My constituency is not very much further down the A23. My hon. Friend can, of course, seek the opportunity of an Adjournment debate, but I shall bring his points to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in any case.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In the course of next week's business, does the Leader of the House intend to lay "forthwith" orders relating to statutory instruments that were taken in Committee? If he does, does he contemplate laying them and asking the House to approve them before the associated *Official Report* of the Committees are available? Would it not be conducive to the good ordering of the House if such orders were not laid until the reports were available, thus avoiding some of the difficulties experienced by the House last night?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not detect that the House had any serious practical difficulty last night on this matter. It has been normal practice for such orders to be laid before the House on the day after the meeting of the Committee. Normally the printing and publication of the report is compatible with that. However, at a time when there is heavy pressure on the resources available for transcribing and printing the necessary material, it has turned out that the report has not been available. I shall certainly see whether anything can be done to remedy that disjointed quality, which is something that we should try to avoid.

Mr Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Notwithstanding the report in today's *Times* that plans are to be prepared in secret, is my right hon. and learned Friend convinced that sufficient Supply days are available to the Opposition to enable them to furnish the House with details of their alternative to the community charge before the bills are issued, or are the Opposition to be allowed to continue to hide under the dangerous maxim that their duty is merely to oppose, not to propose?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I fear that it will prove a difficult task for many of us to discover the answer to the question so rightly raised by my hon. Friend. We have had two debates on the general subject in the past few weeks and neither has added to our enlightenment about the Labour party's plans or proposals. Long may it remain like that, because the British people well understand it.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): As the Leader of the House knows, Scottish Question Time, which is due next week, is televised live by Scottish Television. The right hon. and learned Gentleman also knows that the Lothian health board has suggested that it should attract sponsorship for operations. However, is it true that the Scottish Office has purchased a commercial break for transmission during Scottish Question Time to suggest that people should have their gall bladders removed, sponsored by Michael Forsyth Associates, and get really stitched up?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman's ingenuity may deserve some kind of commendation, but he should not raise that topic on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on early-day motions 303 and——

Mr. Speaker: 303—one early-day motion, please.

Mr. Greenway: Well, 303 or 313—either will do.

Mr. Speaker: One or the other, but not both.

Mr. Greenway: May we have a debate next week on early-day motion 303?

[That this House abhors the prospect of a resumption in the export of horses and ponies to continental abattoirs after 1992; urges the European Community (the European Commission, European Parliament and all member states) to recognise that the ending of British export controls linked to minimum values would mean the rounding up of Dartmoor and other wild ponies for degrading and wholly unfamiliar transport to and across Europe; and calls for changes to proposed European Community measures on the protection of animals during transport, in order to maintain restrictions which avoid cruel treatment to British horses and ponies during long journeys and at continental slaughterhouses.]

It deals with the disturbing situation that will arise after 1992 unless something is done about the export of horses and ponies for brutal slaughter in European abattoirs. The House should give urgent and early attention to these matters to protect equines, as we should protect all animals.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If my hon. Friend wants to bring that matter forthwith to the attention of the House, he can seek an Adjournment debate on it. The Government are already firmly on record as opposing any cruelty to animals during transport. In negotiations within the Community, we shall seek in the future, as in the past, to maintain controls designed to prevent the export of horses and ponies for slaughter.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement on the ambulance dispute next Tuesday from the Secretary of State for Health? On that day, Labour Members such as myself will take part in marches and rallies throughout the country in support of the ambulance workers. Is he aware that, unless the Secretary of State removes the Army and police from the streets of the cities and towns of Britain, withdraws provocative action against the ambulance workers and gives them a decent wage rate, widespread and generalised industrial action of solidarity with the ambulance workers will be undertaken on Tuesday—by workers such as those in several workplaces in Coventry, who have already decided on a half-day strike—and that pressure will only increase? Why does not the Secretary of State do something about solving the dispute by giving the ambulance workers a decent living wage?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman's perception of the matter is entirely the wrong way round. As long as industrial action of the kind that he is prepared to support continues, it will remain the duty of the Government and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health to ensure that alternative arrangements are ready and available to deal with emergencies in a proper way.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): In view of the continuing uncertainty caused by British Rail's failure to announce its final plans for a link from the Channel tunnel to London and beyond, which has brought great distress to the residents of Kent and south-east London, will my right hon. and learned Friend organise a debate in the near future on that extremely important topic?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot undertake to organise a debate. However, I can undertake, as I have done more than once, to bring the anxiety expressed in the House to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and of British Rail.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): May I remind the Leader of the House that almost three years ago, the then Home Secretary was quick enough to come to the House to offer a statement about events at Wapping when he saw it as an opportunity to whip the trade unions and to criticise them and others who were present that night? Given that the report of the Northamptonshire police into events at Wapping is now available, will he give a guarantee that there will be a full statement or, even better, a debate in the House? Is he aware that the matter is of the most fundamental concern, not just to trade unions but for the way in which policing is carried out in London and control by the police of events in which trade unions are involved?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot give a guarantee about how the matter should or will be handled. As I have already told the House, the report of which we now have knowledge was submitted in accordance with the statutory procedures for complaint to the independent Police Complaints Authority. The prospect of publication will be dealt with by the authority in due course in the proper manner. At all times, the House retains the opportunity to debate the matter if any hon. Member can find an opportunity to do so.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): It is now some weeks since my right hon. and learned Friend promised to give consideration to the possibility of a parliamentary debate on the Polkinghorne report. The report has not been discussed in the House. What was the outcome of his considerations?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend knows a great deal about the matter. She will recollect that the Polkinghorne committee considered that legislation was not appropriate because of the need for flexibility. She will also be aware that developmets are taking place quickly. Granted that, the Government decided to promulgate the new code of practice without delay. That is what has happened. It is open to my hon. Friend and to any other hon. Member to seek an opportunity to debate the matter in the House. I shall bear her points in mind, but I cannot go further than that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the lady is for turning, will the Leader of the House organise a statement by the Prime Minister next week on the changes to the poll tax, so that we can dismiss rumours of the possibility that educational salaries will be taken away from the poll tax charge before its implementation in April? If he cannot do that, will he appoint an inquiry into the working of the poll tax, in view of the many changes? Perhaps he could put Lord Justice Taylor in charge.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is testing his capacity for fancifulness to destruction. The community charge has been debated here many times in recent weeks, and there will be two opportunities for discussing the Taylor report next week. The matters should be kept well separate from each other.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Would my right hon. and learned Friend arrange a debate on the creation of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland? As he is aware, there is an urgent need to provide a satisfactory way of dealing with Northern Ireland parliamentary business, and the old Northern Ireland Committee is no substitute.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand my hon. Friend's natural and continued concern with this matter. As he will understand, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Ireland—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ireland?"]—Northern Ireland —has often underlined his willingness to talk to hon. Members on that matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call those hon. Members who are standing. May I remind hon. Members for Scottish constituencies that there is a debate on Scotland following this? They may consider that it could jeopardise their chances if we take up more time now on business questions.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating President Moi of Kenya on today destroying a substantial stock of rhino horn seized from poachers and destroying it, just as

he destroyed the ivory which was seized from poachers? President Moi deserves our congratulations, and I hope that the Leader of the House will agree that he deserves financial support from the Government for the actions that he has taken.

It would be most helpful, because there are disputes about the effect of the Government's decision to allow Hong Kong ivory on to the world market, for us to have a debate on this issue in view of the great amount of international concern. Is the Leader of the House aware that, despite what he said earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), the ivory dealers in Hong Kong are asking for the six-month moratorium to be extended to two years? We must debate the matter urgently.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If we do not debate it, it will not be for want of trying by the hon. Gentleman. I will certainly keep the matter in mind.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Could we have time for a debate about the judiciary? I know that there are limitations about removing members of the judiciary recently, but I think that the House ought to have a look at that again and make time for a debate. Many people are concerned that some judges, and one judge in particular, Judge Pickles, displays a continuing arrogance in asserting that he cannot——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has already said that he cannot say that. Now he has. Perhaps he would withdraw it.

Mr. Cryer: I will rephrase my remarks, Mr. Speaker. Some people are very concerned that, although there is a Criminal Injuries Compensation Board for the victims of crime, there seems to be no compensation for people who are sent to prison for contempt, who appeal and who are released immediately. It is time that this injustice, meted out by some members of the judiciary—including one in particular, whom I shall not name—should not go on without any discussion by the legislature to make sure that this arrogance is brought to an end.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that if there is a matter of some substance there that he wishes to raise, there is almost an infinity of ways in which he can raise it properly and within the rules of order, rather than in this somewhat curious fashion during the course of business questions.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House turn his attention to early-day motion 379 on access to the palace of Westminster?

[That this House is concerned at the continuing lack of facilities for visitors to the Palace of Westminster; and calls for urgent changes to prevent visitors having to wait outside merely to enter the building, access to refreshment facilities that do not require the attendance of an honourable Member or pass holder and urgent changes to give full access to those who suffer from disabilities, including full wheelchair access to all parts of the building.]

Will he arrange for a statement urgently about improving visitors' access, so that they are not waiting outside in the rain and in the cold to get in here, and so that they can get refreshments without having to be accompanied by hon. Members? Most important, since the House has quite rightly passed legislation on access to public buildings for people with disabilities, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that we do not have this nonsense of people in wheelchairs finding it extremely difficult to get in or park their vehicles and suffering great humiliation merely in entering the House to attend any sort of meeting? It really is not on that the House should legislate for the rest of the country and not apply the legislation to itself.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman must realise that any holder of my present job readily becomes aware of the large number of shortcomings in the facilities available to hon. Members and members of the public. The House endeavours to improve these things: for example, we recently agreed, although we have not yet implemented, improved access to the line of route, and, for disabled visitors, we have been making some improvements to this ancient building as far and as fast as possible. But I would not pretend that there are not many other matters which deserve attention and to which the House ought to strive to address itself with increasing application. We cannot expand the site beyond its existing limitations. We cannot transform or transplant the site, but we need to apply ourselves fully to the questions raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Does the Leader of the House realise that, on a day very much like today 231 years ago in Alloway, Ayrshire, the world's most famout poet was born? Does he further realise that tonight throughout the world Scots and non-Scots alike will be celebrating his memory and will be lamenting the lack of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? Will the Leader of the House therefore undertake to apply himself vigorously next week to setting up such a committee and abandon his "man's inhumanity to man" stance?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Burns also said:

> "Be Britain still to Britain true,
> Among ourselves united".

That is a sentiment that also deserves reflection.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that last week my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) had an Adjournment debate on chatlines. It was unfortunate that the Minister, in response to requests from both sides of the House that the Government should take action to make these sexually perverted chatlines unlawful, said that the Government would not take action. Will the Leader of the House ask his colleagues in the Cabinet to think again and to support measures from private Members, if not from the Government, to make these disgraceful chatlines unlawful?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot promise to take consideration further than was promised by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs only a few days ago. The matter is receiving, and will continue to receive, proper consideration.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Could the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement to the House on the reason why Bishopton Royal Ordnance factory has to lose a laboratory and the 26 jobs that go with it after the the magnificent case and battle put up by Royal Ordnance workers throughout the country to keep jobs in

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

Bishopton? Will the Leader of the House listen to the pleas of the people of Scotland? Enough is enough; they have suffered too much unemployment. The Government can stop this deliberate creation of further unemployment in my area.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I will certainly bring the point raised by the hon. Gentleman to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. On the wider question that he raised of employment and unemployment in Scotland, he will have observed the presence in the House of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who continues effectively to conduct economic policy which enhances the growth of employment in Scotland, as it has done for some time under the Government.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Could the Leader of the House arrange for the appropriate Minister to make a statement to the House next week on the state of the ambulance dispute in my constituency? Today, ambulance workers set up an emergency service with its own telephone number, which has been disconnected unilaterally by the Scottish ambulance service, despite the Arctic conditions prevailing in my constituency, where many roads are blocked. If people telephone that number, they will not even get a recorded message to dial 999. Can the Leader of the House do something by bringing someone here and showing that the Government, in making a statement next week, have concern for the people?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is for the local ambulance service management to decide how to respond to matters of the kind referred to by the hon. Gentleman. For everybody —above all, for the leaders of the unions concerned—the urgent and correct answer is to secure a return to normal working as soon as possible.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTION ON MONDAY, 12 FEBRUARY

Members successful in the ballot were:
Mr. Keith Vaz
Mr. Michael Martin
Mr. Peter L. Pike

Points of Order

4.18 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. While the news that lumps of masonry are falling off the House may be a cause for celebration in some parts of the country, no doubt with the added hope that some of us do not get out before the whole thing comes down, it is a serious matter. Further to the welcome statement by the Leader of the House, should we not discuss the matter urgently? Obviously it results from the neglect of the fabric of the building, which is symptomatic of a wider neglect of investment for the House. May I encourage the Leader of the House to bring forward new thinking on exactly the manner and way in which we finance the services and facilities of Parliament?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): That is rather an ingenious point of order, but the hon. Gentleman is not unknown for such an approach to these matters. One should not conclude that the sort of damage taking place in today's storm conditions necessarily signifies lack of maintenance, because many other buildings are suffering in the same way from the exceptional weather conditions —which, I am told, are likely to abate as the evening moves on. We shall ensure that the House authorities continue to do what they can in relation to what may happen, and we shall warn hon. Members of further hazards. Yes, I do attach importance to ensuring that we get the best possible arrangements for the management, not only of the building but of other aspects of the Palace of Westminster as a whole, including the House.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the debate on schools yesterday, when summing up—as reported in *Hansard,* column 942—the Minister of State implied that I was an adviser to the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association. In no way am I an adviser—either voluntary or paid—to that association.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I must warn the House that we have an important debate ahead of us.

Mr. King: I will be brief, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that, yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) and I raised the matter of an incident involving three Labour Members which was dealt with. Since then, have you received any report from the Serjeant at Arms about an altercation which took place in the Lobby that evening involving my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)? I have had the opportunity to drop a note to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East who is clearly not about the House at the moment. I understand that the incident consisted of some physical and verbal abuse. Have you, Mr. Speaker, received any reports about it? Was it picked up by the video cameras in the House?

Mr. Speaker: It is the first that I have heard of it.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure this point will appeal to you as our

employer. Suggestions have been made about the fabric of the building collapsing and there has been a request to the Leader of the House to make alternative arrangements, because of the lack of accommodation here, should the building have to be closed.

However, only this week we were given to understand that a large building opposite, on the other side of the river, which would have been ideal for accommodating Members today, has been sold to private enterprise. Should the wind and hurricane start blasting off more of the roof of this building, you, Mr. Speaker, will have the responsibility of safeguarding Members' interests because you are our employer. I do not know whether employer's liability is involved in this matter, but you are our employer and it is your responsibility. I hope that you will take action.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have an important debate in front of us. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am not his employer, but I do have a concern for the safety and welfare of Members. However, I am not responsible for the weather.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Further to the point of order of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), Mr. Speaker. I can confirm that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East was last night feeling tired and upset about the points of order raised, there was physical contact between him and me and he uttered some words of abuse. However, I have no scratches on me today. I understand that I am in a long line of Welsh Members who have received the same treatment, including Lord Callaghan of Cardiff. I certainly do not wish to take the matter further.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us not take anything further. We have an important debate ahead.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that he is doing a disservice to his colleagues in Scotland who are waiting to have an important debate on the community charge. However, I will hear him.

Mr. Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you agree that, if hon. Members wish to raise on points of order matters concerning the conduct of, or anything else about, other hon. Members, common courtesy requires them to advise the hon. Members to whom they intend to refer of their intention? *[Interruption.]* If I may say so, nothing would suit the hon. member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) better than a good thrashing.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us get on to a good debate.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have heard of lager louts, we have had Tea Room tantrums and now we have Lobby louts. Can we be protected from such shipboard manners as we proceed through the Lobbies?

Mr. Speaker: Let us get on with the business of the House.

Housing and Local Government (Scotland)

4.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.

Mr. Speaker: I suggest that it will be convenient to debate at the same time the following four motions:

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2310), dated 7th December 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th December, be annulled.

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st December, be approved.

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1990, dated 8th January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th January, be approved.

The debate, as the House knows, must conclude at 7 o'clock. I therefore appeal to hon. Members who are seeking to be called in the debate to speak briefly. Then, with any luck, it may be possible to call all of them.

Mr. Rifkind: This is the annual opportunity for the House to debate the revenue support grant and housing support grant orders affecting Scottish local authorities. It is our tradition not only to deal with the details of the orders but to use this as an opportunity to comment on some of the wider matters that arise out of the provision made by the orders.

Because of the time available, I shall speak briefly to the orders and then make some wider comments on matters relevant to them. I hope that that will enable the debate to move forward.

I start with the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1990, about which I need say little. It deals with the interest rate assumptions for local authority borrowing. In the original order, there had been an assumption of a 10·2 per cent. interest rate. As it turned out, the average interest rate for local authorities has been 10·5 pr cent. The consequence of that has been an increase of grant payable to local authorities, which will now be £65·3 million instead of £60·4 million.

The main instrument, the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1990, sets out the amounts of housing support grant to Scottish local authorities for 1990-91. It provides for a total of £59·6 million to be given to 21 local authorities.

In determining the level of housing support grant, I am required to reach a view as to the difference between the estimate of relevant expenditure and the estimate of relevant income for local authorities' housing accounts. There are essentially two components to expenditure—the loan charges that local authorities are likely to incur and the management and maintenance expenditure in which they will wish to involve themselves.

At present, we estimate that loan charges will be 10·2 per cent.—the average rate of interest—but if that turns out to be inaccurate, then, in the same way as this year, there will be a variation order, which is the normal practice.

[Mr. Rifkind]

For management and maintenance, which is an important aspect, for 1990-91 there is a per house allowance of £407, an increase of 12·5 per cent. in the assumption that we are making of the resources that local authorities will wish to provide for the management and maintenance of their housing stock. I am pleased to say that this is the fourth year in succession that we have been able to put forward a figure well in excess of inflation, recognising the desirability of local authorities improving the management and maintenance of their housing stock, in the interests of their tenants and of housing as a whole.

On the income side, we are assuming, for purposes of housing support grant, a relevant income that is based on rents increasing by £2·37 per house per week. That is an increase of 12·5 per cent., exactly the same as the assumption for management and maintenance.

I should emphasise that that is simply an assumption that the Government make to ensure equity in the distribution of housing support grant. It is a matter entirely for the discretion of local authorities whether they wish to work on the basis of the assumptions that the Government have made or whether, in respect of rents or management and maintenance expenditure, they wish to provide for a higher or lower figure. Local authorities have total discretion in the matter, without any penalty from central Government as a result of whatever decision they choose to take. Because, for most authorities, loan charges are not expected to rise significantly above 1989-90 levels, most local authorities can increase their management and maintenance expenditure by significantly more than they increase their rents. That will be true even of those authorities that receive housing support grant. I therefore would not expect average rents to increase by anything like 12·5 per cent.

I should also mention that our proposals for limiting general fund contributions in 1990-91 are based on a proposition that they should be limited to £2·8 million. It is our view that the extent to which the community charge payer should be expected to subsidise council house rents should be at the lowest practicable level. The House will be aware that the sums available have been steadily reduced over the past few years.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): On the general fund contribution, I draw the Secretary of State's attention to a matter of concern in my constituency and a problem facing East Kilbride district council. Representations have been made to the Secretary of State and to the Scottish Office about the 58-bed single persons' unit at Lindsay house in East Kilbride. That hostel runs at a deficit of £60,000, which must be borne by 1,138 council house tenants in East Kilbride. That works out at £1·01 per week for each council house tenant.

The district council does not receive any entitlement to transfer from the general fund to meet that deficit. Will the Secretary of State give further consideration to the representations made by the district councils and allow all poll tax payers in the district to meet the deficit that has been run up on that unit?

Mr. Rifkind: I am certainly willing to give consideration to the hon. Gentleman's point. However, as he knows, it is a basic principle that there should be a proper balance on the housing account. All local authorities, not just East Kilbride, are expected to balance from their income the expenditure that they incur. Only if there was a good reason why East Kilbride should be exempted from that proposition would it be appropriate to apply different rules from those that are traditionally applied to other local authorities.

Mr. Ingram: A special set of circumstances is applicable to East Kilbride. The bulk of public sector housing is run and operated by the development corporation. I repeat that there are only 1,138 district council tenants within the conurbation of East Kilbride. Those circumstances warrant proper examination.

Mr. Rifkind: I note what the hon. Gentleman has said, and obviously we shall have an opportunity to study his remarks in due course.

On the basis of forecast loan charges, and assuming that each authority increases its management and maintenance spending by 12·5 per cent. per house above last year's levels, our calculation is that local authority rents would need to be increased from their present average level of £18·80 per house by about £1·38. That would represent an increase of 7·3 per cent. That is what local authorities would need to do; whether they choose to do that or to opt for a much higher figure is a matter entirely for them.

Where authorities have opted for a much higher level, it is almost invariably because of the covenant arrangements that some local authorites have established. I understand that Edinburgh district council is proposing a rent increase of £3·50. It should be clearly understood in Edinburgh, as well as in the House, that that is a consequence not of the level of Government support, but of the covenant arrangements that that local authority, along with others such as Glasgow and Dundee, chose to enter into, to finance capital investment above and beyond the levels of capital allocations. As a consequence of that, such authorities may have to contemplate higher rent increases.

The Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1989 deals with the errors that were made by Strathclyde regional council in the figures that it submitted to the Scottish Office in respect of two authorities—Strathkelvin and Argyll and Bute. The effect of the error was to reduce Strathkelvin's grant entitlement in the current year by £323,000. The error did not affect Argyll and Bute's overall grant position in 1989-90, but it did affect the proportion of grant that the authority received from the safety net for that year. If a correction had not been made, that would have reduced the amount of safety netting that Argyll and Bute would receive in 1990-91 by almost £320,000. The order will restore to Strathkelvin the under-allocation of £323,000. That will be achieved by marginal reductions in grant for most other local authorities.

The purpose of the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1990 is to implement the distribution of the sum of £2,479·3 million, which was the figure announced by me in the House on 26 July last. I remind the House that at an earlier stage of our deliberations the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—COSLA—said that it hoped that the Scottish Office would provide for a 7 per cent. increase in grant. COSLA considered that that would be acceptable as it would meet the requirements of local authorities. The figures that I announced in July met that requirement to the letter. They provided for a 7 per cent.

increase, and, of course, there has since been a further increase because of the £30 million safety net fund that the Treasury is providing through the Scottish Office, to those local authorities. Together with specific grants, that means an overall increase of 8·2 per cent. There are two stages in the process of the distribution of these resources. First, an amount is distributed among authorities to equalise differences in their grant-aided expenditure, which is determined by the client group assessment approach. The rest of the grant is distributed on a per capita basis.

I should like to deal briefly with the safety netting principle. I remind the House that COSLA said that there should be no safety net at all, either last year or thereafter. Hon. Members from Glasgow and Strathclyde constituencies, who occasionally deem fit to criticise the effect on their local authorities of the running down of the safety net, might like to reflect on the fact that if we had accepted the advice of COSLA, which they normally like to support, there would have been no safety net at all right from the very beginning. So, if criticism is to be the order of the day, I trust that it will be directed towards the right quarter.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Not at all.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman says, "Not at all." That does not reflect his customary sense of fairness, but perhaps it reflects his realisation of where the strength of the argument lies.

In this, its second year, the safety net will add up to £30 million. The main beneficiaries will be Strathclyde region and Glasgow district, which will receive extra grant totalling £17·1 million and £10·4 million respectively. However, I emphasise that this year those grants will not be at the expense of local authorities in other parts of Scotland, many of which have benefited significantly from the fact that there is no longer a requirement to fund the safety net of Strathclyde and Glasgow and one or two other authorities.

In July I said that, in the light of this generous settlement, there should be no need for many authorities —indeed, most authorities—to consider an increase in the community charge above the rate of inflation. I stated that, in respect of a number of authorities, there would be a powerful case for reducing the community charge when they came to settle the proposals for the forthcoming year. That process has not yet been concluded, but it is interesting to see that, already, a significant number of authorities appear to have reached a similar conclusion. On the basis of the figures that we have currently, it is clear that in the case of quite a number of local authorities, the community charge will be reduced—not just not increased, but actually reduced.

I think, for example, of Ettrick and Lauderdale district council, where there will be a reduction of 4·76 per cent.; Falkirk district council, a zero increase; Grampian regional council, minus 5·29 per cent.; Gordon district council, minus 2·27 per cent.; Badenoch and Strathspey district council, minus 34·29 per cent.; and Eastwood district council, minus 30·16 per cent. In many of those cases, of course, there could have been even greater reductions without any effect on services. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that important progress has been made on that front.

Inevitably, there are one or two other local authorities that choose to spoil the general picture. The House will not be surprised if I make reference to them. I shall not dwell for long on what might, at first glance, appear to be the greatest sinner of them all. I notice from the list that I have —at present it is a proposal—that in the case of one local authority, at district council level there is a proposal to increase the community charge by no less than 116 per cent. That might imply a wicked imposition on the local electorate, but when I look further I find that it is Sutherland district council, whose community charge in the current year was the princely sum of £6 per head, which it is proposing to increase to £13 per head. I do not want to give the impression that even an increase of £7 is acceptable or can be defended, but I acknowledge that that authority is not entirely comparable with others.

However, the same cannot be said for some other authorities, such as Stirling district council and Edinburgh district council.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): In order to put the figures that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is about to give us in context, along with the political comments that he will no doubt make, will he tell us who controls Sutherland district council? Is it the Labour party or the aptly named independents, who everybody knows are the Scottish equivalent of the Conservative party?

Mr. Rifkind: I would like to believe that it was the Scottish equivalent of the Conservative party, but I am not sure that Councillor Jamieson, the vice-president of COSLA, who sits as an independent, would agree with that description.

Sutherland is not a Conservative-controlled authority because, if it were, it would not be contemplating a 100 per cent. increase in the community charge. That seems to be a fairly conclusive argument.

I was about to refer to authorities that are going for substantial increases, for which they will have to account to their local electorate. Stirling district council, an authority that had an increase in grant and non-domestic rate income for the year that is about to begin of no less than 20 per cent., instead of reducing its community charge, or even maintaining it, starts off with the second highest community charge in Scotland at district council level and is proposing an increase of some 18 per cent. in order to fund new expenditure.

Edinburgh district council, my local authority, has approved an increase of some 24 per cent. I see that no Edinburgh Labour Members are in the Chamber today, and I am not surprised because they will not be anxious to defend that decision——

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): I am anxious that fairness should be done. Is it not the case that my hon. Friends from Edinburgh are occupied with the important issue of Ferranti, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks might just be the cheapest of shots?

Mr. Rifkind: That might be convincing if the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) had not just walked into the Chamber.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South) *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but he might like to wait until he has heard what I am about to say about his fraternal colleagues, when I am sure that he will wish to intervene in order to make his views known.

[Mr. Rifkind]

Before there is any suggestion that Edinburgh's Labour-controlled district council's 24 per cent. increase in the community charge—which enables it to retain the unenviable position of having the highest community charge in Scotland, combined with the Labour-controlled regional council—was due to the level of Government grant, the hon. Gentleman might like to be aware of the explanation given by his colleague, Councillor Mark Lazarowicz, who explained that extraordinary increase by saying that it was regrettable but that the council had a commitment to provide good service and that it proposed to increase expenditure on the staffing of new sports centres and libraries, and on grants to various other organisations.

Councillor Vestri of Edinburgh district council, talking of the rent increase of £3·50, said:

"No one wants to increase rents but we have no alternative. The rise will include an increase in spending on repairs and maintenance".

He went on to say:

"The problem, of course, was that the amount to which the council could subsidise the rents had been reduced by the Government."

Councillor Lazarowicz said that as well. If it had not been reduced by the Government, the community charge increase would have been not 24 per cent. but 34 per cent., as a consequence of the authority's profligacy.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I wanted to take this opportunity Madam Deputy Speaker, to apologise to you and to Mr. Speaker for coming late to the debate, when I had said that I hoped to catch your eye. The reason for my lateness is that the figures that I intend to use to rebut some of the Secretary of State's arguments were in my room, which was locked because of the masonry falling off the roof of the building. It has taken me half an hour to persuade the Serjeant at Arms' office, which is hard pressed, to unlock that door.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) is a member of the Committee presently considering the Broadcasting Bill, and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) is dealing with the Ferranti matter, which is of pressing importance, not just to him but, I am sure, to the Secretary of State and his colleagues.

I shall come to a defence of Edinburgh, and a stout defence at that, and will refer to the Secretary of State's figures and his appalling meanness towards his city if I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Rifkind: Methinks the hon. Gentleman doth protest too much. The House is fascinated to know where some of his hon. Friends are, but we were waiting in eager anticipation to know where the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) was; clearly the hon. Gentleman has not been given such information, for reasons on which we can speculate.

We shall all be interested to know whether Edinburgh district council and Stirling district council, in proposing such massive increases, appear to be following the advice of one Labour local authority in the south of the United Kingdom, which encouraged Labour local authorities to set their charges

"at the highest you can get away with."

That is clearly the aspiration of Labour local authorities.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The Secretary of State obviously has a clear idea of Edinburgh district council's requirements. Therefore, will he tell us which of the budgets that were debated at the meeting of the Tory group on Edinburgh district council yesterday he supports? Does he support the views of the leader of the Tory group, who is somewhat fancifully represented in *The Scotsman* today as the leader of the Left faction, or does he support Mr. Paul Martin, who triumphed over the leader and put forward a budget that contains even more cuts in services?

Mr. Rifkind: The proposals before the group involved a substantial reduction in the community charge compared with the Labour party's proposal. I should have been content if either had been adopted by the district council, as would the community charge payers in Edinburgh.

I am conscious of the fact that Her Majesty's Opposition are in the process yet again of trying to find an alternative to the community charge and to the domestic rates that it replaced. We have had a pretty miserable saga over the past couple of years, as the Labour party has twisted and turned from one option to another before abandoning each and desperately looking for a new solution. We started off with a Labour party committed to the retention of the rating system, believing that somehow it was preferable to the alternative. Then it came up with the rather extraordinary idea that one unpopular tax should be replaced by two unpopular taxes and we had the proposition that there should be a property tax and a local income tax as an alternative to the community charge.

The Leader of the Opposition made a most delightful comment on the proposition of two taxes to replace one, when in *The Guardian* on 21 September last year, he said:

"What we are contemplating may involve a tax based on the value of property supplemented by a small, a very small, local income tax".

That is rather like the housemaid's baby. As long as it is very small, it is somehow considered acceptable. But clearly that view has since been repudiated by the Labour party, because it is now telling us that that has been abandoned. Earlier this week we heard that the Labour party is to come forward with a proposal for a property tax based on the capital value of property as opposed to the rateable value, which would be supplemented in some form or fashion by reference to income.

Dr. Reid *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I shall give way in a moment.

We shall all be intrigued to know whether there is any truth in the report in *The Scotsman*, which said:

"Labour is to adopt a different poll tax alternative in Scotland than in the rest of Britain."

If I were a more suspicious and uncomplimentary sort of fellow, I might have accused the Labour party of wishing to treat Scotland as some sort of guinea pig, some sort of experiment, with Scotland being treated differently from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. That is a most extraordinary proposition and I find it difficult to believe that it can seriously represent the views of Opposition Members. However, that is what it says in *The Scotsman* and Mr. McLoughlin is a well-recognised and respectable correspondent, and if he says that Labour intends to adopt a different alternative in Scotland from that in the rest of Britain, presumably he has been in receipt of some

information from the Labour party. Perhaps the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) will tell us whether Mr. McLoughlin is correct.

Dr. Reid: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman has already entered his statutory attack on the Labour party, I assume that he has finished saying anything of substance about his Government's policies. I apologise, however, as I want to drag him back to those policies. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is so keen on having uniformity of taxation throughout the United Kingdom, why has he not mentioned poll tax capping in his speech—I may have missed his reference to it—as such capping will certainly be employed in England and Wales? The raison d'etre of the poll tax was to make councillors accountable to the electorate, so that if those councillors increased the poll tax, they would be held accountable. Why does the operation of such a tax apparently now merit interference from the Government? Such interference will remove accountability, as the local electorate will be told that their duly elected councillors will be unable to raise the poll tax to the required or suitable level because the Government will then cap that authority. Will such capping operate in Scotland?

Mr. Rifkind: I note that the hon. Gentleman is reluctant to comment on the Labour party's policy, but I have every intention of pursuing that matter. However, the hon. Gentleman—will be aware that the statutory basis for intervention in Scotland is different from that south of the border. In Scotland, the Secretary of State can intervene only if he is satisfied that the proposed expenditure of a local authority is excessive and unreasonable. If the believes that that is so, he tables an order before the House. That has happened in previous years, but it did not happen in the current years under the new system. It is for the House to consider whether such an order is appropriate, but such action can be considered only when the budgets of the local authorities have been duly analysed.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will there be capping?

Mr. Rifkind: I cannot comment now on whether there will or will not be any capping. In the past, I have said that I should be extremely reluctant to take action against local authorities, as I believe that, under the arrangements for much greater accountability, it is primarily for the electorate to pass their verdict on a local authority.

Parliament still provides for action to be taken, if the House so approves, but I cannot contemplate whether such action would be appropriate until the local authority budgets have been considered.

Dr. Reid: It is important to clarify this issue. Was the right hon. and learned Gentleman searching for the word "yes"? Will poll tax capping be used in Scotland? Under the different circumstances that prevail in Scotland, will circumstances arise under which he will take a course of action entirely opposite to the essence of the poll tax, which he introduced in the first place?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman knows that that power remains on the statute book. I did not deem it appropriate to use it in the current year and I have already said that I should be reluctant to use it in the future, for the reasons given. Any final decision cannot be taken now, at the end of the previous financial year and the hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well.

Let us return, as promised, to the alternatives to the community charge. We are told that it would be a property tax based on the capital values of properties in Scotland. If the Labour party were to continue with such a proposition, it would make the controversy over the community charge look like a General Assembly garden party in comparison.

Such a tax would be a most appalling innovation in several respects. First, it would be a recipe for an explosion in local tax payments. As we know, property values have soared over the years, and under a system where one's liabilities were based on the value of one's house, one's local tax obligations would also soar. Secondly, such a tax would be a tax on home improvements. People seeking to improve their homes, especially the 170,000 council tenants who, having bought their homes from their local authorities have, in many cases, initiated substantial improvements to them, would find that they were faced with a massive increase in their tax obligations to their local authorities.

To seek to discourage young married couples from improving their lot and that of their families is an extraordinary proposition. If they should build an extra room for their growing families, erect a garage or install central heating to keep the family warm in winter, it will not only cost them in terms of providing such facilities, but the Labour party will tax them more heavily as a consequence.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn) *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, as I cannot believe that he would want to support such an inequitable proposition.

Mr. Martin: I am glad that the right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned young couples' ability to get homes. In the high-demand areas of my community, local authority houses are now changing hands at £30,000 a time, but he will know that those houses were acquired by the sitting tenants for £7,000. Young couples who are on the dole cannot obtain a local authority home in the area in which they were brought up, because they cannot afford such prices. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should study the problem to see whether he can find any answers.

Mr. Rifkind: I shall be happy to look at that problem if the hon. Gentleman will inform his constituents that, under his party's proposal, the tax that they would pay to their local authority would be based not on the £7,000 that they paid for their council houses, but on the £30,000 which the hon. Gentleman says such houses are now deemed to be worth. I am sure that his constituents will not thank him for advocating a proposition that would result in an explosion in the amount of tax that they would pay to their local authorities. Such tax increases would also be faced elsewhere in Scotland.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): If that proposal was put forward, there would be another triumph for the Labour party, particularly the Scottish Labour party—that since property prices in Scotland are so much lower than they are in the south-east of England, that region would be taxed at a much lower rate.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. and learned Friend is right.

Several factors are associated with the Labour party's proposal and, so far, I have mentioned two. The third is the hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland who did not pay rates because they were not owner-occupiers or tenants, but who are now contributing to the community charge. Under the Labour party's proposal, they would once again, be exempt from any direct contribution to the cost of local government. The sums that such people currently pay under the community charge would have to be borne again, as they were under the rating system, by the minority——

Dr. Reid: The poor would be exempt.

Mr. Rifkind: No, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. Those exempted would include many young adult sons and daughters who would be in receipt of a much greater income than their elderly next-door neighbours. Under the Labour party's proposal, those young people would not make a penny contribution to the revenues raised by local authorities.

It appears that the Labour party wants us to return to the time when hundreds and thousands of young adults, on good incomes and in employment, were exempt from making a contribution simply because they were living with their parents or in someone else's house. Such an attitude is fundamentally unfair.

Fourthly, the Labour party's proposal would represent a tax on the elderly. The longer one lives in one's own home, the more its value will increase and the more one's taxes will increase, irrespective of whether one is retired or not. Furthermore, there would be no question of a pensioner's tax contribution being halved when his spouse died—such an exemption operates under the community charge. Under the Labour party's proposal, the remaining partner would continue to make the maximum contribution based on the value of the home.

Fifthly, we would return to the days of revaluation on a regular basis, with all the horrors that that produced. I speak with some feeling on that matter; should the Opposition introduce a system that required regular revaluations, they would live to rue that day.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Secretary of State accept that he is building a rather melodramatic fantasy on the basis of a third of a column in *The Scotsman*?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the report is entirely inaccurate and that the Labour party does not intend to propose an alternative based on capital values, we shall look forward to hearing more. The hon. Gentleman says that what I have said is a melodramatic fantasy. If the Labour party is not proposing a capital value-based local tax, I shall happily withdraw the accusation. But if it is, then, by the hon. Gentleman's own words, it is a melodramatic fantasy. That is a most interesting description.

Mr. Wilson: Although I am unable to aspire to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's legal sleight of tongue, there is a great difference between a system based on capital values and what he has spun out of it, for it bears no relation to anything that the Labour party is ever likely to put forward. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has constructed something in order then to knock it down.

Mr. Rifkind: We look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman explain why it is that a tax based on capital values would not increase a person's liability to tax if he improved his home and thereby increased its capital value. We shall also look forward to hearing him explain how, under a system based on capital values, people who live in somebody else's house will cease to make any contribution to local taxes. We look forward to hearing how the elderly will be protected. I am aware that reports imply that the Labour party admits the inherent unfairness of a tax based solely on capital values and that it has suggested that it will also wish to take account of income. The Labour party, we understand, would modify tax liability on the grounds of income, but what about savings? The elderly rely primarily on savings. I hope that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) will say whether savings, too, will be exempt.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State is weaving fantasies about what he thinks *The Scotsman* thinks the Labour party's policies might be. Am I not right in thinking that the debate is supposed to be about the level of poll tax and rents which he, the minority Secretary of State for Scotland, seeks to impose on the people of Scotland? Will you please ask him to direct his remarks to the reality of life in Scotland rather than to his fantasies?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have wide-ranging debates on such motions.

Mr. Galloway *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to catch my eye. He is not going the right way about it. I also remind the Opposition that they will have an opportunity to refute the arguments in due course.

Mr. Rifkind: The House, and the people of Scotland, will be aware of the sensitivity—the raw nerve—that I appear to have touched, such is the reluctance of the Opposition to have their policies examined and considered. I am surprised that my modest comments about what I presume the Labour party firmly believes will be wildly popular throughout the length and breadth of Scotland should have given rise to accusations of irrelevance, unfairness, misrepresentation and all sorts of other terrible sins.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North) *rose*——

Mr. Galloway *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: Opposition Members are anxious to tell me what a popular tax this will be. I happily give way to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), who no doubt wishes to say that.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I am anxious to point out to the Secretary of State that in a debate which is to end at 7 o'clock he has spent 30 of the 35 minutes of his speech explaining what he thinks is Labour party policy. He has spent only five minutes on the subject of the debate. I know that he tries to be a fair-minded Secretary of State for Scotland, but it is carrying matters a little far, to cover his blushes, deficiencies and embarrassment, not to bother to make the case for his own orders.

Mr. Rifkind: I have spent half my time responding to Opposition interventions. They would have been the first to criticise me if I had declined to give way. I sense the Labour party's embarrassment. We shall have many other opportunities to consider its policies. I look forward to hearing the Oppositions's version of them.

As for the alleged non-payment of the community charge, I know that a number of Opposition Members have a personal pecuniary interest in it, either because they have or have not paid it. We shall no doubt wish to identify which hon. Members have or have not paid the community charge.

It has been suggested by the Labour party and the Scottish National party that the levels of non-payment of the community charge in Scotland give a message to the Government and to the wider public. If they examined what happened under the old rating system, they would find that at this time of the year local authorities, including Strathclyde regional council, issued summary warrants to almost exactly the same number of non-payers of domestic rates——

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Apples and oranges.

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I shall happily give way to him. Apples and oranges are fruit, so they have a considerable amount in common.

Mr. Sillars: They are different kinds of fruit.

Mr. Rifkind: Of course they are different, and domestic rates and the community charge are different. However, when it comes to some people preferring not to pay their taxes, there appears to be a great similarity between them. In Strathclyde, 15 per cent. of those who were liable to pay domestic rates directly to the regional council declined to do so at this time of the year and received summary warrants. It is an interesting coincidence that, at this time of the year, 15 per cent. of community charge payers have similarly declined to pay it.

Before the Scottish National party grows too excited, I ought to say to the SNP Members of Parliament that Scotland would be more interested in what the SNP did than in what it says. In the one local authority that is controlled by the SNP, Angus district council, respectable, law-abiding people are anxious to obey the law and to encourage others to do the same. They are participating fully in the implementation and collection of the community charge.

However, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars), and the infant Robespierre from Banff and Buchan are encouraging law-breaking thoughout the length and breadth of Scotland—so much so that their colleague, Mr. Hamish Watt, a former Member of this House, felt it necessary, along with his colleagues, to resign from the SNP precisely because the hon. Member for Govan and the infant Robespierre from Banff and Buchan hijacked his party and turned it into another Left-wing Socialist party which is unacceptable to people in the north-east of Scotland. The hon. Member for Govan will no doubt wish to comment on these matters in due course.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. and learned Friend has referred to a distinguished former Member of this House who left the Scottish National party. He did not refer to a regional councillor, Flora Iles, who also left the SNP because it has no policies for anything and different policies for everywhere.

Mr. Rifkind: There will soon be more people leaving the Scottish National party than attend its constitutional convention.

The orders that are before the House are representative of a Government who have given a generous settlement to local authorities. It accords with what they asked for a year ago, when these matters were first considered. Any reservations that anyone might have had about the community charge will pale into insignificance the more the House and the people of Scotland have the opportunity, which the Labour party will be anxious for them to have, to examine the capital-value-based local tax that the Labour party wishes to propose and its implications for the elderly, those who wish to improve their homes and those who want a fair deal from local government in Scotland.

5.7 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The Secretary of State has certainly painted a broad canvas. At one stage, I thought that I might follow him by showing my holiday snaps. They would have just about as much relevance. He was clearly enjoying himself, but it was a disgraceful speech. The Secretary of State made no attempt to deal with what is happening under his Government. It was a diversionary tactic and intermittently it was amusing—for example, the important piece of information that Mr. McLoughlin of *The Scotsman* is a respectable reporter and, according to the Secretary of State, a respected one. We were also told that there was something intrinsically comic about the poll tax in Sutherland.

I had hoped to make a brisk and brief speech, but it will take a little longer than I had anticipated. However, I am conscious that many of my hon. Friends want to take part in the debate.

The orders relate to the delivery of services and the quality of life. Both are directly affected by local government finance and housing finance in Scotland. It is not just a nice Treasury balancing act that can be shrugged off in a few minutes before the Secretary of State takes off to go somewhere else. We shall want to consider the consequences of what is happening in our constituencies and in Scotland generally as a result of the inadequate way in which these matters have been dealt with by the Government.

I invite whoever is to wind up the debate for the Government to consider certain matters. I presume that it will be the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) who is sitting there, as always, looking extremely alert—a pet by his master's side. I have no doubt that the hon. Member might say a word or two about councillors' allowances, which of course are part and parcel of the whole business.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Is the hon. Member aware that decisions on these matters have been deferred for three months, at the request of COSLA and other associations, in order that further investigations may

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

be made? We look to COSLA to return to us with further information for my right hon. Friend, who will be seeing them on 9 February. That is the up-to-date information.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Member will soon be known as Action Man. I am delighted to hear this, because—it is not often that I ride to the defence of Councillor Brian Meek and his colleagues—undoubtedly there was widespread concern right across the board, embracing all parties and all political persuasions, about what was proposed. It is very important that those who wish to serve as elected councillors and who carry the confidence of the electorate should be in a position to get on with the job.

The danger of the scheme that he proposed and the Government had embraced was that this would become the preserve of those who could afford to serve but were not necessarily best qualified to do so. It would have been tragic if a clumsy little manoeuvre of the Department of the Environment had damaged local democracy, which has already been put under unreasonable pressure by the Government. I very much hope that we shall now be able to get away from the very crude two-tier system based on an annual payment of £3,400 per regional councillor and £2,700 per district councillor, as was proposed.

I can only hope that the Minister has learnt something from his traumatic experience with the poll tax about the dangers of flat-rate systems and cash limits in that context. It is very important indeed that, if we cannot reach agreement on something that will allow people of talent and commitment to remain in local government, we should continue, perhaps for longer than three months, an attendance allowance system which at least has the basic virtue of being based upon the work that is done by councillors.

My attention was drawn in the *Largs and Milport Weekly News* to a very typical statement by the leader of the Conservative group on Cunninghame council, Councillor Edith Clarkson, who complained very bitterly about Members of Parliament:

"They see us councillors as incompetent and useless, and people who do not do anything. There is no will in Parliament on any side of the House to look at it and see what we are doing."

She went on to complain bitterly about the Government's schemes, plans and proposals and their impact on local authority allowances and the new way of compensating councillors for the inevitable loss of income which they incur because they are elected to local government. I very much hope that the Minister will use the three months' period of grace which he has announced to find a way to get over these problems.

I turn first to the revenue support grant, because it is very basic. I expected that the Secretary of State would say that COSLA had asked for 7 per cent. I put that to one or two COSLA officials the other day and got a very robust reaction. As the Secretary of State well knows, that figure was produced at a period when the situation was rather different in terms, for example, of interest rates. The 7 per cent. or 7·5 per cent. that was then announced included within it a number of factors which could not have been anticipated.

I am thinking of the mandatory rating relief for charities and the rating relief for universities in Scotland. I do not think that these are necessarily bad in themselves —in fact, I strongly support them—but they have been announced as concessions by central Government, and they have been financed entirely out of the revenue support grant that had already been fixed.

When Sir Kerr Fraser says, understandably in some alarm, that he thinks that it will take £40 million merely to preserve the fabric of Sir Gilbert Scott's Gothic imagination on Gilmorehill, no doubt he is thankful for the small mercy brought by rating relief, but I am sure that he would also accept that it is unfortunate that such a concession should be financed entirely at the expense of local government and local government services, or the poll tax payer, or some combination of both.

I believe that the figure is inadequate and that there is plenty of reason and evidence for saying so. Obviously, there was some initial confusion. The Secretary of State will remember the illuminating incident of Glasgow's allocation—a situation in which the Minister had forgotten to use his toes as well as his fingers when he did the initial calculation. When we have time to look at the final figures, the shape that emerges is one of enormous importance to the poll tax payers whose health is of such concern to the Secretary of State. There is no doubt that there is a direct correlation between what is happening to the poll tax in the individual areas of Scotland and what the Secretary of State has achieved in his grant distribution.

If we take the aggregate Exchequer grant and the non-domestic rate income of an authority and put them together, we find that the cash available to an authority such as Bearsden and Milngavie will in the coming year be 51 per cent. higher. In Eastwood, the increase is 50 per cent. Going down to some of the authorities which have been the butt of criticism by the Secretary of State, we begin to see, with the unwinding of the safety net and other grant distribution difficulties, some of the reasons why they have been faced with particular problems.

Bearsden plus 51 per cent. and Eastwood plus 50 per cent.: these are not areas that spring to the minds of my hon. Friends as those of highest deprivation or outstanding need when one considers the social profile of Scotland. Glasgow had a cut in cash terms of 2·6 per cent. Edinburgh had an increase of 0·082 per cent.—less than 1 per cent. When we compare that with the 50 per cent. and 51 per cent. figures at the top of the scale, we begin to see the gap that had to be bridged and the difficulties that had to be faced.

I think that the Secretary of State was ungracious and misleading in not recognising that and accepting that there was that genuine problem. He was the author of that problem, and this does him no credit.

Mr. Rifkind *rose*——

Mr. Dewar: I will give way to him in a moment, but first I want to add a couple of points that he may want to deal with; I do not want to accept as many interruptions as he did, in the interests of other hon. Members who want to take part in the debate.

I do not disguise the fact that there is a difference of philosophy. In a sense, the Secretary of State outlined it perfectly clearly when he quoted my colleague Mark Lazarowicz. He said that the leader of the majority group on the Edinburgh district council had apparently said something unforgivable—that the council had to bear in mind its commitment to provide new services. I do not think that that is something of which he should be

ashamed. Commitments have to be tempered in every authority by the realities of the situation and balances have to be struck.

The Secretary of State and I might have a disagreement about where that balance should be struck, but I find it offensive that he should suggest that it is some kind of grotesque, absurd or ludicrous proposition that someone looking at the social problems in Edinburgh's peripheral housing schemes or some of the inner-city areas of Edinburgh should consider improving services and tackling those problems.

If the Secretary of State intends to intervene, perhaps he can deal with this point.

If we look at the other part of the equation of that area, at the Lothian region budget meeting we had an extremely well-documented account of what the alternative is. It came from a man who is admired as the sort of civilised face of the new Conservative party; someone who is still clinging on to some of the older civilised values, despite the efforts of the chairman of the party and his dominating philosophy. I refer to Conservative Councillor Brian Meek. Brian Meek was suggesting the abolition of welfare rights and pensioners' free bus passes. He was suggesting the privatisation of Hillend ski centre and seven old people's homes, as well as a number of other items of that type.

I really do not think that the Secretary of State can suggest, in the face of the grant allocation made in Edinburgh and the cut that occurred in Glasgow, that if they had responsible people at the helm, good Tories, men of integrity, men who could manage a bawbee or two, who knew how to make ends meet, they could cut back on our present extravagances, as he would see them; they could reduce the poll tax without hurting vulnerable people, without doing genuine and real damage to services; and they could carry out the kind of policies that even a moderate such as Brian Mack is having to suggest in the Lothian region.

It is a real problem, which to some extent relates to the philosophical divide between us and our views about community and the duty of a council, but it also goes back to the Secretary of State and his grant allocations. The same applies to the regions. Although the figures are less dramatic, the amounts are larger and therefore the variations are just as significant. The grant allocation has increased by 13·2 per cent. in the Borders; by 13·1 per cent. in Dumfries and Galloway; by 12 per cent. in the Highlands; and by 10 per cent. in Grampian. Then there is a substantial drop—a chasm in local government financial terms—until we reach Lothian and Strathclyde which have received 4·6 per cent. and 3·8 per cent. respectively.

We cannot banish the problem by saying that they are black and white figures on a page and they mean nothing. Inevitably they will present dilemmas for councillors and burdens for poll tax payers. If the Secretary of State were prepared to concede that, perhaps we could have a reasonable argument.

One of the great tales about the poll tax is that it strengthens local authority accountability. I believe that the present message—although it may change over the years—is that what matters is the grant that a local authority receives and that conditions the poll tax that has to be paid.

I shall take just two examples, which are not politically contentious because the authorities concerned are not in the eye of the political storm and have not been singled out by the Secretary of State for criticism or sarcasm. Gordon district council has cut its community charge by 2 per cent. If I remember correctly, that represents a £1 reduction. It could do that not because it had been careful and prudent with its expenditure, in the Secretary of State's terms. I am told that its spending is going up from £5·6 million to £8·5 million. It has nothing to do with the discipline of reducing the poll tax and calling extravagant councillors to heel. That massive increase in expenditure may have been justified. It was possible because its aggregate Exchequer grant and its non-domestic rate income had gone up by 33 per cent.

Clydebank council is increasing its poll tax imposition by 24 per cent., yet its spending has risen by only 2 per cent. The reason is that its aggregate Exchequer grant and non-domestic rate income has gone up by less than 0·5 per cent. That is the message. It has nothing to do with all the claptrap about accountability, and everything to do with the Secretary of State and the sums that he does mysteriously and secretly in the recesses of St. Andrews house.

Mr. Rifkind: I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman say that reductions in the community charge have everthing to do with the grant given by the Scottish Office. Will he join me in condemning Labour-controlled Stirling district council, which, despite an increase in grant of more than 20 per cent. for the forthcoming year, proposes not to reduce its community charge or even to maintain it at its existing level, but to increase it by 18 per cent.—more than twice the level of inflation? Does that not fly in the face of what the hon. Gentleman has just said?

Mr. Dewar: It certainly establishes that the performance of Stirling and the decisions taken by the council are out of line with many other parts of the country. I do not condemn that. It is up to the electors in Stirling, who have been advised by the right hon. and learned Gentleman and, more shrewdly, by the local Member of Parliament over many years to repudiate that policy. They have not done so. The Secretary of State may think that the people of Stirling are barmy and do not know what is in their own best interests, but if he believes in democracy, he had better recognise that that formula has gained the approval of a sufficient number of people to continue to elect that council.

I am talking about the general position in Scotland, and I repeat that many of the difficulties that have been mocked rather unsympathetically by the Secretary of State relate to the grants. The general position is exactly as we predicted. COSLA reckoned that the 7·5 per cent. added under the revenue support grant settlement would mean average increases in the poll tax of about 12 per cent.—and that is exactly what is happening now.

Although it would not be fair to other hon. Members to have a major debate about it, I must tell the Secretary of State that almost everything we have said about the social justice of the poll tax and the problems of administration and collection have been fully justified. I have to warn the House, having spent half an hour yesterday struggling—I make no apologies for that—to understand the intricate workings of the new transitional allowance, that the problems that we all anticipate in April in calculating the transitional allowance for next year, making the back payments for this year and adjusting the entire rebates

[Mr. Dewar]

system will be a nightmare. I believe that it will bring a system which is already disliked and widely considered to be unworkable into ultimate disrepute.

I should like to ask the Under-Secretary of State to say a word or two about the business rate and the non-domestic rate. I understand that the Government have decided that £80 million should be made available to reduce the rate poundage by 6·25 per cent. across the board. That is an interesting decision, because it could have been used to take out some of the peaks and to help areas particularly in the urban central belt where the rate poundage was very much higher. The Government decided to spread it thinly across Scotland, so perhaps the Minister could say why.

I should like a fairly specific answer to my second question. In England, the unified business rate poundage is 34·8p. I am told that the rate poundage that will have to be uniformly levied across Scotland to raise the present level of revenue is 55p. That gap has to be closed. I have heard authoritative figures ranging from £250 million to £450 million as the sum required to close that gap. I understand that the Scottish Office has consulted the CBI, and I know that the advice from COSLA was near the top of the range. Will the Minister say what he thinks that figure will be, how far we will have to go to plug that gap and what it will cost the public purse?

I close by briefly raising a major issue concerning the housing support grant, which used to be a major factor in local Government finance, particularly for district councils. When the present Government took office, 39 per cent. of council house costs came from the housing support grant. The figure is now 7 per cent. It reached a peak of about £228 million, and it is now down to £60 million. It was £60 million last year, and this year it will remain unchanged.

The Minister may say that I should be grateful that it has not been cut further, but as interest rates are higher than they were, they are eating into what is available for genuine housing work, and the figures take no account of inflation. We now have an HSG which will mean higher rents or will handicap authorities in tackling the real problems of deterioration of fabric.

The Under-Secretary of State says a great deal in a pleasant style about the Government's generosity in housing finance. The capital consents and the housing revenue account for 1990-91 compared with that for 1989-90 shows that the Government allocated £474 million in public sector housing capital allocation. In the coming year, the figure will be £420 million. That is a reduction of £53 million and a real terms drop of close on £100 million.

I know that I will be told that the net consent is being increased from £145 million to £189 million and that that is a measure of the Government's generosity, but if the net consent were being decreased and capital receipts were being increased, I would be told that I was being extremely silly and short-sighted in considering the net consent because all that matters is the total amount that will be spent.

If the total amount that will be spent is what matters, there will be the substantial drop that I have just outlined. The problems that I see every weekend in my constituency, and the problems faced by tenants in my constituency and in those of my hon. Friends, make me sceptical and cynical about the well-tailored rhetoric that emerges from the word processors in Dover house and St. Andrew's house.

The housing support grant has been reduced to a shadow of its former self. Over the years, it has been cut ruthlessly. If it had been maintained at the level of the early 1980s, we would now be debating a cumulative increase in local authority resources of billions of pounds. Against that, we recognise the miserable inadequacies and desperate need of the Secretary of State to tilt at windmills rather than talk about the realities that he has so sadly neglected.

5.30 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I have suffered three misfortunes today. First, I have been done out of my Burns supper by this business tonight; secondly, I have had a bit of masonry whistling around my room upstairs and have been locked out; thirdly, I am having to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I think that I would rather have seen his holiday snaps.

I shall begin by considering housing, because it is an important issue in Scotland. Last year, the Government set up Scottish Homes, so we must look forward to better standards in the foreseeable future. I know that it will play its part in improving the old Scottish Special Housing Association housing and working with housing associations to develop housing in Scotland.

The housing support grant is a key part of housing management. Housing management involves considering the problems not only of damp, condensation, repairs and rents but of vandalism, bad neighbourliness, noise and the general feeling that the environment of housing estates is not what it should be. We must also consider the problems of waiting lists and homelessness. I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the work that they have been doing on urban projects, which often improve rather miserable areas.

Over the past 10 years, the Government have increased housing investment by 2 per cent. per annum in real terms, whereas under the Labour Government of 1974-79 it declined by 8 per cent. per annum in real terms. There is no doubt but that the Government have given housing a high priority.

I welcome the impact of the sale of council houses, which is what tenants wanted. I am glad that, despite the opposition of the Labour party and Labour-controlled councils, we have sold so many over the past 10 years.

Capital allocations, which are extremely important, have doubled over the past five years. I welcome that increase, and when I raised it with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) before Christmas, he assured me that the aggregate for this year would increase by £64 million, or 50 per cent. That should enable local authorities to maintain expenditure, but the Government recognise that increases are necessary in some of the worst areas.

I am glad that the two districts that I represent—Nithsdale, and Annandale and Eskdale—are receiving allocations far above the national average of £559 per house. Annandale and Eskdale will receive £727, and Nithsdale £815. That is of particular benefit to Nithsdale, where the public sector contribution to housing is increasing by 67 per cent. In Annandale and Eskdale, it is

increasing by 16 per cent. Various adjustments have been made in Annandale following the Lockerbie disaster, in which my right hon. and learned Friend was so helpful by providing finance for the rehabilitation of damaged houses.

Nevertheless, the Government have recognised that much remains to be done by making available additional money in the Lochside area of Dumfries. That continuing high investment has allowed the council to undertake many projects. I know that there has been a small national increase in non-housing revenue account grants, but districts in my area have above average allocations. Improvement grants are one of the key ways of quickly improving housing. Rural cottages are not only attractive to live in but enhance the countryside if they are in a proper state of repair. I am in favour of giving as much non-HRA support to district councils as possible.

The Government have allocated substantial sums for the revenue support grant. However, most authorities—but, I am glad to say, not all—have increased expenditure by more than the rate of inflation. I very much doubt whether local authorities would have increased expenditure so rapidly if they had been working under the old rating system. Over the past two years, they have taken the opportunity to increase expenditure and blame that on the community charge and the Government. This year, they cannot blame the Government for cutting expenditure, because almost all local authorities are receiving a substantial increase in expenditure.

I know that there must be a careful balance between prudent expenditure and what other people may regard as excessive experience. That is the key job of councillors. I remember when I was a councillor that councillors were only too keen to spend money on projects that were important to their ward or council. Sometimes restraint must be exercised, particularly when the country knows that the Government are keen to restrain inflation. Increases in local government expenditure are extremely inflationary and add to the problem of restraining interest rates.

This year, the Government have increased the revenue support grant by £242 million and adjusted the safety net. Most important, they have made moves towards the uniform business rate, which will be of great advantage to businesses, particularly small businesses, in Scotland. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) has been given sufficient recognition for what he has done for the rating assessments of sports grounds. His action has been well received by all sports clubs and voluntary organisations in Scotland.

I hope that community charge payers will bear in mind the Labour party's proposals, which chop and change so much that one does not know where one is. But if the Labour party decides on the capital values option, the community charge payer will undoubtedly have to pay a great deal more.

Let us consider the regions and districts. Like the hon. Member for Garscadden, I find it virtually impossible to understand local authority accounting—the use of balances, the options relating to the community charge, the change from the client-group method to grant-aided expenditure and so on. It is very difficult to find true comparisons from one year to the next to establish what is going on. In 1989-1990, with inflation running at roughly 6·5 per cent., the grant to my region was 13 per cent., whereas this year, with inflation at 7·5 per cent., the grant is 14·3 per cent. One might think that there was every reason to believe that the community charge could be stabilised and that a substantial amount would still be left to improve services. The region has had an increase in grant of 70 per cent. over five years, so it is disappointing to discover that the community charge is to increase substantially.

I know that councillors considered various options—increases of from zero to 15 per cent.—and in the end settled for 6 per cent. But add to that a 21 per cent. increase in water charges arising from more stringent requirements relating to water quality, and the overall increase is 8 per cent. That is a substantial increase in view of the money made available through the grant system.

Matters have been made worse by the two districts in the area, which have increased their expenditure substantially. In Socialist-controlled Nithsdale, where the grant increased by 18·9 per cent., expenditure has increased by no less than 28 per cent. That was voted through against strong Conservative opposition at a council meeting last night. That is the increase that the community charge payers of Nithsdale will now have to face. In Annandale and Eskdale, with a Liberal Democrat majority, grant is up by 17·3 per cent. and expenditure by 19 per cent. That simply will not do. It is not fair on the community charge payer.

We all want improved services, but we must be careful to ensure that improved services do not always mean substantially increased costs. I support my region in its efforts to attract industry, and I realise that that may cost more. I also realise that school boards may add to costs. But all that should be taken into account against the background of the substantial balances that local authorities can achieve.

The House ought to send out the message that prudent expenditure is essential if we are to make our way forward and maintain low inflation and, it is to be hoped, lower interest rates. We cannot go on spending and spending without facing the consequences. I hope that local authorities will consider their plans carefully. I was sorry to hear that a respected SNP regional councillor in Dumfries and Galloway had had to resign his membership of the party because he wanted the council to maintain the rule of law and collect the community charge. It was sad that his local party should have forced him out.

I gather, too, that the Member of the European Parliament for Dumfries and Galloway and the south of Scotland, Mr. Alex Smith, has had some difficulty recently. When I first saw headlines saying, "MP's bank balance frozen", I wondered whether they referred to me, but it turned out to be the MEP, who is setting an astonishingly bad example to the community charge payers of Scotland.

My message is this: let us have prudent expenditure. We really cannot go on increasing grant from central Government—from the taxpayer—and having it all put into the kitty to allow local authorities to spend more and more. If we do that, we shall become a banana republic, spending far more than we should. That is something we must avoid.

5.44 pm

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): No matter how the Government try to dress up the figures, the fact remains—as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said—that they represent a cut

[Mr. David Marshall]

of £58 million in funds for council housing and, when inflation is taken into account, a reduction in total resources for council housing of £100 million.

Like all other hon. Members, I am grateful to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities for the excellent brief that it has sent us, which exposes the Government's meanness and the true extent, nature and effect of the cuts.

This debate should be not about figures but about human beings. It may be possible to argue about the need —or otherwise—for some items of Government expenditure, but in the name of decency and humanity, the House must agree that, in this day and age, everyone should have a fit and proper home in which to live, and that is especially true of pensioners and children. Unfortunately, that is simply not the case and the order will make matters worse. It will lead to increased rents and a further deterioration in the fabric of our council housing. All that many tenants have left is hope, and some of them do not even have that luxury.

No doubt my hon. Friends will deal with the general questions arising from the order, but I want to highlight what I believe to be a unique and scandalous catch-22 affecting between 2,000 and 3,000 people, which the order will do nothing to remedy. I refer to the 998 Winget-type houses constructed in 1924 in the Carntyne area of Glasgow and divided between the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan and myself. They are the only houses of their type in the whole of Scotland. There are no such houses in Wales and only 2,568 in England.

The houses were classified as defective under the Housing Defects Act 1984. Arguments followed as to what should be done until 1988, when Glasgow district council applied for the houses to be declassified. In March 1989 the Secretary of State refused to agree to the council's request, so the houses are still officially classified as defective. The tenants took the matter up with the ombudsman who, to his credit, found in their favour. But his recommendation, in June last year, was simple: the council and the tenants should get together to discuss the problem. That took us back to square one. No advance of any kind had been made. One wonders what is the advantage of having an ombudsman's report in one's favour.

At present an insulation programme is under way in the Carntyne area, but Winget houses are excluded because they require extensive fabric repair. The housing department of Glasgow district council states that outstanding work on the houses includes recladding, window replacement and roof renewal, all directly related to the Winget method of construction. Someone whose house need a new roof or new windows is unlikely to be very comfortable in weather conditions such as those prevailing this week.

The estimated cost of those essential repairs—they are not repairs that should be undertaken only in ideal circumstances—is £12 million. The council says that it will not be able to carry out any of the work in the foreseeable future, and certainly not before 1995. The order will do nothing to help: it will probably make the time scale longer still. My hon. Friend the Member for Provan, the local councillors, the Winget action group, especially Mrs. Brawley and Mrs. Love, the Carntyne residents association, especially Mrs. Robertson and Mrs. Burns, and I have all tried to get something done about the problem. Glasgow district council cannot help because it does not have the money. Sadly, the Government will not help because they do not want to help. Scottish Homes will not help financially. It will give what advice and counselling it can, but it will not help financially because, as it says, it has limited resources and other higher priorities. Appeals to the Scottish Office and to the Prime Minister fell on both stony and iron ground.

The tenants are not political pawns to be used and abused as politicians see fit. Many of them are pensioners who have been tenants of their homes for over 60 years. They have always paid their rents and rates and have never been in arrears. They have probably paid for their houses several times over and their reward is to be trapped in houses which no one will repair. They will be left to rot unless something is done. No politician can possibly justify ignoring their plight.

We heard earlier about damage to the Palace of Westminister. No doubt, however many millions of pounds that damage amounts to, the money will be found to put it right immediately or as soon as the work can be carried out. But not even a penny will be found to put right the disrepair of the 998 homes of those 2,000 to 3,000 people in the Carntyne area of Glasgow. On Robbie Burns' birthday, it is sad to see that man's inhumanity to man continues unabated.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Galloway: It was a good ending.

Mr. Marshall: A better one than that will follow.

I understand that the housing support grant formula takes into account economic conditions. Glasgow has the eight constituencies with the highest unemployment in Scotland. Surely that factor merits the allocation of additional resources to tackle the appalling housing conditions which, sadly, persist in many part of the city. My constituents have a perfectly good case for sueing Glasgow district council under the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897 and, in all probability, they would win their case. But the only result would be that the council would have to rob Peter to pay Paul. The citizens of Glasgow would be no better off.

Specific Government assistance is needed to resolve the problem. It must be recognised that this is a special and urgent case. I appeal to the Secretary of State and to the Minister to do something positive. They should begin by convening a meeting of the tenants' representatives, Glasgow district council, Scottish Homes and the Scottish Office to discuss what action to take. That would give the tenants some hope, which is the very least that they deserve.

5.52 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dumries (Sir H. Monro), I should have preferred to be in Scotland this evening remembering the birth of our bard and enjoying good company. We are here because the official channels agreed to have this debate tonight. I have been told by those who do not understand, "You will be finished by 7 o'clock so you can get to a Burns supper." One would have to be pretty clever to travel from here to a Burns supper in Perthshire.

Like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), I wish to speak about housing. Housing is

important and many of our citizens depend on properties owned either by a local authority or some other state body. I welcomed the setting up of Scottish Homes. Such a body was long overdue. I am particularly pleased that it is carrying out a survey into rural areas, and I have suggested to Scottish Homes that it should consider places such as Aberfeldy.

Aberfeldy is an interesting place. It is one of the places in Scotland where there have always been more jobs than people to fill them. That is because businesses there are prosperous and doing well. They have to bus people from Blairgowrie to Aberfeldy. Anyone who knows the area will know how far that is and how difficult a journey it can be in winter months. We need to build low-cost housing that could be made available to people who want to work in the Aberfeldy area. I hope that Scottish Homes will take up my suggestion and do just that.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the community charge. The registration and collection system in Tayside region is different from that of anywhere else in Scotland and, as far as I know, in the United Kingdom. Every time there is a change in the amount due, an individual receives a new book. Some people have had three or four books. One can imagine the impact of that on elderly pensioners who did not understand what the first book was about. They may request a change because their conditions have altered. They then have to be given a second book. If that is not right, they are given a third book, and some are on their fourth book. That is appalling; something will have to be done.

For some interesting reason, a rumour is spreading round Tayside about my position with regard to the community charge. Why anyone should imagine that I do not support the community charge is beyond me. Some scurrilous people have put it about that I have not paid my community charge. I wish to place on record the fact that I and my family have paid our community charge. Like most other hon. Members, I have registered for the standard community charge at my flat in Westminster. I do not understand where those mischievous rumours have come from.

Mr. Wilson: May we take it that there is no reason why the hon. Gentleman's name would not appear in the public register?

Mr. Walker: None whatever. I have not looked at the public register so I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman whether I am on it. I see no reason why my name and those of my wife and daughters should not be there. I have commented on the unique collection and registration system in Tayside, so nothing would surprise me. The only thing that I know for certain is that I have paid. Like most people on Tayside I pay by standing order through the bank. A debit appears on my bank statement so someone is receiving the money. If it is not going into the system properly, it is not my fault.

On Tayside the administration of one district council is controlled by the Scottish National party. Contrary to the views expressed in the House by SNP members, the SNP in Angus recommends that people should pay the community charge, and it is collecting it. That is interesting because we are told that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) will not pay his community charge. It will be interesting to see what happens when he does not pay. Other people in Angus will have to pick up the tab.

I also draw attention to the fact that Provost Murray of Perth and Kinross district council, another distinguished member of the SNP who attends the convention to which I shall refer later, has put it on record that he believes that people should behave properly and pay their community charge. As ever, the SNP speaks with different voices. That is why Hamish Watt, Flora Iles and other distinguished councillors have had to leave the SNP. They can no longer stomach the illegal activities that it recommends.

Last Friday we had a rare opportunity to debate the Labour party's policies. It tells us a lot about the Opposition's policies that no Back-Bench Member from any of the Scottish Opposition parties was present. That is not surprising, because many of them were attending the sham convention in Scotland, where they can achieve nothing. All that they can do is talk. They did not attend this House, where changes can be made.

I realise that many hon. Members wish to speak so I shall not speak at great length. If we are to believe the leaks that appear in the Scottish newspapers, the Labour party proposes to replace the community charge with a tax. I use that word carefully. It will bring in a tax based on property valuations. They call it a fair tax, but it is still a tax.

That must raise the constitutional question whether it is possible to have a tax in Scotland that is different from the taxes in the rest of the United Kingdom. If the Opposition are not aware now that that raises a constitutional problem, they certainly would be if they ever tried to introduce it.

Another important point is that we are not discussing a charge. Rates are a charge but—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Wilson: That is a nice use of language.

Mr. Walker: No, it is not just a nice use of the English language. I had to obtain Mr. Speaker's ruling on this some time ago. The community charge is a charge. Indeed, the community charge is a community charge. It is not a poll tax. Opposition Members should not persist in trying to legitimise something like that because they might find themselves in some difficulty if they tried to introduce it and used the word "tax". They might find that people in the other House would take exception to there being different taxes in Scotland and in England because of the constitutional position. If the Labour party had a different form of tax in Scotland from that in England, the question arises whether Scotland is to be used—in the words of the Labour party—as "a guinea pig". If so, the Labour party should come clean and tell us exactly what it is going to do.

There is no question why Scottish Opposition Members were not here last Friday—it was because they cannot answer for their proposals, which are flawed and full of leaks. I shall go further and say that, like their proposals for devolution, these proposals are flawed, fraudulent and unworkable. At the next election, despite all their hoo-hah and brouhaha about the community charge, Labour Members will have to tell the people of Scotland their alternative. That alternative will be dissected and analysed and, as on so many previous occasions, the Labour party will be found wanting. That is when the Opposition will find that their support begins to evaporate.

6.1 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State said that we are here for our annual debate on revenue support grant. It seems as though nothing has changed. Everything sounds the same. The Government continue to show indifference to local councils about the levels of revenue support grant.

The poll tax is now in being in Scotland, but a number of authorities have had to increase it in an effort simply to maintain services. Even with adjustments to compensate for the loss of non-domestic rates, £13 million, still has to be found in Scotland. Costs are increasing daily for councils, which are facing growing pressures on their social work departments as they struggle to meet the needs of an aging population, the costs required to run their school boards and horrendous burden of administering and collecting the grossly unjust, "unworkable" and "fraudulent" poll tax—to echo some of the words of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker).

The poll tax is a terrible mess, as can be seen from the number of irate letters that I believe we are all receiving from our constituents, protesting at the muddle and at the number of poll tax demands that are wrong, to say nothing of the costs incurred by councils that are having to pay sheriff officers to chase those who are in default.

The Minister is aware of the reduction in revenue support grant in my constituency of Argyll and Bute. My council, which is not profligate, firmly believes that that is the result of the formula and the method used for calculating the level of grant. Over the years, on a variety of occasions but without success, the council has tried to persuade Scottish Office officials that the method used for calculating the support grant is unfair and does not take fully into consideration the difficulty of providing services to communities in remote and island areas. The problems in Argyll and Bute are similar to those experienced by the island councils—in fact, they are probably worse. My constituency contains 28 inhabited islands in its total area of 3,000 square miles.

The Minister has written to me on this subject, and I shall certainly take up his invitation to meet him to discuss it. However, that might not be necessary if the Minister could assure me that he will ask his Scottish Office officials to help if I ask Argyll and Bute district council to present a detailed case for change to the distribution committee. I hope that we can get this settled once and for all, so that the problem does not recur year after year. I hope that the Minister can assure me that his Scottish Office officials will give some help to the council.

I am aware of the time, so I shall speak only briefly about the housing support grant. The last figure I have heard is that there are now 29,000 homeless people in Scotland, which is quite disgraceful. Funding for hostels run by the local authorities still comes from the housing revenue account. Therefore, tenants are having to pay the cost of housing the homeless through their rents.

The proportion of those costs funded through rents has increased from 47 per cent. to 92 per cent. in the past 10 years. As the Government frequently tell us, the number of council house tenants is in decline—although, I believe, not to the extent that the Government would like—and the burden on current tenants has therefore become much greater.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem is particularly acute in north-east Scotland because of the high cost of renting and buying houses in the private sector? Banff and Buchan, and Aberdeen and Gordon have had record increases in homelessness compared with any other part of the country. Does my hon. Friend agree that those authorities need help to enable them to deal with the problem in a way that does not disadvantage existing tenants?

Mrs. Michie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. Providing for homeless people should be the responsibility of the whole community, which is why I plead for funding to be transferred from the housing revenue account to the housing support grant or some other means to be found. The importance of this issue was acknowledged as long ago as 1968, when the Housing (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1968 allowed for the "hostel proportion" of housing support grant.

Last year, the Minister said that he recognised that it was a problem and stated that he would ask the Department to write to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to seek its considered views on the extent to which the cost of these and similar services should be excluded from housing revenue accounts. I should like to know what progress the Minister has made, if any, because it appears to take the Government an enormously long time between supposedly recognising a problem and taking practical action to remedy it.

I am especially concerned about housing in rural areas, which requires a different approach from that for urban areas because distribution is focused far more on elderly households from low socio-economic groups. There are estimated to be at least 24,700 "below tolerable standard" properties in rural Scotland. The Minister may wish to excuse the level of housing support grant to local authorities on the grounds that Scottish Homes is now in existence, but even its level of funding leaves much to be desired if we are to meet the real need and to build the type of houses that are required for young people, for single or married people without children, for retired people, for the single middle-aged, for divorcees, widows and widowers, to say nothing of those who live in winter lets, caravans and tied houses.

The Minister knows of my concern about the sale of school houses in sparsely populated communities in my constituency. Once the school house is sold, where on earth is the new teacher supposed to live? There is little choice because demand exceeds supply, and there is really nothing available for them. I give the House the example of the Ross of Mull on the island of Mull, where at least eight local families need housing. Three of the people involved are the local teacher, a home help and the postman. They should not find themselves in a position where they cannot get a house.

Even if houses come on the market, they are snatched up by incomers who can afford a high price. Locals everywhere in rural Scotland are being priced out of the housing market—the hon. Member for Tayside, North referred to this.

I would like to pay tribute to Scottish Homes for its consultative document on rural housing. Although it leaves many questions unanswered—it deliberately poses questions—it is a genuine and commendable attempt to address the real issues and it shows vision and foresight in asking, for example, whether measures must be taken to

reduce competition from second home and retirement home buyers, and whether councils should seek balanced communities and controls in targeted areas on the resale of houses so that they are retained within low-cost home ownership initiatives in priority areas.

This has been done in England, where the Government have sponsored a rural housing initiative to build 1,800 housing association houses in villages each year on land, planning consent for which is restricted to housing associations catering exclusively for local needs. This is the sort of foresight and enterprise—the great vogue word—that is required, and I will fully support any moves in such a direction. The Minister and the House need to know that resentment is building up in many parts of Scotland among many local people who are unable to get houses. This is a serious situation which I do not like and which I do not believe the Minister approves of either.

6.12 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Mention has been made of the poll tax which hon. Members on the Government Benches call the community charge. There is one thing that I would like to get on the record: severe hardship is being caused by the poll tax in my area. Many families face bills of over £1,000, and they do not know where the money will come from. The Government should look at the difficulties in areas where unemployment is high and where the few jobs going are low-paid.

It does not help matters when people like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) come to my constituency and tell people, some of whom are in the hands of illegal loan sharks, that they should not pay the poll tax, telling them that it will be all right, they will not go to jail but they might get their furniture lifted.

Mr. Sillars: You cannot get your furniture lifted.

Mr. Martin: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) says that people cannot have their furniture lifted, but my understanding of warrant sales is that they can.

Mr. Sillars: You are wrong.

Mr. Martin: I may be wrong, and it is up to the hon. Member to contradict me, but one thing that is certain is that the poorest of the poor will come out of a warrant sale very badly. It is all right for hon. Members to say that warrant sales will not do a great deal of harm. They do not do a great deal of harm to people earning £26,000 a year; but we are dealing with people who have taken a lifetime to get their bits and pieces together. Already, people have been on the telephone to me, telling me that they are in difficulties because they took the advice of a Mr. Tommy Sheridan, a Trotskyist leader, and the hon. Member for Govan. I just think that hon. Members should be careful in the advice that they give when they tell people that they are not going to do something, because the circumstances for some of the people sitting in the audience are different.

What is more, it ill becomes officials of Strathclyde region who are community workers employed by the authority collecting the poll tax to give advice like this. I blame not the councillors but some of the community workers who are organising these meetings in their own time. It is hypocrisy to pick up a wage from an authority which is collecting tax while at the same time telling the people they are supposed to advise not to pay it. Once again, some of these people are earning a good shilling or two while giving this advice to the poorest of the poor.

A lot of money is going into housing estates at present from this grant and from previous grants, from both central Government and from local government. Impressive things have been done in my constituency and other parts of Glasgow in doing up houses, but something will have to be done about the environment. People are proud of their houses and their tenement flats, but many tell me that they are ashamed to bring people into their street—not the home but the street. Graffiti cover the tenement closes.

The Secretary of State may well blame the local authorities and the local authorities the Secretary of State. Surely both parties can get together to do something about the environment. It would cost a small amount compared with what is being spent on rehabilitating homes.

While we are talking about the environment, surely something can be done about tenants who own dogs which have aggression bred into them—pitbull terriers, rottweilers and alsatians—and which are allowed to roam housing estates. I have heard it said that if there were no bad owners there would be no bad dogs, but that is small consolation to someone who walks into his own street and is attacked by animals which have been let loose. Some of them are used to stop policemen raiding houses for drugs. Surely we can legislate to do something not only about the aggression of these animals but about the dirt they leave in our parks and streets. It makes people feel ashamed when they have relatives from England, Canada and America coming into an area that they were once proud of.

The Secretary of State failed to give me an answer to a problem in high-demand areas in our council estates. These houses have been sold off and, as he knows full well, some have changed hands as often as three times since the sale of council houses began. The Minister will tell me and other hon. Members that Glasgow has a surplus of housing stock. When I was a councillor for Govan, if I could get the best house in Springburn for a Govanite he did not want to move, because Govan was the area where he had been brought up, where his mother and father came from, and where his wife's family came from, and it was the community to which he belonged.

The problem is the same in the rural areas: no one wants to leave the village where he was brought up. The people of Springburn do not want to leave Balornock, Barmulloch and the Carron scheme; they want houses next to their mothers and grandmothers and other relatives. In the high-demand areas, people have to find £30,000. That is unfair in an area with some of the highest unemployment rates in the country. The Minister should look into that.

Commendable work is going on in housing action areas and in areas for which Scottish Homes is responsible. The people running these organisations tell me that they do not have the same fear as local authorities about the rehabilitation of the houses. The Government are prepared to put more finance into rehabilitation, but what is the point, in places like Dennistoun, of rehabilitating the houses to a high standard and then allowing motorways to be shoved through the middle of the district? Residents complain to me that, although their houses are excellent, they would need double glazing and more soundproofing because of the heavy traffic on the road which the Secretary of State approved.

[Mr. Martin]

I know that the Secretary of State will say that it is a Labour-controlled authority that is building the roads. I have the highest regard for Strathclyde, but it is impossible to talk to its road officials. There is motorway madness at its worst. If people are to get beautiful homes, and if Government money is to be spent on rehabilitation—we are talking about 90 per cent. Government aid—surely there should not be a motorway just outside with cars going along at 50 or 60 mph. I ask the Minister to consider that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It may be convenient for hon. Members to know that the replies to the debate will begin at 6.40 pm. If hon. Members speak for about five minutes each, I shall be able to call most of them.

6.21 pm

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): May I point out to you, Mr. Speaker, that the three hon. Members from my party who have spoken are all associated with the city of Glasgow? We know that Glasgow is a city of culture this year, but Glasgow is not Scotland. If the remaining time is to be divided, I think that you should call Members from throughout Scotland and not concentrate on the city of Glasgow.

This week we have had a series of similar debates on England and Wales, yet those debates were totally different, because housing support grants and housing orders affect only a small number of people in England and Wales. In the south of England, the number is insignificant. It is only when we move north into Scotland that we are speaking on behalf of the majority of people, because in Scotland most people are still tenants who are affected by the orders. When so many people are concerned, it is a disgrace that there are so few hon. Members here.

Several hon. Members have said that, during the 10 years of Conservative Government, we have seen an attack on council housing. The Government have moved money from public sector housing into the private sector. Where has all the money gone? A total of £7 billion has gone to owner-occupiers through mortgage tax relief. The Government have taken money from the pockets of tenants and given it to owner-occupiers. In doing that, they have moved money from Scotland to the rich south of England. The Government have been like Robin Hood in reverse, taking money from tenants in Scotland and giving it to the rich in the south of England who have too much money already.

At a time when we are discussing further reductions in the money available for housing in Scotland, the Prime Minister, we are told, is recommending that the Chancellor of the Exchequer should increase the limit for mortgage tax relief from £30,000 to £50,000, or perhaps £60,000, so as to give further help to owner-occupiers in the south of England. That is totally different from the case that the Secretary of State is making about the need to claw back money from council tenants.

Most people in Scotland are afraid of Scottish Homes. They believe that it has been established by the Government as a Trojan horse to attack public sector housing, without appearing to be an attack by the Conservative Government. A large number of houses in my area that were formerly owned by the Scottish Special Housing Association are now under the control of Scottish Homes. People are up in arms. Tenants' and residents' associations are campaigning against the policies of Scottish Homes.

I and the Labour party accept that we cannot stop the Government's policy of the tenant's right to buy. It is a bad policy in principle, but the people have accepted it, and so has the Labour party. Therefore, tenants should have the right to buy. What is Scottish Homes doing? In my constituency, when a house becomes vacant, it is putting that house up for sale. Scottish Homes tells me that these are so-called economic expansion houses—in other words, houses for incoming workers. Surely it is a poor reflection on the new town of Irving when it is said that houses are no longer needed for incoming workers.

There are 4,000 people on the waiting list for Cunninghame district and 1,000 on the waiting list of Irving development corporation. Scottish Homes is beginning to sell houses that are lying empty, but they should be tenanted from the waiting list of Cunninghame district council.

I have been informed that Scottish Homes intends to go further and to announce at some date that every house that becomes vacant, whether or not it is an economic expansion house, will be put up for sale. When the Under-Secretary of State replies to the debate, I want him to confirm or deny that that is the future policy of Scottish Homes.

I have in my constituency 29,000 homeless, the majority of the homeless in Scotland. I want the Under-Secretary, on behalf of the people on the waiting list and the homeless in my constituency, to deal with Scottish Homes. It should not be the Trojan horse of the Tory party in public sector housing. People have the right to a home at a decent rent. They have the right to the same conditions enjoyed by people in the south of England. We should speak for the majority of the Scottish people. In the European elections, we made Scotland a Tory-free zone in Europe. If the Government do not change their policy and look after tenants better than owner-occupiers, after the next election Scotland will be a Tory-free zone in the United Kingdom.

6.27 pm

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): I appreciate the position and I shall be as brief as possible. I want to take the Secretary of State up on his point he made about comparing the amount involved in non-payment of rates with that involved in the non-payment of poll tax. He pretended that they were exactly the same, but he was using two different and separate statistical bases.

Let us take the example of a street with 100 houses. Under the rating system, if 15 per cent. of the rates were not paid, that meant that 15 people did not pay. If we assume that there are four adults in each house, under the poll tax we are talking about 400 people in the street; if 15 per cent. do not pay the poll tax, that is 60 people. That is why there is a tremendous problem for the Government and the regional councils which are trying to collect the poll tax. They have to cope with the magnitude of the non-payment revolt. If the Government want to pretend that there is no problem, they are foolish.

There is a reason why non-payment of the poll tax is succeeding. It is different from every other Government

imposition. When the Government wanted to drive young people on to the YTS, they could withdraw benefit from them and we could protest, but do nothing about it. When the Government privatised British Steel and jeopardised Lanarkshire, we could protest, but do nothing about it because they were using the power of legislative and Executive control. The difference with the poll tax is that for it to be implemented the Government require the co-operation of every individual adult in Scotland. They have to register, put in a standing order or a direct debit, send a cheque or postal order, or go along with the money. When the people who have the power in the poll tax equation withhold their co-operation, the Government cannot implement it. Their flagship has struck the rock of non-payment.

In the limited time available I shall direct the main burden of my remarks to housing. Whatever the Secretary of State may say today, the Government have inflicted enormous damage on the standards of the people of Scotland. That is summed up extremely well in the brief that we received from Shelter, which states:

"The net effect"

of the Government's policies

"has been that as capital allocations programmes have decreased (a reduction in real terms of £90 million for 1990-91 . . . vital new stock has not been built to replace ageing stock and stock lost through council house sales. At the same time the stock that does remain is likely to be poorer quality as the better quality stock is sold off, with high repair and maintenance costs, which are increasingly having to be met from a shrinking rental income base."

I echo what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) said—the problem is not about statistics, but about people. I can give three examples from my constituency. In Corkerhill, most of the houses have flat roofs, but require pitched roofs. There have been technical reports and the council acknowledges that those houses face severe dampness problems and have poor insulation. But the people of Corkerhill are fighting for resources with folk in other parts of Glasgow. Insufficient investment is going into the public housing sector to meet the needs of ordinary people.

An area called Moorpark in my constituency has been visited by representatives of every political party. Many hon. Members probably visited it during the Govan by-election. It has suffered a major drugs problem which we have tried to tackle. However, the underlying problem of the housing conditions remains. I was present at a meeting between the tenants association and Mr. Comley, the director of housing in Glasgow. He did not argue for one moment that the area did not require enormous investment or that it was an area of multiple deprivation. However, he had to tell the tenants association that there was no money available in the current five-year programme. Nobody knows what the score is beyond the current five-year programme.

My constituency also includes an area called Teucharhill with which many hon. Members will probably be familiar. This month, the Govan Initiative produced a special secure communities report from which it emerges that there is concern about windows caving in because they have not been replaced for years, dampness and lack of insulation. When we go to get some money, we are told that the council does not have it.

I do not absolve Glasgow city council of criticism; folk can criticise it for its allocation of funds to one part of the city or another and its inefficiency. But there is no question but that the housing problems in Glasgow can be resolved only by central Government allocating the appropriate amount of resources to meet the people's needs. It is an indictment of the Government and each of us who represent Glasgow constituencies, that we hear such heartbreaking stories about housing when we sit down in our surgeries. The Government have created misery when people are entitled to a decent and harmonious life.

6.35 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): These debates can turn into flights of fancy about obscure statistics and heaven knows what else, but as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) and a number of my hon. Friends have said, we are talking about the conditions in which people in Scotland have to live. In far too many cases, their circumstances are well-nigh intolerable.

The House would do well to remember that today's proceedings set the scene for poll tax levels and the quality of service in every district and region in Scotland for the coming year. We now know that every one of my constituents, including the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), who will reply to the debate, will have to pay £407 a head in poll tax—whether it be the Parliamentary Under-Secretary with his means or people living just above the poverty line and income support level. That is the kind of arbitrary, unfair tax which this Government have imposed and local authorities are having to try to implement to fund hopelessly overstrained and overstretched local services. As hon. Members have said, tenants also face higher rents.

The poll tax system in Scotland today is a monstrosity for which the House must accept full responsibility. It was not just Douglas Mason who dreamed up the poll tax before he lost his seat on Kirkcaldy district council. It was not just Michael Ancram who dreamed it up or tried to force it through the House before he lost his seat in Edinburgh to my excellent learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths). The House forced through that tax and imposed it on the people of Scotland. It is small comfort to my constituents to see hon. Members representing English constituencies, who voted for the poll tax in Scotland, suddenly discovering that they do not like it after all when it is imposed on their constituencies.

This is a viciously unfair tax which applies to everyone, whether or not they can afford it. It is also an administrative nightmare, as those of us representing Scottish constituencies can confirm. I can think of many anomalies. For example, a nurse in my constituency is employed by a boarding school which requires her to live in for part of the time. She is a single person on low pay and she had to pay not only her personal poll tax because of her accommodation at work, but a double standard poll tax for her own flat. The tax is an administrative nightmare and grossly unfair.

When calculating the eligibility of local authorities for revenue support grant, the Government assume that all these debts will be paid; but they will not be paid, because it is such an inefficient tax. The trouble with the minority administration in the Scottish Office is that it exercises power without responsibility. That seems to have been the prerogative of the Tory party in Scotland during the past 10 years.

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

The Tories have no serious aspiration of winning political support in Scotland. They are content to rely on English Lobby fodder to see through their legislation in the House. They have the power to impose any kind of dog's breakfast on the people of Scotland—and that is what the poll tax is. Once the Conservatives have done their mischief, the elected local authorities and their officials have to try to maintain local services in schools and elsewhere which our people so desperately need.

Tonight's business sets the scene for local services in the coming year. When the Secretary of State opened the debate, he suggested that Lothian regional council should cut its budget—do away with pensioners' free bus passes, I suppose. But the local Labour authorities are elected to do a job in Scotland and, unlike the Minister, they have a right and duty to implement the policies on which they were elected.

In my last couple of minutes I shall concentrate on housing. I can certainly confirm what local authorities and Shelter have said about the housing crisis which people in Scotland are experiencing. The housing capital allocations are insufficient to meet the well-known need for investment in repairs and improvements, let alone build the new houses needed to meet the growing needs of people on waiting lists in every part of Scotland. It is intolerable that people have to live in cold, damp housing with windows that require replacement and, sometimes, unsafe wiring, because local authorities are not allowed to spend the money required to bring the houses up to standard.

East Lothian district council's borrowing allocation is £1·221 million on top of its projected receipts from council house sales. That is fully £5 million short of what the council requires to spend on its improvement and repair programme in the coming year. It is better than the position last year, when it had a negative capital allocation, but it is still not good enough.

We must not lose sight of the housing shortage. The Government do not seem to care how many people do not have houses so long as those who have them own them. If ever there was a case of warped principles, that must be it. In my constituency, 5,700 people are stuck on the district council's housing waiting list. Hon. Members hear about such cases in their surgeries. We must deal with young people just married having to live in their in-laws' overcrowded accommodation. What sort of way is that to begin a marriage?

The Conservatives, who claim to be the party of the family, govern Scotland. Local authorities cannot meet those needs. The present state of affairs is a scandal. Tonight in East Lothian, 20 families will be living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation because the local authority does not have homes to let to those people who urgently need them. It is a tragedy and a scandal, and the Government are responsible for it.

6.41 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): It is unfortunate that, at the end of the debate, we must cram in short speeches, largely because, in opening the debate, the Secretary of State treated us to an epic epistle to absent friends. He spoke for 40 minutes.

At the end of the debate, in marked contrast to what we had from the Secretary of State, we get down to the nitty-gritty of our discussion. It is not about abstruse statistics or about calculations in the basement of the Scottish Office. It is about human beings, and in particular about the housing conditions in which they are having to live. Anyone who walks through the streets and is in touch with the real world of people who live in our constituencies knows that there are conditions which are appalling; that they are getting worse; and that authorities are being starved of resources by the Government.

A revealing figure is the housing revenue statistics that were accepted by the Government as the grant calculation figure for the management and maintenance of council stock. It is £407 per house; but the real figure which local authorities will announce next year is not £407 but £466. The difference between the two is represented by the cases we see in our surgeries and about which we read in letters concerning repairs and maintenance that cannot be carried out.

Give local authorities the resources to do a decent job on behalf of their tenants and they will do it, for they are crying out to do it; but producing bogus statistics and saying that it is £407 instead of £466 does not change the realities of the situation. It simply changes the script and the false basis on which the statistics are prepared.

The poll tax calculations produced by the Government are based largely on false assumptions about inflation and the performance needs of local government. All the time, we get a politically motivated picture. The Secretary of State is trying to build up that picture by saying, on the one hand, that profligate Labour councils are doing things that do not need to be done, are taking daft decisions and are creating services for which there is no demand. He speaks, on the other, of cautious, penurious Conservative councils which are watching every penny they spend.

Look in detail at the figures and the real picture becomes clear, while Scottish opinion polls show that 50 per cent. of the people support Labour policies and 16 per cent. support the Government.

Let us take a quick spin round Scotland to see some of the realities that lie behind the facade that the Government erects. It being Burns night, it is appropriate to go first to Ayr—

"Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
For honest men and bonnie lasses."

The Tory lead is down to a stump, and John Mackay has got the bump. In Ayr, there is a 40 per cent. increase in the revenue support grant settlement to the good Labour council, leading to a cut in the level of poll tax.

Move up the Ayrshire coast to Cunninghame and we find an increase of 13 per cent. in the poll tax. It is not difficult to see why there is that difference, recalling what Kyle and Carrick are getting. Whereas the latter has an increase of 40 per cent., the increase in Cunninghame is barely 3·5 per cent.

No wonder, when consulting that valuable organ of public opinion, *The Largs and Millport Weekly News*,—we find that the Leader of the Conservative group on Cunninghame district council is not attacking the Labour administration for a poll tax increase of 13 per cent. but congratulating that administration on keeping the increase to that figure. That newspaper reported:

"The budget was welcomed as a fair one by Tory councillors. Group Leader Edith Clarkson said the committee convenors and officers had done 'very well' . . . The local Conservative councillor hit out at the lack of support from the Government who cut Cunninghame's revenue support grant. She expressed extreme concern over the lack of grant aid."

It is nice to know that there are Tories somewhere who have not yet fallen under the malign influence of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling.

We move on to Strathclyde, also cited as a bogey figure despite years of fiscal responsibility since its inception. There can be a lower poll tax in Strathclyde, but at a cost. The Tory budget for the area, reported today involves £9 million-worth of cuts in education expenditure. Do the people of Strathclyde want that? They will have a chance to say when they vote in May.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, it is interesting to see the cost when we cross to Lothian. Mr. Moderate Meek has put forward the Tory budget, which includes selling off seven old folks' homes and a ski slope, closing down welfare rights services and taking away concessionary bus passes. Any fool can make cuts, but everybody in Scotland must realise the price that would be paid for the figures that the Tories are putting forward. Those figures are based on cuts in the level not of luxury services but of necessities.

In Lothian this year they would sell off the old folks' homes—as they do a Bradford—and they would sell off a ski slope, thereby keeping the poll tax artificially low. Perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us what Lothian should sell next year or the year after that.

Mr. Home Robertson: Cemeteries?

Mr. Wilson: Perhaps.

Let it be clearly understood in Lothian that the basis of the Tory budget this year has involved selling off seven old folks' homes. Is that what the people of Lothian want? They too will have a chance to have their say in May.

We move to Tayside, where less political manipulation is going on with the poll tax. A range of budgets has been put forward in that area, varying from £280 by the Tories, £284 by the SNP—always a wee bit in the middle—and £285 by the Labour administration. Where there is political competition, with the parties aiming to be electable and wishing to maintain a decent level of services, all the calculations come out at about the same figure.

The Tories think that the poll tax can be used as a political game. They think that in Scotland, and now in England, it can be sold by saying that Labour councils mea high poll taxes and Tory councils mean low ones. People are not stupid. They are realising in Scotland, as they will come to realise in England and Wales, the potential that exists for the Government to manipulate the level of poll tax for political advantage.

Those who cannot appreciate that should consult the grant figures, which show an increase for Borders of 13 per cent. The increase in Strathclyde is less than 4 per cent. The increase in Edinburgh is 0·08 per cent.; in Bearsden and Milngavie, 51·23 per cent.; in Eastwood, 50·2 per cent.; and the decrease in Glasgow is minus 0·2 per cent.

Those are the statistics of political manipulation. The people of Scotland will not let the Tories, the architects and onlie begetters of the poll tax, off the hook when the statistics become available. As poll tax levels are set throughout Scotland, they are being seen as the products of political manipulation through grant calculations by the Secretary of State.

I want briefly to discuss housing support grant. Yet again, ordinary people whom we represent will face rent increases this year of at least £2 to £3 as a direct result of Government policies. For 10 years, the Government's ideological motivation has been to drive people out of tenancy into owner-occupation. At least there was a political logic in that, when people could afford to buy council houses or move into starter homes because they thought that they would be no worse off. The tactic of the Government was to force up rents and send people into the private sector.

It can be argued that that was a fair political tactic, but now the position is different. People cannot now go into the private sector or pay their mortgages because of the Government's high interest rate policy. Now, the choice is not between becoming owner-occupiers and staying as high-rent council tenants; it is between massive rent rises —achieved by Government manipulation of grants—or mortgage misery. The Government and the Scottish Office are confronting the people of Scotland with the choice of rent rises or mortgage misery.

Finally, I support what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). I have no truck with those who, for political advantage, urge poor people not to pay the poll tax in the hope that, at the end of the day, they will make political capital out of attacking local authorities for doing the job that they are legally obliged to do, which is to collect the revenue. As a Socialist and a member of the Labour party, I am proud that in its history Strathclyde regional council has never initiated a warrant sale. It never will do so against people whose need is genuine.

My contempt is profound for those who would try to make it impossible for the council to maintain that record —not for reasons of defending the poor, but out of malice in the hope of attacking that Labour authority. I have no time for those people. We will get rid of the poll tax in Scotland, as well as in England and in Wales, by getting rid of the Government. The poll tax will be one of the principal vehicles by which we do so.

6.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I strongly reject the charge that there has been any manipulation in the grant, and I shall cite evidence. Stirling had its grant increased by 20 per cent., the Labour authority of East Kilbride by 33 per cent., Hamilton by 18 per cent., Kyle and Carrick by 30 per cent., Motherwell by 29 per cent., and Strathkelvin by 41 per cent. That is clear evidence that the distributions are done entirely on the basis of need, to equalise the needs of an authority on the basis of the arrangements agreed with COSLA, with the balances then distributed on a per capita basis.

There has been not only a 7·5 per cent. increase in the rate support grant but, taking into account other grants, an increase of 8·2 per cent. If authorities spend in line with the settlement, community charges, on average, need not rise by more than inflation. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfies (Sir H. Monro) that there is no doubt that if community charges higher than inflation are set, they will be a direct consequence of growth in spending and not the level of the settlement. The encouraging reality of the community charge is that it persuades the electorate to focus sharply on the validity of council spending plans.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

On the safety net, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) asked me a specific point concerning her district council. It was invited last year to submit a detailed paper to the distribution committee, explaining how it considers itself to be disadvantaged. So far, it has not done so, but the offer remains open. I strongly suggest that the council does that, as the distribution committee consists of local authority and Scottish Office representatives. The Exchequer buy-out of the safety net means that those authorities such as Grampian, Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, which contributed to the self-financing net last year, will receive their grant entitlement in full in 1990-91 and in future years.

I recognise that there are those who argue that we are giving too much grant to rural areas. Under the new grant system, it is our aim that prudent authorities would no longer be disadvantaged compared with high-spending authorities. The effect of the new system is now being seen, whereas previously it was practically obscured by the safety net. It is now working its way through to the advantage of Scotland.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) wanted me to speak about the business rate. The Government's policy on business rates has been widely welcomed. The across-the-board reduction of 6·25 per cent. in rate poundages is an important first step towards a common rate poundage, and further steps are planned to continue the process towards harmonisation.

The Government recognise the concern expressed by local authorities about the uncertainty of the yield of the non-domestic rating income. That is why we gave a commitment to consider redetermination of the RSG for 1990-91 in the light of actual rate yield.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked for an estimate of the sum needed to eliminate the balance. The original estimate of the CBI was £250 million. We recognise that the effect of revaluation might affect that figure, and we will take that into account when considering further reductions in the business rates. We believe that the £80 million reduction will be a significant first step along the right road.

On the collection of the community charge, I agree with the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) that those who are in a position to pay the community charge should do so. It should be stressed to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) that more than 1 million people in Scotland receive rebates—a higher number than the first Scottish Office estimates. I agree strongly with my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that those who have the capacity to pay should do so.

It is especially significant that Angus district council, the sole nationalist-controled council in Scotland, should be busily collecting the community charge when the Scottish National party Members of Parliament are claiming that they are not paying. I suggest to the House that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. I remind them of the old New Zealand saying that the tree that is split is nothing but food for the ants.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) raised the relevant matter of a hostel in his constituency. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) raised a similar point. Consultations are taking place with COSLA to the extent that hostel costs should continue to be charged to the housing revenue account. I regret that the consultations are not yet completed, but agreement in principle has been reached that the HRA should be restricted to the authorities' landlord function. Any change involves complex issues, but I hope that that will be completed before long and that revised guidance will be sent out.

As hon. Members will appreciate, there has been a £64 million increase in the net allocation. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) asked about the Winget houses. That is primarily a matter for the district council. The final allocations will be made in March and we will thoroughly investigate all available possibilities. If we are in a position to make a further allocation, we will do so, but I am not in a position to do so now.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No, I must answer a few more points.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) failed to mention that East Lothian had a supplementary allocation in excess of £1 million a month ago. We will keep the points made by hon. Members in mind before final allocations are made in March. I agree with the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute that it is important for Scottish Homes to focus on not only low-cost home ownership but the problems of rural housing. That is why Scottish Homes was asked to go into it thoroughly, to prepare a report and to develop a rural housing strategy. The document, which I think is a good one, made many wide-ranging suggestions. I agree with Scottish Homes that the view of all those with an interest in rural housing should be aired. Only then will resulting policies be seen to be in the interests of all those living in rural Scotland. I hope that policies will be fully developed later this year, as I am sure they will be.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) raised the question of environmental considerations. As time has almost run out, I can only say that I will write to him.

Let me end by saying that our overall housing policies would have received the approval of the great Robert Burns, and tonight I commend them strongly to the House.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [19 January] to put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the Motions.*

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 167.

Division No. 50] **[7 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian

Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. John McFall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st December, be approved.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1990, dated 8th January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Orders of the Day

London Local Authorities Bill *[Lords]*

Order for consideration read.

7.16 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley) *rose*——

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): The Question is, That the Bill be now considered.

Mr. Redmond *rose*——

The Chairman: I apologise. I did not realise that the hon. Gentleman wished to speak.

Mr. Redmond: It is not often, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that people do not see me.

I should like to know who is in charge of the Bill and I hope that whoever it is will take this opportunity to enlighten the House on the Bill's aims and objectives.

The Chairman: Order. I was about to put to the House the Question that the amendments be considered. If the hon. Gentleman will let me put that Question, he can then make the points that he wishes to make.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the amendments be made.

Mr. Redmond: I hope that whoever is in charge of the Bill will take this opportunity to explain its finer details.

What does the proposed amendment on all-night cafés entail? I used to be a lorry driver and when I was working I liked to call into a café. I am not sure what restrictions the Bill seeks to place on them and I should welcome clarification on that. I should also like to know the extent of the powers that the Bill gives local authorities to restrict all-night cafes. Many tourists frequent London, our capital city, and they will want the cafes to be open, serving good quality food and tea.

The Bill talks about the restoration of gas and electricity supplies, but I am not sure whether the privatisation of the electricity and gas industries will have any effect on it. I am not sure when it kicked off in the Private Bill Office.

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying wide of the specific amendments. He should address himself to the amendments; he may find an opportunity to debate some of the wider issues on Third Reading.

Mr. Redmond: Am I to understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you intend to take the amendments en bloc or separately?

The Chairman: The Question, on the motion before the House, is that the amendments be made. The hon. Gentleman ought to speak to the amendments that are before the House. If, however, he wishes to deal with wider issues, it may be admissible, in a wider debate, for him to do so under the next motion for Third Reading.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful for your clarification of the proceedings, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, I should like whoever is promoting the Bill on the Government side of the House to say why the amendments have been tabled. I understand that the promoters of private Bills are lawyers. I am anxious to know whether the amendments

have been tabled on account of bad drafting. I keep asking that question, but I am only getting blank looks from that side of the House.

The Chairman: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that, because he has the Floor, no other hon. Member has so far had the opportunity to respond to him. When he has finished his speech, we may find that an hon. Member is in charge of the Bill and is able to answer his question.

Mr. Redmond: But when I sit down you will certainly not allow me to stand up again Mr. Deputy Speaker, if no hon. Member on the Conservative Benches answers my questions. There is no certainty that any hon. Member who is sitting on the Government Benches will be prepared to explain why the amendments have been tabled.

The Chairman: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to comment further after the hon. Member who is in charge of the Bill responds, he may, with the leave of the House, do so. The House will not withhold its consent.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful for your guidance, Sir. However, as the amendments have been tabled, they will be incorporated in the Bill. If a Conservative Member had clarified the amendments, I should not have had to stand up and ask questions. There have been occasions in the past when we have sought clarification from Conservative Members but have received none. My worry is that by means of these amendments somebody is trying to sneak something through.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I am not sure how we can help the hon. Gentleman. He has referred to hon. Members on Conservative Benches. Is he not aware that schedule 1 lists the participating councils? They include every single London borough—both those that belong to the Association of London Authorities, which is Labour-controlled, and those that belong to the Lond Boroughs Association, which is Conservative-controlled. I am sure that all hon. Members would like to help the hon. Gentleman if he could explain which of the amendments cause him concern.

Mr. Redmond: The hon. Gentleman is correct when he says that all the London boroughs are participating, but the lead authority is Westminster. I have grave reservations about an authority that is prepared to sell cemeteries so cheaply, without giving any thought to the consequences. I wonder, therefore, whether Westminster council, the lead authority, will make similar mistakes here.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): It may assist the hon. Gentleman if I explain that the city of Westminster is promoting the Bill on behalf of the other London authorities. That has been the practice since the abolition of the Greater London council. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that it is a necessary technicality that Westminster is taking the lead. By that means, all the London boroughs, controlled by whichever political party, have been given the opportunity to place this important Bill before the House.

Mr. Redmond: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Did Westminster consult all the local authorities involved?

Mr. Bowis: Of course it did.

Mr. Redmond: I am sorry, but I cannot assume anything, given what has happened in the past with private Bills.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): If I am able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I may address the House on the amendments to the Bill. That may assist the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond).

Mr. Redmond: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The tragedy is that earlier I saw no movement on the Conservative Benches. Had there been any movement, I should have remained seated and would have listened carefully to the explanations. My suspicions about the amendments are understandable when one reflects on what has happened in the past. We can only draw conclusions from those events. We must take great care when private Bills are considered. However, the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) has assured me that he will explain why the amendments have been tabled. I intend, therefore, to sit down and to listen carefully to what he has to say. I shall then have to decide whether to divide the House on one or all of the amendments.

Sir John Wheeler: With the permission of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall address it on the amendments before us. They are essentially minor and purely technical, and are designed to improve the Bill. For example, the amendment on page 2, line 16, invites the House to leave out "1989" and to insert "1990". That is the nature of most of the amendments that the House is considering.

However, there is a slightly more substantial amendment at page 8, line 27. It relates to the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority. The promoters of the Bill —the city of Westminster, on behalf of the 30 London boroughs, including all the Labour-controlled boroughs and all the Conservative-controlled boroughs, as represented by their two associations, the Association of London Authorities and the London Boroughs Association—have agreed the contents of the Bill and the amendments that the House has been invited to consider.

The substantial amendment that relates to the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority has been tabled by the promoters because they are anxious entirely to meet the worthy objective of the authority, that the aims of the Bill should be clear and unambiguous. Therefore, I invite the House to approve the amendments. If I am required to deal in greater detail with the purpose of the Bill, I shall do so. However, I have reason to believe that the Bill is supported by the London boroughs and by all the others who are concerned with the good government of London.

The Chairman: Does the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) seek the leave of the House to speak again?

Mr. Redmond: No.

Question put and agreed to.

Amendments made.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Standing Order 205 (Notice of third reading) be suspended and that the Bill be now read the third time.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

7.30 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I warmly welcome this Bill on behalf of the borough of Hillingdon, in which my constituency is situated. It is a very useful and important Bill which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) said, has the support of all London local authorities.

I am particularly glad to see clauses 23 and 24, which enable London local authorities to deal with the difficult problems of street trading and licensing street traders to operate in designated streets where it is believed that that is desirable. This is a separate question from the one asked by the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), who was referring to something quite different—night cafés.

Mr. Redmond: While travelling round London one sees streets with market stalls in them. Will this Bill affect the people running those stalls?

Mr. Shersby: No. As I understand the Bill—this has been the subject of considerable discussion over the past five years or so—it gives local authorities in London the power to license those street traders. Westminster council, on which I had the privilege of serving for about 12 years, has very close contact with street markets in places such as Soho and elsewhere.

I am addressing the House on a quite different matter —street trading in the outer London boroughs such as Hillingdon, where the need for licensing has been clearly identified and is highly desirable. It is encouraging that all the London boroughs have signified their approval not only of this aspect of the Bill but of its many other apsects.

The Bill will benefit not only my constituents but all those who engage in street trading in one form of another by providing a proper system that is clearly understood by those involved in selling food and drink and those who wish to buy it.

I commend the Bill to the House.

7.34 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): In the past I have taken an interest in street trading matters and I know that the relationship between street traders and local traders has not always been very happy. I have a few questions which I expect the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), speaking for the promoters of the Bill, will be able to answer.

First, I heard what was said about all London local authorities now supporting the Bill. I should be grateful if it could be clarified whether, not only formally but, as far as the hon. Member for Westminster, North is aware, informally, there is no dissent from the provisions of part III, which deals with street trading. There were negotiations on, amendments to and a petition against the Bill on behalf of street traders, who were concerned not just about ice cream trading, which I know was a separate matter, but about street trading generally. The first assurance that I seek is that, as far as anybody concerned with the promotion of the Bill is aware, there is no remaining discontent among street traders.

Sir John Wheeler: I represent a division of the city of Westminster where there are many street traders and I know that on previous occasions there were objections. I have received no objections in respect of this Bill and I am reliably informed by those responsible for the promotion of the Bill that they have had no objections either. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel reassured on that very important point.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Secondly, I wish to make a few comments about the relationship between local authorities and street traders. I speak from experience in Southwark and from having watched the local authority, which is controlled not by my colleagues—we are the official opposition in Southwark —but by the Labour party. Street traders have had a very unhappy relationship with their local authority for many years.

Street trading is an integral part of the variety of commerce in London, but an even more important element is that it is part of the continuing employment of people in family businesses. It is often a matter of significant pride to people that they inherit a business that was set up by a father or mother, grandparents, an aunt or uncle, or the like.

Clause 26 deal specifically with provisions governing succession. It provides that, although the holder of a current licence may have given the name and address of a relative to whom he desires the licence to be granted when he dies, retires or gives up his pitch through ill health, the borough council cannot grant that licence until a certain period has elapsed. Have the boroughs given any assurance that they will support rather than oppose the carrying on of businesses in street markets by the relatives of those who currently hold the licences? One controversial issue is that there has been some very sharp practice over the years, wrapped up as non-discriminatory practice but often precluding the carrying on of family businesses by the people who have the most obvious claim to do so.

I am perfectly content that we should expand the possibilities for people to get into street trading. Like many other hon. Members representing London constituencies, over the years I have been approached by people who want to have a stall or a pitch in a street market and have found it difficult to do so. However, sufficient opportunities arise in the normal course of events, so it seems to me to be improper and unjustifiable that people who have built up a market stall as a family business should not be assured that they can transfer the business to a member of their family. Members of the family are defined in clause 26(2). They are all sufficiently proximate in terms of affinity to be eligible.

I hope that I can have some assurance before we end this debate that local authorities are committed to and support the principle that, where appropriate family members wish to take over such a business, the authorities should be positively disposed towards them and not make life difficult.

Thirdly, we now have a set of regulations in substantial detail about designating licensed streets, the way in which applications should be made to local authorities for street trading licences, the conditions that shall be applied, and so on. Street trading requires common sense, as does the relationship between the licensing authority and street traders. It is no good taking an antagonistic and parochial attitude to such obvious problems as how the streets are to be cleaned either during or immediately after a market. These are matters of dialogue.

I wonder whether an assurance has been given to street traders by London local authorities that they will always

seek properly to include street traders in the local authority committees, sub-committees and working parties that make the decisions on these matters.

I appreciate that under the new legislation that will come into effect this spring it will be impossible for people who are not elected councillors to be full committee members. I support that. Those who are elected should be ultimately responsible, and it should be impossible to fiddle the numbers by co-opting people. None the less, if local democracy is to work well, it is important for street traders to be involved in the decision-making process. Have assurances been given that street traders will be properly involved? In Southwark, the system has certainly been rigged against them on many occasions, and they have unreasonably been excluded from those parts of the decision-making process in which they have a justifiable case for inclusion—often with surprising ingratitude for what street traders do.

Street traders do not simply set up stalls and sell food, vegetables, clothes and other wares. They often make substantial contributions to the local community. They arrange outings for underprivileged or deprived people and collections of money for people in the community. I have never found street traders to be unwilling to co-operate or to collaborate with people who are reasonable to them. It is a pity that in Southwark things often came to such a sad pass; there was a great deal of acrimony because there was no proper consultation and dialogue. I hope that some assurance will be given during the passage of the Bill that street traders will be involved in decisions about fees, charges, the siting of pitches and which streets are designated.

The fourth matter on which I seek information from the promoters is whether there was any discussion behind the scenes on the view of local authorities—if there is a collective one—about the fees and charges to be imposed. In my constituency, there is a designated street market in Albion street, which is very near the mouth of Rotherhithe tunnel. It provides for a small number of pitches, but because of population change and the Surrey docks development, the market has not been running for some years now and the number of street markets in my constituency has been reduced.

The variety and benefit of shopping in the locality has been diminished by the absence of pitches and stalls there. One factor which has determined that—although it is by no means the only one—is the fees charged by local authorities. I am not arguing that there should be a centrally determined standard fee for 33 London local authorities. That would be against my philosophy, illogical and probably impossible to enforce. I am seeking information on whether any guarantees have been given that there will be no unreasonable increases that will freeze out street trading.

One conflict that is below the surface of all the legislation is the battle between street traders who want to retain street trading, which is very popular with local people and visitors as part of the commercial life of London, and the local authorities, for which street trading often represents a nuisance. They sometimes deal with it by encumbering it with so many regulations and administrative difficulties that people are dissuaded from trying to get through the process, and then by adding charges and increasing them so unreasonably above inflation that street traders are driven away.

Although some people have stalls and pitches in more than one market, more than one borough or all over a large city, most traders make their living from one stall. If they cannot continue in the borough where they are traditionally known, or they are frozen out, that is the end of their business. I hope that assurances can be given about the positive attitude of local authorities in London towards street trading.

The House should take note of the valuable role of street traders. I recall a controversial debate about earlier legislation promoted by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) on behalf of the Greater London council, which proposed changes to street traders' patterns of occupation and licensing. The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and I managed to persuade the House to adopt an amendment that was supported by both sides of the House. It was supported by the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) who is now the Minister for Sport, although I do not know for how much longer. We had to take on the GLC, which was acting insensitively towards street traders. I hope that those days are over and that the Bill does not presage a further series of battles—although this time they would be fought local authority by local authority in boroughs where street traders hope to hang on to the important role that they play.

My final point relates to procedure. I was present at the end of last Session when the House passed motions which, for the first time, carried over private legislation into this Session. Perhaps the sponsor of the Bill can tell us how often we have proceeded immediately to consider and approve such a motion—if the Chairman of Ways and Means' motion is approved by the House.

At the end of last Session, the motions were introduced on the basis that it was a precedent and that we had never before reached the stage where so many Bills had been blocked. When we returned this Session, we had a resurrection motion, which was also unprecedented. Unless there have been one or two others since that resurrection motion, the motion of the Chairman of Ways and Means is unusual, to say the least. May we have some information on whether it is unique or unprecedented or whether there have been precedents for considering amendments and moving straight into a Third Reading debate without giving hon. Members the opportunity to consider the Bill as amended? It is unusual.

In a debate last night, when the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was certainly present, we discovered that some statutory instruments that had been debated in Committee only the day before were being considered forthwith without hon. Members having had the opportunity to see the *Hansard* reports of the debates in Committee. It may be that they were considered in the wrong order and that we considered some tertiary legislation before we had enacted the treaty that made it possible.

These are important matters, and I hope that we are given some reassurance that we are not acting over-hastily. No great disservice would be done to legislation if we could consider it in Committee one day and on Third Reading another day. Even if some hon. Members wished to speak against the amendments or Third Reading, surely it would be better to proceed stage by stage in the traditional way of Parliament, rather than trying to avoid, ambush or hijack difficulty by concertina-ing two stages together.

[Mr. Hughes]

I should be concerned if this was the only opportunity for the House to debate a motion that brings together consideration and Third Reading. I ask hon. Members to reflect on whether that is a wise precedent for private or other legislation, and whether there will soon be the reform of the private Bill procedure that we all expect.

7.49 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): If the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has queries about the procedure, he should have consulted you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the guardian of the procedure on private business. I assume also that the hon. Gentleman consulted members of his party who control certain London boroughs, and who support the Bill, about the subjects tht he raised. I should like to emphasise that the Bill, which we hope will shortly be on the statute book, is welcomed and promoted by all London boroughs.

Mr. Simon Hughes: May I correct the hon. Gentleman? We are still considering the motion; we have not yet reached Third Reading.

Mr. Bowis: I think that we are on Third Reading. If I am wrong, no doubt you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will correct me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The Question before the House is, That Standing Order No. 205 be suspended and that the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful; we are indeed on Third Reading.

I wish to welcome the Bill in principle and highlight clause 42, which will bring welcome relief to people in London because it deals with discarded shopping trolleys —the misguided monsters of London streets.

Shopping trolleys litter our streets, and it is time we gave local authorities power to deal with them. They are a boon to shoppers, but they are left in the most extraordinary places, not least in my front doorway. I welcome the fact that something will be done to remove them.

Shopping trolleys disfigure the environment when they are left lying around. They pose a danger to blind people, who trip and fall over them, and others with partial or full sight can equally suffer injury. They should not be left lying around. They pose a danger when they are tipped into rivers and streams, thereby damaging the creatures that live in them, not least swans. Many swans have been killed as a result of anglers' fishing lines getting hooked round trolleys and wrapping around a swan's neck, causing it to drown.

Today, projectiles are flying around because of the gales and causing damage and danger. We have the opportunity to remove shopping trolleys from our streets, so that, on days such as this, they do not contribute to the damage that the people and property of our capital city are suffering.

7.53 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I agree with the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) about trolleys. He and I represent adjoining constituencies which, like those of other hon. Members, suffer from the problem of discarded shopping trolleys.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I have never been able to understand why we do not adopt the French system, whereby one pays the equivalent of £1 when taking a trolley, which is returned when one returns the trolley.

Mr. Cox: The hon. Gentleman has taken the point that I was about to make. The hon. Member for Battersea and I have Texas do-it-yourself stores in our constituencies. The Earlsfield store operates that system, and I rarely see its trolleys discarded. That is a simple method of preventing people from discarding trolleys.

I wish to deal with clause 41, the first four lines of which say:

"In the case of any market or fair held in pursuance of any statute, royal licence, royal charter or letters patent, or as of right from time immemorial, nothing in this Part of this Act shall affect the sale or exposure or offer for sale of goods in any such market or fair".

I am a member of the all-party Showmen's Guild. Its large membership is made up of members of all political parties and its regular meetings are well attended. Fairs and markets are held throughout the year in the constituencies of hon. Members representing London. Many of them have traditions going back hundreds of years and are part of the history of those areas. Local authorities, irrespective of which political party controls them, by and large welcome fairs, which have large public support. Children and families enjoy the events that fairs and markets offer.

Clause 41 outlines what should be the position, but sadly it often is not. The all-party Showmen's Guild held a meeting in the House in December, at which showmen informed us of a problem that they face in Northallerton. However, the problem could equally apply to any part of London. The local authority in Northallerton claims that fairs and markets, which have been held there for hundreds of years, are causing too much congestion. In the eyes of the local authority, they are becoming a nuisance and it does not want them to take place.

Hon. members may ask, "Surely the royal statute gives showmen a guarantee. For hundreds of years they have been able to hold fairs and markets in that area, so why should they worry?" Unfortunately, it is not as simple as that, because I understand from the latest information that I have been given that the local authority has become bloody-minded. It is not prepared to hold the meetings that the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain has repeatedly requested to discuss the problem. It is saying to showmen, "We are not concerned about the traditions. Your fairs are causing too much congestion in our area. Therefore, we will no longer allow them."

That has caused much worry, not only to people whose livelihoods depend on fairs and markets but to local businesses, which often benefit from them, because they attract people who spend their money in those local businesses. I understand that this will cost the showmen a great deal of money because they intend to contest the actions of that local authority.

Clause 41 clearly outlines a showman's rights, but when those rights have been outlined before, they have not

always been observed. I understand that the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) is the sponsor of the Bill. Will the hon. Gentleman give me and other London Members a clear assurance that what is said in the Bill is what is meant, and that this group of honourable men and women, who follow a tradition in fairs and markets that have existed for hundreds of years, will not find itself in Northallerton? It could cost the guild an enormous amount to defend what has generally been accepted as a basic right. As a London Member, I feel that I have the right to seek the clear assurance that clause 41 will be adhered to by the London boroughs that have supported the Bill.

8.1 pm

Sir John Wheeler: I hope to bring this short but useful Third Reading debate to its conclusion. First, let me seek to respond to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who has expressed an interest in clause 41. He is absolutely right to address the House in such terms: we all know and understand the value and importance of the Showmen's Guild and the contribution that it makes to the quality of life.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to say, on behalf of the promoter, whether clause 41 means what it says. I believe the words therein displayed to be wholly accurate and a proper reflection of what is intended. I believe, too, that the 32 London boroughs will endeavour to operate not only to the letter of the clause but to its spirit as well. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I have made those remarks in good faith, in the belief that the promoters of the Bill believe that what they propose is proper.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke eloquently in support of the work and life style of street traders, and the House will remember his contributions on previous occasions. I need hardly tell the House that that part of the Bill dealing with street traders seeks to enshrine in law a clear statement of how street trading should be practiced in the 32 London boroughs, and will introduce for the first time scope of the legislation shoe shines and ticket touts, who will also require a licence. The purpose of the exercise is to protect and enhance the activities of the genuine street trader and to keep off the streets of London, to the benefit of the public as well as of street traders, the humbugs and scoundrels to whom we object.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am just passing through the Chamber. I was interested in something that he said about licences for ticket touts. Is it really the case that one can get a licence to practise something which, if not wholly illegal, certainly approaches illegality?

Sir John Wheeler: Our proceedings are greatly enhanced by the passage through the Chamber of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). The Bill would require ticket touts to apply for licences but I have not said whether they would be granted licences. The hon. Gentleman may conclude from that that the Bill may be regarded as a means by which to deal with a difficult and unpleasant social problem.

Let me return to the speech made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and to his concern for street traders. He is right to say that clause 26 deals with the family relationship of traders who succeed one generation after the other. The Bill seeks to define that succession. Let me try to help the hon. Gentleman by explaining that the intention in the Bill is to protect those who have a proper succession but allow the licensing authority to protect the public interest by preventing the charlatan and the rogue from usurping the privilege. The hon. Gentleman will have noted that clause 30 provides for a developed and detailed appeals system so that the aggrieved person can properly press his claim should he wish to do so.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether there would be consultation between the 32 London boroughs and the street traders. That is a more difficult question for me to attempt to answer, although I believe that the 32 boroughs intend to have a full and proper working relationship with those who seek to trade within their jurisdiction. As the hon. Gentleman knows, some authorities unfortunately do not seek to establish such relationships at present. We can only hope that the passage of the Bill and the examples of the best in London will encourage those authorities that have been at odds with their traders to find a more satisfactory way of relating to them.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman's mention of 32 London boroughs prompted me to check the statement issued on behalf of the promoters. I had assumed that the 32 boroughs and the City were included. Now I see that the City and one borough are not included. Only 31 are mentioned. Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House why the City and one London borough are not to come within the regime?

Sir John Wheeler: I am afraid that I cannot help the House with that question. The House will understand from its knowledge of the history of the corporation of the City of London that its activities are invariably separate and distinct from the rough and tumble of the life of the 32 London boroughs. On my present information, I cannot, alas, tell the hon. Gentleman why one of the London boroughs does not fall within the scope of the Bill. The Bill would nevertheless consolidate and improve a number of measures, and it is to the advantage of the people of London and the boroughs represented that we should approve it.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey also touched on fees and charges. As I understand it, these must be a matter for the constituent local authority, and I have no authority to say what they should seek to do collectively. That must be a matter for them. I invite the House to give this important local measure its Third Reading.

8.8 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I thought that I had better say a word or two about the Bill because, when the Leader of the House introduced what was commonly called the resurrection motion some time ago, I pointed out that some of the street traders that I had spoken to during the 12 months since the Bill had started its passage through Parliament had drawn my attention to its inadequacies. I refer in particular to those in the city of Westminster.

There are many Labour local authorities in London. Many street traders in such areas, including those in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham,

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North-West (Mr. Banks), believe that the local authority will do its level best to protect the street trader and others who are affected by the new provisions in the Bill. I had a discussion to that effect with some of the street traders in Westminster—Lady Porter's domain. They are worried about the treatment that they will receive.

Sir John Wheeler: No, they are not.

Mr. Skinner: We can carry on doing the pantomime act for as long as the hon. Gentleman wants. I spoke to a considerable number of market traders, including many on Strutton ground, not far from here, off Victoria Street. They are worried about registration and licensing. They are also worried about some of the points to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Under the present procedure, people who have licences keep them on until they decide to pack up the licence, retire or pass away. They are worried that under the new procedure they will have that right taken away. Some of the traders may be 60-odd years old and have been on Strutton ground or in other places in the vicinity for many years. A family may have traded there for generations.

Under the Bill, someone from Westminster council who had lost his interest in giving away cemeteries might decide to take it out on the street traders. The traders are worried about that and have made representations to Westminster council on several occasions but not got far.

We must question how the Bill has managed to reach this point, with Third Reading and amendments. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred to the amendments on Third Reading. This is not the first time that amendments have been brought before the House on Third Reading, although it may not have happened on a private Bill.

In the last parliamentary Session, the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) sponsored a private Member's Bill. It waltzed its way quickly through many of its stages and reached Third Reading. It was suddenly realised that it had gone so fast that the promoters had got the title wrong. They did not simply need amendments: they had to change the title. Some of us who were here on that Friday put a stop to that hanky-panky. The same thing is happening with this Bill. It has come along with amendments on Third Reading, despite the fact that they have not been properly and thoroughly discussed.

To add to the confusion, the Bill did not get through in the last parliamentary Session. What is known as a carry-over motion could have been brought in to allow the Bill to be carried over into the next parliamentary Session. The Government have a massive majority, so one would think they would be able to do the job simply. They have a majority of 150 over the Labour party and the rest—the rag, tag and bobtail—of about 100. With all those Members available, one would think that the Government could get it right. They say that they can whip these things, but it is a different story when the heat is on. They did not bring in a carry-over motion, and then came up with another motion after the new parliamentary Session had begun.

The Government's motion was to the effect, "Let's imagine that we don't have a new Session. We shall carry the Bills over retrospectively." If a Labour Government or Labour manifesto proposed to introduce retrospective legislation to give an amnesty to all the people who will not pay the poll tax, the Tories would play merry hell. An amnesty would not be a bad idea. I am working on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: I say this only in passing. I am simply drawing a parallel. The Tories' people in the media would want to hang, draw and quarter those who had the gall to propose retrospective legislation. However, that is what the Government have done. The Bill was carried over retrospectively. The Chairman of Ways and Means is knowledgeable about such affairs, and he knows what I am saying.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend recall that, on the Housing (Special Provisions) Bill, which became an Act in 1975, restrospective provision was made to allow civil rights to be restored to several local authority councillors, including 11 Clay Cross councillors, in the same way as they were restored to Scottish councillors and others? On that occasion, many Conservative Members said that retrospective legislation was the top of a slippery slope to Fascism. Two different standards are operating here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are debating the question, That the Bill be now read the Third time. The remarks to which we have been listening are wide of that question. I hope that we shall return to the question before the House.

Mr. Skinner: Let me explain simply, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill before us is unusual. It has been blocked, and the promoters have now come along with amendments. They did not bring them in the normal fashion but on Third Reading. As the Leader of the House had too many Bills before the House and he ran out of parliamentary time, he said that the London Local Authorities Bill would come before the House and would be carried over retrospectively. As Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what I am talking about. We are talking not about an abstract matter but specifically about the Bill.

When the Leader of the House caught up with the backlog of Bills, he decided not to tell the promoters of this Bill, "Sorry, you will have to start from scratch and bring it in afresh." That is what should have happened. The Leader of the House realised that he might be able to shuffle the Bill through and carry over a whole series of Bills, including this one. It was retrospective legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was right to draw a parallel with the way in which the Tories, their friends and Lord Hailsham hammered my brothers and their colleagues on Clay Cross council because they had the guts to keep down council house rents in the 1970s. The councillors stopped the Bill's progress. It never reappeared. They did a good service, although they suffered for it.

Mr. Tony Banks: I remember the incident that my hon. Friend describes. I was a member of a council at the time. We refused to put up the rents and were surcharged, although not at the same penal level——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have an inquest on legislation that was before the House years ago. We

should confine our remarks to the Third Reading of the Bill before the House. I hope that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will do so.

Mr. Skinner: We are here to discuss the Third Reading of an unusual Bill. On a normal Third Reading, it would be right and proper to discuss the content of the Bill. However, we are talking about an unusual Third Reading. Amendments have been brought in at Third Reading which have not been discussed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not correct. There are no amendments before the House. The amendments were put before the House properly.

Mr. Cryer: Ah.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cryer: I was just saying, "Ah."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The amendments have been put before the House. They have been discussed by the House and decided by the House. That is now water under the bridge and the debate should be confined to the motion, That the Bill be now read the third time.

Mr. Cryer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is no point of order. The Chair has given a ruling.

Mr. Cryer: I wish to raise a point of order. Is it now forbidden?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise a point of order, he may do so, but he must not seek to debate or challenge my ruling.

Mr. Cryer: I am just asking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I was not in the Chamber at the time, whether all the amendments have been incorporated in the Bill and are now part of the Third Reading debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has heard me say that the amendments were properly considered at the appropriate stage and have now been decided upon by the House. The motion before the House is, That the Bill be now read the third time, and that is what the debate should be confined to.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The motion is, in fact, slightly different. The motion on the Order Paper, which you confirmed earlier, is

"That Standing Order 205 . . . be suspended and that the Bill be now read the third time."

That is unusual, because we have a Standing Order that requires notice of Third Reading, but this motion will allow us to do without that. However, we have not yet voted on that proposal, just as we have not yet voted on Third Reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to spell out the full motion, he is quite right, but I remind him that the House considered a similar motion last week, which it discussed and approved, so there is nothing unique about what we are doing this evening.

Mr. Skinner: So, we move on a stage and to the question of the "resurrection motion", if I may use that term, which the Leader of the House introduced after the new parliamentary Session had begun. That too was unusual, that too applied to this Bill and that too was retrospective legislation, which is why I am referring to it. I am speaking on behalf of some of the street traders to whom I referred earlier, and to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) referred. It was because my hon. Friend also showed proper concern that the sponsor of the Bill had to answer some of my hon. Friend's queries.

I want to put on the record the fact that this is not just an attempt by me to talk on generalities. The people at Strutton ground and throughout other parts of the area of Westminster council are concerned about the way in which they might be treated when the Bill has received its Third Reading. They believe that, unlike many others, they will be subject to a series of changes—and they have already experienced a few.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend has said that the Bill has been resurrected. It certainly has, but it is unlikely ever to become an object of worship. The point that I had been about to put to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, savaged me in a nice and friendly fashion, would not have discussed the difficulties within my hon. Friend's family back in 1974——

Mr. Skinner: There were no difficulties.

Mr. Banks: Well, the certain problems that were—

Mr. Skinner: There were no problems. It was heroism.

Mr. Banks: Indeed, the heroism of the Skinner family is well known in this House and throughout Derbyshire. What I had been going to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover was that, if we get to the point when we can discuss the various recommendations in the report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, we will not get ourselves into the sort of difficulties that we are in tonight. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about that because he asked the Leader of the House questions about it recently.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has made a fair point. What he is really saying is that an additional reason why we are speaking on this matter, and why my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) has spoken about it, is that we are concerned about the way in which the Government are using the private Bill procedure. The Bill is now part of the backlog and, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey has already pointed out, it is now being hurried through. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting spoke tonight about a matter that I know he would have liked to speak about on a previous occasion, but did not get the chance. He is concerned about the showmen and the street traders.

This has been a mumbo-jumbo affair. The Bill is being shovelled through the House in the hope that people will not take too much notice of it.

I am also worried because, as a result of this debate, I have discovered that the City of London is not involved in these provisions. Indeed, this is not the first time that we have found out that the people—the yuppies—in the City of London are not included in legislation relating to the London authorities. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West has had some previous experience of this.

Mr. Tony Banks: Yes, I certainly have, and I certainly go along with what my hon. Friend has just said about the City of London. However, Camden is also missing from the list of participating councils. Of course, Camden does not have the same political outlook—it is not a totally true-blue Tory council—as the City of London. Although the City of London claims to be impartial and non-political, we know that it has been ring-fenced for the Tory party. The hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) has just returned to his place, so I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover can draw him out somewhat more on the question of why Camden is not included in the list.

Mr. Skinner: I noticed that the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) had gone to speak to some of the people who might have an interest in this matter. Perhaps he has found out why Camden is not included, and perhaps he will tell us. Does the hon. Gentleman have any information to offer us? If he is proposing the Bill, he should be able to tell us why.

We all know why the City of London has been left out. It is because the street traders in the City of London are a different kind of street trader. When we talk about traders in the City of London, we are talking about those in the stock exchange and all the rest of it. They would not like to be described as "street traders", but that is what they are. Many's the time that I have heard on the wireless, "Dealing closed on the stock exchange at 3 o'clock"—that is not a bad time to finish, is it?—"but they are still trading on the pavement." Apparently, that is a metaphorical way of describing it, but it is true. Traders used to leave the stock exchange and deal in shares outside. That was before big bang, which has been a right old carve-up, because the Japs have taken it over now and there have been job losses.

So, there are street traders in the stock exchange and in the stock exchange and in the insurance market at Lloyd's. We should remember that 50 Tory Members are members of Lloyd's——

Mr. Tony Banks: They are names.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, that is right—they are names, but I think that they are members as well. There have been one or two swindles there, including the almighty swindle recently involving £40-odd million and the PCW syndicate but of course, nobody has had their collar felt. Those involved are street traders, yet they are not covered by the Bill's provisions. I find it odd that those people who represent the Tory party and who have picked up something like £26 billion in tax cuts along with their friends in the course of the past 10 years are not having a fence put round them as well. Why are the street traders of the City of London not being treated exactly the same——

Sir John Wheeler *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: Oh, I have drawn him out—I have drawn out the prison officers' whatever it is——

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene in his extremely interesting discourse about the nature of trading in the corporation of the City of London. I am sure that he recalls that the House has approved other measures dealing with those people in the City of London to whom he has just referred. It might help him to know that the Labour-controlled London borough of Camden was not able to participate in the Bill because, as I understand it, it did not want to subscribe to the costs of promoting the Bill. That is all I can offer the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Skinner: Well, that is an answer as far as Camden is concerned, and I suppose that it has satisfied my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West, but it does not alter the facts about those in the City of London. I want to be able to tell the street traders down at the Cut and the others who are not a hop, step or a jump from this building why the street traders of the City of London and Lloyd's will not be subjected to the licensing arrangements, but I do not suppose that I shall get an answer. Just imagine somebody telling those street traders, "Sorry, your licence is finished." Yet that is what might happen to some of the street traders in the city of Westminster and some of the other Tory-controlled authorities. I want to know why those people are being treated differently.

Mr. Simon Hughes: This is an important point, because there will be a difference in treatment for the street traders in two London authorities. Perhaps Camden's reason is that it would not pay, but the result is that street trading in Camden and in the City will be different. My street traders will want to know whether their colleagues in other boroughs and in the City will be better or worse off. I hope that that question will be answered before the end of the debate, because as the hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out, we will not have a Londonwide common standard. There will be two or three different standards—one for 31 boroughs, plus different ones, and it is important that we know whether they are better or worse.

Mr. Skinner: That is a fair point. This is what the debate has revealed, although these points should have been discussed earlier, when we might have remedied some of the anomalies. We are now beginning to find out that the City of London and its people are not to be included. We now find that Camden is not included, and perhaps we may find some other anomalies. That only arises out of a debate that was started by, among others, my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley and my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting. They had what I was going to call the audacity—they felt it necessary—to question some of the contents of this Bill.

Mr. Redmond: At the start of this debate, I asked for clarification about the amendments. I said that, if someone had jumped up and explained the amendments, one could either accept them or reject them. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) got up and, among other things, the question of street traders emerged, whether they would be affected and so on. We were given an assurance that there were no objections whatever. Yet we find that there are objections. We find that not all the London boroughs are involved. I am not a Londoner. Perhaps my hon. Friend ought to continue to draw information out. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing out the points that he has, and perhaps if he continues we can elicit more information.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley has a valid point. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will appreciate this as well because, like the hon. Member, you represent a market town. It is not called a market town for nothing; Doncaster has some of the best and biggest markets in the whole of Britain—as many as three or four, I gather. I have been to several. So my hon. Friend the

Member for Don Valley is knowledgeable about such things. I bet he will want a guarantee for the street traders here equivalent to those given to the traders who come under the aegis of the Labour-controlled Doncaster authority of which he was a member.

That is what we are talking about here: if it is right for those people in the City of London—the moneylenders—to be able to escape from any controls and any licensing, why should these people who have to live under the threat of Lady Porter and her Tory friends be subject to the possibility of losing their licences next week for little or no reason, when one of the local officers comes along and tells them that their licences are up? That is what they worry about. They have asked me to put these questions.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): My hon. Friend may recall that, until a few years ago, my constituency had the largest open-air market in the country. He may also recall that only a few months ago in this House we discussed the Redbridge London Borough Council Bill, which sought to implement a market in contravention of a royal charter. My hon. Friend may also recall that Barnsley has a market founded by royal charter——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. These are not matters to be discussed on the Third Reading of the London Local Authorities Bill.

Mr. Illsley: I appreciate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I wanted to explain this point about street traders. The Bill will give extra powers to London local authorities and will again circumvent powers which have been granted to certain authorities under royal charter to hold markets and allow street trading. Perhaps my hon. Friend for Bolsover would care to consider that.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) is absolutely right. We were present on that occasion, when it was apparent that hon. Members on both sides of the House were in competition with one another about the very thing that he points out. It would be absolutely true, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central has said, that if these powers go through without some of us studying them very carefully, it could well mean, if the Third Reading is agreed, that some of those street traders in authorities other than Westminster will suffer as a result.

It is important that we raise these matters. I know that it is late in the day, but that is not our fault. The whole procedure was, as it were, concertina-ed. Normally, a Bill that goes through the House, whether it is a private or a public Bill or a Private Members' Bill, will take a fairly lengthy time and be discussed, but this Bill has been scuttled through in clandestine fashion, mainly because the Government got all their private Bills piled up and did not know what to do with them. The result is that these promoters, who make a tidy sum out of them, are not too unhappy.

They should have gone back to the street traders to whom I have spoken in the Westminster council area and asked if they could discuss these matters. Some of the traders have been to the council and asked if they could discuss them. I bet the hon. Member for Westminster, North did not know that. He did not know at the beginning of the debate, because he almost suggested that I was not telling the truth; but I have discussed it with these people, and they are very concerned about it.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover is on the right lines. Not many days ago, we had a meeting in the House with the Market Traders Association. Because of what my hon. Friend is saying and the kind of information that he is dragging out, I wonder if there was any consultation at all with the Market Traders Association. It is a national organisation which takes in this area.

Mr. Skinner: Apart from the content of what my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) has said, the most delightful thing about his intervention is that he was standing there with his hand on the Dispatch Box. It would be wrong if that were not recorded in *Hansard*—the fact that he really did look the part. Although he is not standing at the next election, in the next two years before we take control, my hon. Friend may grace that Dispatch Box on some other ocasion—perhaps not when a Bill is going through its very late stages but right from the very beginning.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend has raised the question of market traders and street traders and the question of Lloyd's. He may recall that, in 1981, a private Bill was brought here by Lloyd's to give it, among other things, additional powers and complete immunity for the council of Lloyd's from any action in law for whatever disciplinary action it carried out, on the basis that Lloyd's could manage its own affairs. In view of scandal after scandal, it is clear that Lloyd's cannot manage its own affairs. That is a very good reason why Lloyd's should have been incorporated into the section on street trading in the Bill, even though its members are called by a posh name in order to avoid offending Lloyd's.

Mr. Tony Banks: Spivs.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head again; he is talking about the spivs in Lloyds, who make millions and regulate themselves. What would be wrong even at this late stage in telling the street traders that they can operate on a co-operative basis and regulate themselves? We could tell them that they could have an umbrella organisation to make sure that nothing could be regarded as affecting the environment, but that, when it came to control, licensing and regulation of the markets, they could form local co-operatives. If it is good enough for Lloyd's and the moneychangers, why is it not good enough for them? That is the point.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I have had the opportunity while the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has been speaking to make inquiries about the absence of the City of London from the authorities in the Bill. I understand that the consequence, if the Bill gets a Third Reading tonight, is that the position of market traders, strictly defined, in the City will be relatively worse than in the other authorities which are participants in the Bill, so the logic of the argument holds good.

Sadly, Camden's market traders will also be in a poorer position. When will the City of London make sure that its market traders get the same standards as the Bill would give anyone else in London, and why has it not been willing to give them those same standards at the same time?

Mr. Skinner: I think I said earlier in respect of the absence of the City of London that it has friends on the

[Mr. Skinner]

Tory side and in government. If a body has the support of 50 hon. Members who are Lloyd's names—there are 50 in the Register of Members' Interests; I do not know whether there are any who are not in it—it has real power. It has the power then to say, "Can we be assured that the City of London is not included in the London Local Authorities Bill? We don't want it in. We can look after ourselves."

We hear the arguments about ballots for trade unionists, but not for the Tory party. If the Tory party has a ballot, it does not have a polling booth. The Tory party has double standards. Tory Members have one rule for ordinary, run-of-the-mill street traders who, by and large, are working class, but when it comes to the street traders and the money lenders in the City of London, they have a different set of values.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend is a great defender of parliamentary democracy. Indeed, parliamentary democracy owes him a great debt this evening for having drawn some of these important matters to our attention. He has raised something that I had not thought about until now. If the City of London is excluded, and if the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is correct in saying that the traders in the City of London are relatively worse off in comparison with traders in other boroughs, how does my hon. Friend think that the Bill will affect traders in other parts of London? He will be aware that the City of London is a market authority. It controls not just traders in the one square mile of the City of London, but has responsibility, as a market authority, for markets all over London. Will those markets be affected by the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must draw to the attention of hon. Members the fact that it is the practice on Third Reading to discuss what is in the Bill and not what might have been in the Bill. The appropriate stage to consider omissions from the Bill is earlier than Third Reading.

Mr. Skinner: That is not the point I am arguing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My point is not that the City of London is not in the Bill. I would be out of order if I were to argue that it ought to be in the Bill. I have not made that point. What I say is that the 31 authorities in the Bill may be affected by the absence of the City of London. The point has to be made over and over again. I would be out of order if I were to say that I wanted the City of London in the Bill. I am not likely to say that, but because it is not in, it means that street traders in this area and elsewhere will be affected in many ways.

Mr. Banks: And the markets outside.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, the markets outside the City of London would also be affected.

Some people may ask how we know that the city of Westminster and Lady Porter would deal with the street traders in a way that was disadvantageous to them. I will tell hon. Members why I take that view. It is not because it is a Tory authority, which is bad enough, because of the track record of Lady Porter's administration on cemeteries and other matters; it is because the city of Westminster has already put forward another proposal on Strutton ground. Half the street has already been dug up. I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West is listening, because he is interested in the arts.

Westminster city council proposed to change that quaint little street, which has been there for centuries, into a piazza—not a pizza. The council wanted yuppie stones, coloured stones. The fruit merchants and all the others who have had stalls there for years organised a giant petition to stop the proposal. One thing is certain; there would have been different street traders there after the development. That was the plan. The street traders were told that they would be moved three quarters of a mile away while the work was going on. They would have lost all their trade, and then the yuppie traders would have moved in.

I hope the hon. Member for Westminster, North is listening, because this is important. That was the plan last year. It was thwarted, perhaps only temporarily, because of the petition. I want assurances, because Westminster city council might bring forward a similar proposal. It has already dug up half the street, and some of the traders have been shunted into side streets.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): My hon. Friend has mentioned proposals for yuppie stalls somewhere in London, very close to here, I understand. As he well knows, in most developments these days there must be a marina and a parking place for yachts. Were there any such proposals in the plan that he is talking about?

Mr. Skinner: No. However, the Bill is so comprehensive, covering 31 authorities, that it covers much of the Thames and the Embankment. Some Tory Members were tittering when my hon. Friend made that point, but let me make it clear that there is scope in the Bill to do that.

If Westminster's plan is carried out, markets that have existed for generations may be changed in character. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) knows what it is like to live in a stable community; he does not knock it. Other hon. Members come from communities where there is not the same mobility. Let us remember that, under this comprehensive Bill, there could be massive changes. Many people who have had stalls for years might find themselves literally on the coloured stones.

Mr. Bowis: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is expressing concerns which should be expressed in the House, but can he explain why the leaderships of the Labour party in Newham, in Barking, in Lambeth, in Southwark and all the other Labour councils who are promoting the Bill have got it wrong?

Mr. Skinner: No, they have not got it wrong. I said at the outset that the Bill deals with many local authorities controlled by the Labour party. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West told me many months ago that the local authorities felt that they would be able to use their democratic strength to ensure democracy; I am sure the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey would take the same view.

The Labour authorities are worried about the Tory authorities, where the same democratic control might not exist. It is no use someone saying that I have plucked that out of thin air. Hon. Members need only look at the track record of Westminster city council over the past three or four years. There is plenty of evidence of democratic rights being trampled on—even the rights of people who have buried their dead. When peple like that are running local

authorities, is it any wonder that street traders think that they cannot have the same protection as street traders in Newham? That is why there is a difference.

Mr. Bowis: I think the hon. Gentleman misses the point—that Labour authorities in London, together with non-Conservative authorities, happen to make up the majority of the authorities sponsoring the Bill. They are sponsoring it on behalf of all London boroughs, including the Conservative boroughs. Yet they do not have the concerns that the hon. Gentleman seems to have.

Mr. Skinner: That is right. They feel that they are making an advance and that they will have democratic control. The Labour groups in Hackney and elsewhere may think that there is only a tiny majority in Westminster and that they will be able to control it. That is not bad thinking; it is fairly progressive. It is on the cards, but as Members of Parliament, we have to consider the long term as well.

That is why I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) come into the Chamber, because there are street markets in Leicester as well. If the proposal was for Leicester, he and his two Labour colleagues in Leicester would not take long to stand up for the rights of street traders there. That is what is significant about this debate: those participating—apart from the hon. Member for Westminster, North—all represent Labour authorities and are Labour Members. They are interested in democratic control and believe in the idea of co-operative movements.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): My hon. Friend is making a valid point. Earlier, he talked about the self-regulation of Lloyd's and the legislation for that. Why is it right for Lloyd's in the City of London to have self-regulation in these matters, but not the traders association? Why are we not giving some responsibility and authority in these matters to the traders association—as has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes)—so that the street traders would be self-regulating and have some influence on their own destiny?

Mr. Skinner: There is a good reason. The people behind the Bill include, as I said earlier, Labour-controlled authorities, which feel relatively happy about the matter, and the minority in the Tory-held areas that we are speaking up for today. We are trying to say to the hon. Member for Westminster, North, who is acting on behalf of the promoters, that we want some guarantees. A few Labour Members expressed fears about the consequences in Westminster, which is why I raised these important matters.

Mr. Illsley: I appreciate the point which my hon. Friend makes about Westminster city council. Before he leaves that point, will he bear in mind the tourist trade within London and surrounding areas? Is it not a fact that Westminster has the vast majority of tourist attractions in London, so its street traders benefit from tourism? If regulations were imposed in Westminster that were not imposed in other Labour-controlled authorities, it could be to the detriment of the tourist industry in and around the capital.

Mr. Skinner: That is an important point; it highlights the fact that sometimes in this place hon. Members stand up and make a point or two about what seems to be an innocuous measure and then, suddenly, the truth is revealed. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) has spotted another factor: tourism in Westminster and other areas.

Mr. Tony Banks: I do not wish to disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). However, although many tourists are attracted to Westminster, there are many other delights for them in other parts of London. A walk along the northern sewer outfall in Newham is an interesting treat—wonderful rural life can be experienced.

Mr. Skinner: I am not going to talk about the northern outfall sewer—that may be where my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West got his inspiration the other day when he was on about Ratty, Toad and the rest.

I want to reflect on what my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central said about tourism. He made a decent point, but we must remember that, notwithstanding the efforts of the streets traders and their attractive qualities to tourists, tourism receipts in Britain under this Prime Minister have fallen dramatically. Invisible exports—overall tourism in Britain—are down to about £100 million a month, from about £700 million. That is another matter with which we shall have to deal another day.

I did not intend to speak for long, because my hon. Friends have important measures on which they wish to speak later tonight. I have made all the points which need to be made. Will the hon. Member for Westminster, North answer the questions that I have raised to give safeguards to those traders operating in the area of Westminster city council? Will they be given those guarantees that I have demanded? Why has the City of London been removed from the measure? We need those answers. I know that the hon. Gentleman may need the leave of the House to speak again, but we shall probably allow him to do that.

Mr. Cryer: I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would ask the hon. Member for Westminster, North why we should be dealing with a Bill which has extensive powers for the variation of night café licences. As my hon. Friend knows, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 1982 granted every local authority powers to deal with such establishments. What is different about London late-night cafés that they need this additonal legislation? I am extremely intrigued to know.

Mr. Skinner: I am not aware of the difference, and I thought my hon. Friend might elaborate on that point; perhaps the hon. Member for Westminster, North, will be able to tell us.

The main concern of those traders I have met is that they have licences—some of which are 60 and 70 years old. They have had the tradition of those licences continuing until the traders die or decide to pack up their market stall. They want that to be guaranteed. They say that under the Bill they do not have that guarantee. They also say—this is important—that with regard to registration, they do not want the strong-arm Lady Porter officers coming to places such as Strutton Ground and elsewhere and saying that because there has been a minor infringement—only alleged—the traders will be removed from the market scene.

Those are real fears, and that is why I am sad that this legislation has not been amended to take account of them, to ensure that those street traders, many of whom have

[Mr. Skinner]

been there for generations, have not had the assurances that they demanded from the Tory-controlled Westminster city council. We need those assurances today.

9 pm

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak at this stage of the Bill because aspects of the measure continue to need clarification. Despite earlier requests by my hon. Friends for assurances about its effect on, for example, street traders, we continue to have fears about such matters. My experience with Bills has led me to be sceptical lest provisions slip through that we would otherwise oppose.

The activities of street traders provide an attraction for tourists. Market stalls are often colourful and have a pleasant atmosphere. We should try to retain their character. Doncaster has wonderful indoor and outdoor markets, with stalls of great charm. Let us be sure that some of London's streets are not denuded of the stalls that provide colour and enjoyment for tourists. In many areas, market day is a time of enjoyment for many.

I was surprised to hear that no objection to the Bill had been voiced by street traders. I would have thought, from the remarks of my hon. Friends, that a question mark must hang over that statement. It would have been appropriate for a special Committee to examine the Bill in detail in relation to such issues.

It would be a pity if the Bill had an adverse effect on street traders. After all, the concrete block buildings that are going up in London, especially in the City, have no charm or character. They appear soulless to me, and although I am not a Londoner, I want the capital city to retain the charm and the warmth that Londoners can generate.

Let us maintain the fine traditions of street traders. I appreciate that there is the odd cowboy among them, but we should question any measure that would make sweeping changes. It may be said that the Bill would alter nothing. If so, why have the legislation at all? If authorities have permission to alter and tidy up, they may do that. I appreciate that nothing can stand still and that change is unstoppable, but let us ensure that, when change takes place, it is for the benefit of the community at large.

My remarks apply equally to fairs and fairground sites. Regrettably, their numbers have dwindled over the years. What impact might the Bill have on the activities of showground people? They, too, provide colour and charm in our lives, and although I do not support the Prime Minister's Victorian values, I wish to retain some of the family charm that existed in Victorian times. Perhaps we need legislation to ensure that we retain the family charm of those days; I am not sure. One tries to learn a little each day, and if one can do that, the day has not been wasted. Today I have learnt something, if only about the necessity to suspend some of our Standing Orders to enable a Bill to move briskly to its Third Reading.

I agree with those who say that supermarket trolleys can be a hazard. There must be a method, without the need for legislation, to enable local authorities to penalise firms that allow their trolleys to be scattered near and far. A trolley parked on, say, the footpath is a hazard not only for the blind and partially blind but for the elderly, who may not notice it if it is raining and they are walking with their heads down. Althought that problem needs tackling, do we need the sledgehammer of legislation to crack such a little nut?

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) is not alone in his complaint—I once had five Asda trolleys in my driveway, so anything that stops that sort of dumping would be welcome. I intend to ask the local legal and administration department whether we can institute proceedings because the trolleys contribute to the litter problem. An abandoned trolley could be classed as litter. We can assume that whoever takes the trolley will dump it. Some onus should be put on the supermarket to ensure that that does not take place. Instead of erecting signs saying, "No trolleys beyond this point," the supermarket should employ someone to tell people not to take trolleys past that point. There are many unemployed people in my constituency and in London, so that would help to reduce unemployment.

Some legislation brings benefits, but we do not need this type of Bill, which I was led to believe was welcomed by all London boroughs. The hon. Member for Battersea said that all London boroughs welcomed it, but it would appear that the City of London and Camden are not party to the Bill. I understand that Camden refused to participate because of the cost of promoting it. I do not know what costs are involved. I know that they are high, but they are not astronomical. There may be a reason other than expense. It appears that there is a practice of making changes to suit the occasion. Certain tactics for the passing of private Bills seem to alter slightly as some obscure rule or regulation is dug out and dusted off so that Bills can make progress. We need to be extremely careful.

Camden may not have participated in the promotion of the Bill because it disliked certain aspects of it. The fact that all 31 boroughs have a Labour majority is not a valid reason. As with other organisations, there is a splintering-off if certain things do not happen. Money may or may not have been the reason why Camden refused to participate—we cannot say. Camden has made no objections, but nor does it support the Bill—if it did, it would have put its name to it.

Sir John Wheeler: It is my belief that the London borough of Camden might seek to apply the measures contained in the Bill in its own jurisdiction through another measure on another occasion. If that proves to be the case, all 32 London boroughs will be in agreement.

Mr. Redmond: It was said earlier that one reason why Camden refused to take part was the cost. I know that the people who draft the Bills and shove them through this place get a bob or two, but as 31 boroughs are involved, I assume that the total cost will be split 31 ways. That would bring the cost down. I hardly think that Camden, which could have had a share of this marvellous cake that has been described, would have turned its nose up at a way of achieving a nice Bill at a very cheap rate. I do not accept that Camden said, "Get lost," so that it might have the opportunity of promoting the self-same Bill again, with all the costs that that would involve. There must be another reasons, and one wonders what it is.

Mr. Bowis: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. Certainly Camden was involved in the early discussions on the Bill. It agreed with the principles of what was being done but decided that it did not want to contribute to the cost. Every London borough has an absolute right to

promote a Bill or to combine with others in doing so. That is provided for in legislation. As hon. Members know, there are two or three London Bills going through the House at the moment. The fact that one of them includes Camden shows that that borough has seen the wisdom of the hon. Gentleman's point about costs being reduced if everyone pulls together.

Mr. Redmond: I accept that Camden was given the opportunity and may have drawn back, but it is still not clear why it took that decision. Given the astronomical costs involved in going it alone, it cannot be the money factor; there must be some other reason.

One or two other things have come out during the debate on this Bill, so it is useful. There has been reference to street traders and fairs. One could talk also about markets. Why did not Redbridge lump together its private Bill with this one? Many other strange things have taken place. Combining with those promoting this Bill would have made the process extremely cheap for the Redbridge ratepayers.

Hon. Members have said that people outside London are taking an interest in the Bill. As Members of Parliament we live in London while Parliament is sitting, so we have some interest in this matter. Obviously we are anxious that there is no sharp practice in the passage of Bills, and that they should be scrutinised fully so that we may, as near as damn it, say, "That is okay and can go on its way." But a Bill should depend for its success on its merits, not on the payroll vote that the Government commands—and uses—in respect of these private Bills.

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): Shame.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for intervening from a sedentary position.

If one examined the Bill a little more closely, one would probably find matters about which its promoters, should be informing us. During the passage of the Bill, no one seems to have been anxious to jump up to defend its merits. Only after I had asked for an explanation of some of the amendments did that happen. If the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) had been in the House earlier, he could have jumped to his feet and explained all the amendments in detail. He could have told us why the amendments were necessary and how they would affect the Bill. I do not think that there was sufficient discussion of the amendments, but they have been made, and that will have a bearing on whether the Bill receives its Third Reading. If we had had an early explanation, we might have been home tucked up in bed by now.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): My hon. Friend referred to the role of Members of Parliament from outside London in scrutinising legislation that applies basically to London authorities. I want to reinforce my hon. Friend's point. The Bill refers to the licensing of street traders and markets, and Redbridge is one of the authorities that is a party to the Bill. Last year, my hon. Friend and I took part in a debate on legislation through which the Redbridge authority sought powers to establish markets in its area. The secretary of the National Market Traders Federation has had considerable correspondence with me about London markets and markets outside London. My hon. Friend should emphasise the involvement of Members of Parliament from outside the capital. We receive much correspondence and are lobbied by many people who may be affected if a Bill such as this is extended to other authorities.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Barnsley and other markets will be affected by this Bill and by the Redbridge London Borough Council Bill. Doncaster has a royal charter and I have had representations from my street traders and market traders —as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will have had—as a result of the Redbridge London Borough Council Bill.

The Bill could affect such markets. I am no lawyer, but the Bill may contain a small clause that opens the pearly gates and allows markets to spring up all over the country in inappropriate places. We must be careful. Doncaster market is not in my constituency, but in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Mr. Walker). However, I have a market in the fine town of Mexborough and I want to ensure that the traders there are protected and that nothing in the Bill would bring about the demise of that market.

We have found to our cost that legislation, once enacted, can create many problems and become a lawyer's paradise. I am not a lawyer and I do not have the background to enable me to vet Bills. We need qualified people to explain the impact of the amendments that we have accepted tonight. In the past, several Ministers have had to come back to the House to rectify errors in legislation that the Government have pushed through. If they, with all their lawyers and civil servants, can make mistakes, it is important that laymen such as me should have the opportunity to examine the Bills and ask questions about them. The importance of that is underlined by my experience of private Bills over the past two years. The Bill should not be allowed to pass unchallenged. We should at least register our concern about its effects.

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend referred to the need to ensure that land is made available for fairs. Will he elaborate on the implications of the Bill for fairs?

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) spoke with great feeling about the worries of fairground people. London's green patches are diminishing. The *Evening Standard* carries articles about angry ratepayers and tenants objecting to motorways being built near their properties, reducing still further the green belt. The number of places where fairs can be held is decreasing. If a block of flats is built on a parcel of land that has been used for centuries for fairs, they go for ever. It would be impracticable for a fair to be held on the roof garden of a block of flats, especially in windy weather such as we have experienced today.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 104, Noes 25.

Division No. 51] **[9.22 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Amess, David	Buck, Sir Antony
Atkinson, David	Burt, Alistair
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Butler, Chris
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Body, Sir Richard	Chapman, Sydney
Boswell, Tim	Conway, Derek
Brazier, Julian	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Cope, Rt Hon John

Couchman, James
Curry, David
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Bob
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Gregory, Conal
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thorne, Neil
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Bowis and
Mr. Andrew Rowe.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Haynes, Frank
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lambie, David
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Nellist, Dave
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Rowlands, Ted
Skinner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Martin Redmond.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

MEDWAY TUNNEL BILL *[LORDS]* *(By Order)*

Read a Second time and committed.

Shipping (Dangerous Goods)

9.35 pm

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7074/89 relating to requirements for vessels carrying packaged dangerous goods when using Community ports; considers that Community legislation does not represent the most appropriate means of securing the development of effective provisions to enhance environmental safety in this area; and endorses the Government's view that any new measures should be adopted and implemented on a wider international basis through the International Maritime Organisation.

The Commission's proposal is to equip the Community with legislation on the transport of packaged dangerous goods by sea. It is seen as a means of plugging a loophole left by an earlier Council directive, No. 116/79, on the minimum requirements for tankers entering or leaving Community ports carrying oil, liquefied gas or chemicals in bulk. That directive does not cover a large and growing proportion of shipments of dangerous goods—those in packages, containers, tanker wagons, tanker lorries or mobile tankers.

As its title implies, the purpose of the proposed directive is to require vessels entering or leaving Community ports carrying packages of dangerous goods and marine pollutants to observe a number of minimum standards.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes, with some trepidation.

Dr. Godman: The Minister always gives way extremely courteously. Has the Department of Transport a contingency plan to allow tankers that are in difficulty to enter sheltered waters for remedial measures to be taken? It if has, what consultations have taken place with the commercial fishermen who fish those sheltered waters?

Mr. McLoughlin: I hope to answer the hon. Gentleman's question when I reply to the debate.

The purpose of the proposed directive is to require vessels entering or leaving Community ports carrying packages of dangerous goods and marine pollutants to observe a number of minimum standards. It seeks to do that by imposing a number of rules applied to goods defined by reference to an arbitrary list of substances. The rules would require vessels carrying them to provide to the port state information that is specified in the directive; to keep in contact with coastal radio and radar stations on passage; to use pilot services; and to provide the pilot with detailed information about the ship and its officers and require him to inform the port state of any deficiencies that he encounters. The rules would also require coastal states to inform all vessels in their territorial waters of the presence of other vessels known to be carrying dangerous goods.

The Government's attitude was made clear in the explanatory memorandum. First, there is a risk that the measure, if enacted, would inhibit the free movement of ships by encouraging a trend to create pockets of different regimes of control in different parts of the world. It would create practical problems. Using figures from a 1987 research report from the European Commission,

approximately 4,000 ships would be involved at any one time, and there would be considerable difficulty in keeping track of all the information generated. The proposal to require vessels to use pilot services would be contrary to present United Kingdom law and Government policy, which leaves it to harbour authorities when considering their pilotage arrangements to take into account the hazards involved with vessels carrying dangerous goods.

We certainly want to give all possible support to proposals to enhance environmental safety, but an EC directive is not the best way to go about that. The carriage of harmful substances in packaged form by sea is regulated by international conventions on marine safety and pollution prevention. It is far more desirable for any new measures to be implemented through the International Maritime Organisation. The IMO, as hon. Members are aware, is a specialised agency of the United Nations with 134 member countries. It is a body par excellence for dealing with shipping safety and the protection of the marine environment. It has considerable reserves of expertise to call upon, and a long history of achievement.

For instance, there have been recent amendments to the safety and marine pollution conventions to include identification and listing of marine pollutants and development of detailed carriage conditions for them. There has also been agreement about the hardware and operating procedures needed for mounting rapid and co-ordinated search and rescue operations by shore authorities and ships in the immediate vicinity of any ships in distress.

Dr. Godman: What progress have the Government made in negotiations with other maritime states, on the hazardous and toxic substances convention? May I remind the Minister of the foundering in the English channel not long ago of the multivessel Perintis, which caused considerable concern to commercial fishermen who fish those waters? Does the Minister agree that negotiations undertaken under the umbrella of the IMO, on the carriage of toxic and dangerous substances, are much too slow and cumbersome and that we need directives and action to bring such dangers under control?

Mr. McLoughlin: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. We have considerable powers when dealing with our own territorial waters, under the various controls that the Secretary of State may exercise. The hon. Gentleman referred to the Perintis. I think that I am right in saying that action was taken in that case under our existing powers. I shall check on the exact details, because I should not like to mislead the House.

I agree that dealing through the IMO can sometimes seem to take rather longer than one would wish, but it remains more sensible to try to secure international agreement than to create little pockets in which different things happen and different rules apply. Merchant shipping is by its nature an international activity. I should not want to put British ports and operators at an unfair disadvantage in relation to foreign ports and operators. We are often asked about the size of our merchant fleet, and if we started to impose more restrictions on our fleet, it would not grow as many hon. Members who have criticised its decline would wish it to grow.

It is because of the expertise of the IMO and the acceptance by the international community of the IMO that we believe that it is the right forum for such initiatives.

I must make it clear that the Government accept the principle that ships carrying packaged dangerous goods leaving or entering ports should identify themselves to the port authorities. There are already requirements for the prior notification of goods entering ports and we are sponsoring a proposal at the IMO, in conjunction with the Governments of other North sea nations, to extend them to goods leaving ports.

Hon. Members wish also to consider the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1989, which came into force on 19 November 1989. The 1972 international convention for preventing collisions at sea came into force in 1977. The United Kingdom is a signatory to the convention and brought it into effect in 1977. The IMO has amended the convention on two occasions. The first amendment was agreed in 1981 and was incorporated in new collision regulations in 1983. The second amendment was agreed in November 1987 and to incorporate that amendment, the 1989 regulations were made. The IMO required that they should come into force internationally on 19 November 1989, so they are in operation at the moment.

The regulations clarify certain aspects of the collision rules. They clear up anomalies in the wording of the original text and extend earlier regulations by the provision of some additional definitions. The most important changes relate to the actions of vessels using traffic separation schemes such as exist in that very busy stretch of water, the Dover strait.

I believe that the House also wishes to discuss the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations. This instrument, which is made under the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, provides a framework for inquiries into all types of shipping accident, except for public inquiries, which are covered by earlier legislation. To some extent, they bring together in a single set of regulations what is already long-existing practice, but many of the provisions are new, and there was much helpful discussion in the course of their formation with representatives of all aspects of shipping operation. I believe that the regulations, in their present form, are recognised in the shipping industry generally as a valuable addition to marine legislation.

At much the same time as the regulations were being developed, the new marine accident investigation branch was coming into being, and this branch is to a large extent responsible for putting the regulations into practice. The task was previously carried out by the Department of Transport's marine directorate, which is responsible for marine safety in general, but it was decided to separate the investigatory function. That will avoid any question of conflict of interests in an inquiry, and means that a dedicated body is available to concentrate on investigations. To an extent, there is a parallel with the long-established air accident investigation branch, and as with that branch, the chief inspector reports directly to the Secretary of State. The marine accident investigation branch, although part of the Department of Transport, is entirely separate from and independent of the marine directorate.

Dr. Godman: I wish to ask the Minister an important question. When can the people of the lower Clyde expect the report to be published on the loss of the motor fishing vessel Destiny with the deaths of six men? That is an important question, because the foundering of that vessel

[Dr. Godman]

should be investigated by a fatal accident inquiry. I cannot make that demand to the Lord Advocate's office until an inquiry is completed by the marine accident investigation branch.

Mr. McLoughlin: I hope that I can answer the hon. Gentleman's question. I do not want to be drawn on that accident, which was tragic and moving to any person who remembers the events that weekend. I know that the hon. Gentleman paid tribute to those involved in the rescue operation. I hope that what I am about to say will go some way towards helping him to understand why it may take some time to publish the report that he wants. I shall deal first with the way in which the investigation is progressing into the Marchioness disaster on the Thames last August. For obvious reasons, we shall follow the same procedures, in the investigation that he mentioned.

Already, both the marine accident investigation branch and the regulations are being put to the test. Sadly, hon. Members will be only too well aware of the Marchioness tragedy. The regulations provide for the more serious accidents to be the subject of an inspector's inquiry, and that is considered to be the appropriate investigation in this case. The investigation is now in its final stages, but before publication of the chief inspector's report, which must include the inspector's findings and the chief inspector's recommendations, there are a number of procedures to be complied with.

The regulations require that any party whose reputation might be affected by the report must be shown it in draft form and given the opportunity to comment. If any point at issue cannot be resolved, the aggrieved party can provide an alternative text that must be set out with the report when it is submitted. Those important safeguards require a minimum of two months to allow all those concerned adequate time to respond.

I am sure that hon. Members will realise why that is done. Once the report has been issued, it will normally be made public, so it is important to give anybody who may be criticised or whose judgment may be called into question the right to have his or her say on it.

In addition, there have been several less severe but still serious accidents requiring full investigation.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am sorry that I was not here at the beginning of the debate, but it began early. On the present assessments, what will the delay be between now and the expected conclusion of the inquiry and the reports on the Marchioness incident, bearing in mind the procedures that the Minister outlined? I know that the railway inspectorate, which is also supervised from the Minister's Department, has a similar parallel in its investigation work. What is the link between the investigation by the inspectorate and any potential prosecution by the Director of Public Prosecutions? I appreciate that the Minister may want to be careful about his answer, but it is important that people know how the work done by the inspectorate and any potential prosecutions interrelate. It would be reassuring if we could have that information by the end of the debate.

Mr. McLoughlin: We hope and expect to be able to publish the report as soon as possible, but I do not want to say too much this evening that might lead people to believe that publication is imminent because there is still some way to go. As I have said, part of what remains to be done is that the inspector's report must go first to the chief inspector and then to the people who may or may not be criticised. Time is obviously a factor in this. Once the report is issued, consideration is given to the criminal charges that might be brought, if any are deemed necessary. I do not wish to say at the moment whether that would or would not be the case, because that is not a decision for me and it is not a decision for the chief inspector, as I understand it. However, if I am wrong I shall clarify the point later.

There have been several serious accidents requiring full investigation as well as a number of other incidents, relatively minor but still significant. The various inspectors are greatly helped in their task by the co-operation given by those concerned in those accidents; but even with that co-operation they are finding it valuable to have the backing and guidance of clearly laid down provisions as given in the regulations.

The provisions cover not only the conduct of investigations but their purpose; they set out the requirement for the reporting of accidents and the preservation of evidence. They cover the investigation of hazardous incidents—"near misses" as they are sometimes called—and they provide for the publication of reports and summaries. The aim of investigations, as set out in the regulations, is to improve safety at sea and to avoid accidents in the future. I am sure that the regulations provide a sound and practical basis for marine inquiry work for many years to come, and I hope that the House will accept them as laid down and support them tonight.

9.53 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): The Opposition have sought the opportunity to discuss these two statutory instruments tonight—although, as the Minister said, they have already come into effect—because of the seriousness of the issues. On the night before the last scheduled date for this debate—9 November—there was yet another serious shipping accident. On that occasion, the passenger ferry Hamburg collided with a cargo vessel and two British people lost their lives. Last week on the Thames, another pleasure boat was hit by a barge in an accident that might have been a tragic repeat of last year's Marchionness disaster. Thankfully, it was not, but each accident raises important questions for the Minister.

We welcome the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations, because 53 per cent. of casualties on merchant vessels are caused by collisions and contacts. Moreover, it is of deep concern to us and to the National Union of Seamen that flags of convenience vessels continue to have a significantly higher accident rate than those of western flagged vessels. In the accident to which I referred earlier, the cargo vessel was the Nordic Stream. It is registered in Panama and I understand that it calls at British ports. Can the Minister tell us whether this ship has been the subject of any Department of Transport investigation in recent times and how often flags of convenience vessels are inspected in United Kingdom ports? It would also be of interest to know when we may expect publication of the Government's research into making roll-on/roll-off ferries safer—work which, I believe, was begun following the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster in 1987.

Communications between vessels is obviously important in the avoidance of collisions, and we are advised that there is a strong case for compulsory radar equipment within our estuaries. The area between Tower bridge and London bridge has witnessed 11 incidents in the past five years; a further six have occurred just along the river at King's Reach, including the fateful Marchioness collision. Just before we were due to debate this subject in the House last time, a river bus was involved in a collision, injuring 10 people. Last week, as I have already said, yet another Thames pleasure boat, this time carrying 150 teachers, was involved in a collision with a river barge in darkness. Thankfully, no one was injured, but the similarity of that incident to the Marchioness disaster raises urgent questions.

Can the Minister tell us whether the Secretary of State's six-point code, which was instigated following the Marchioness disaster, applied to these vessels? If so, was it followed and how was it enforced? If not, what lessons does the Minister expect to learn from these events?

In addition to this incident, we should note an accident in which a sand barge collided with a stationary rubbish barge only hours after the collision to which I am referring. It is no exaggeration to suggest that another fatal accident may be imminent.

As the Minister acknowledged, separation schemes in which lanes and notorious accident spots are closely monitored could play a vital role in keeping traffic flowing safely. Skippers on cargo boats on the Thames frequently complain about pleasure craft moving indiscriminately from one side of the river to the other. Does the Minister think that the time has come for formalised codes of conduct for traffic movement, rather than the present voluntary and recommended codes?

The Marchioness collision also highlighted the inadequate use of lookouts. Members of the National Union of Seamen have urged me to remind the Minister that lookouts play a crucial role in safety and navigation, irrespective of technological advances. We are therefore very disturbed to hear of a Department research project allowing ships under 1,600 gross tonnes to sail at night at sea without a lookout and with only one officer on duty. I understand that this project is currently being undertaken in the Irish sea, and I should be grateful if the Minister could confirm that and give us his comments.

With regard to the statutory instrument on accident investigation, although we support in principle a marine accident investigation branch responsible for the investigation of all types of marine accident, we are concerned, despite what the Minister said, about the composition and independence of that body. Opposition Members believe that the safety of marine transport should be removed to a truly independent safety inspectorate within a reformed Health and Safety Executive.

I take this opportunity to ask the Minister how many public inquiries have resulted from preliminary inquiries. As he knows, and as he said tonight, preliminary inquiries are mandatory; following them up with a full public inquiry is left to the discretion of the Secretary of State. The loss of the Derbyshire in 1980 resulted in the loss of 44 lives, yet it did not come to a public inquiry until seven years later. Perhaps when it is convenient the Minister could give us the figures for preliminary and public inquiries carried out in 1988, so that we can examine the point further.

Dr. Godman: With regard to the Derbyshire, there was some concern about the loss of the report into that tragic event. I wondered whether my hon. Friend intended to mention the loss of the report.

Ms. Ruddock: My hon. Friend reminds me of an important point. I had not intended to refer to it, but it has undoubtedly complicated the position and perhaps explains the considerable delay in bringing the issue into the full glare of a public inquiry.

More immediately, I should like to ask about the Government's intentions regarding the Marchioness inquiry. I am grateful for the explanations so far about procedure, but it does not take us to the point in which we are most interested, the holding of a public inquiry. We believe that such loss of life warrrants a full public inquiry.

It is salutary to note the news from Bow street today regarding the corporate manslaughter charge to be pursued against P and O in respect of the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster. Controversial though it may be, the fact is that that action would not be pursued——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Lady is referring to a case which is sub judice. I think she understands the rules of the House. She should not refer to it further.

Ms. Ruddock: Certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I gave no intention of referring to the issues in the case. I simply want to point out that charges could not have been brought had the issue not been examined at a public inquiry. It set an important precedent that the House should note.

I appeal to the Minister to use his best endeavours to persuade the Secretary of State to set up a full public inquiry into the Marchioness disaster. Nothing less will satisfy the relatives of those who died.

A further problem arises from the involvement of the Department in investigations. I take the opportunity of asking the Minister whether the practice continues whereby shipowners who are asked to co-operate in an investigation are given an assurance by the Department that it will not bring a prosecution. The Health and Safety Executive, by comparison, requires the co-operation of shipowners by law and does not have to provide them with assurances of immunity. Is that not another point in favour of removing the marine accident investigation branch from the auspices of the Department of Transport?

Moving to the European document on shipping and dangerous cargoes, we believe that the directive represents an attempt to improve existing regulations governing the movement of dangerous cargoes in and out of member state ports. Therefore, we regret the Government's decision to disregard the document in favour of relying on what might be implemented by the International Maritime Organisation. Although we recognise the valuable role of the IMO in retaining and improving standards at sea, we believe that the wholesale rejection of the directive will not help to create uniform standards for ships of member states.

The directive responds to the loopholes in previous legislation which laid down only minimum requirements for oil and chemical tankers in Community ports. The new measure would cover widespread shipments of dangerous goods, as the Minister said, in other forms such as packages, containers and mobile tankers. In bearing down

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on all forms of shipment of dangerous goods, it will play a large role in the prevention and control of pollution in British waters.

Tonight we have heard the Government's three main objections. The first two—the inability to maintain constant contact and the problem of the sheer volume of traffic—are not wholly misplaced. We recognise that, in the English channel, where traffic is constant, the scope for detection and avoidance is ever-present, but the Government's response to those problems is defeatist.

The Government's third objection, involving compulsory pilotage, runs most directly counter to present United Kingdom policy and seems to be at the heart of the disagreement. I understand that United Kingdom pilotage is not compulsory in normal circumstances or to accompany ships with dangerous cargoes. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) argued in the Chamber on 23 October last year that the absence of a pilot could have been a contributory factor in the then recent Humber tanker collision. The use of pilots when carrying dangerous goods is a practice which the Government should encourage. When a ship is in unfamiliar waters, there is every reason to suppose that its well-being would benefit from a pilot's expert knowledge.

The Government have dismissed the compulsory use of pilots, as well as the recommendations applying to pilots. United Kingdom ships could certainly benefit from the directive because, as the tragic accident involving the Herald of Free Enterprise made clear, legislation is not strict enough and dangerous goods are shipped without being declared. In that instance, unnotified cargoes, including cyanide, were discovered when the Herald sank. If we were to follow the European proposals, a pilot on board would have to go through a safety check list which would include the identification of any dangerous cargoes. The Government could and should apply the directive's proposals to ships on which pilots are employed. That is a separate issue from whether pilots should be compulsory.

In discussion of these matters, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there is considerable traffic in small parcels of dangerous cargoes. The National Union of Seamen has calculated that almost all ships sailing from Dover are likely to have some form of dangerous cargo on board. It believes, as we do, that higher safety standards should be sought.

As well as the objections that I have already mentioned, in the explanatory memorandum the Government made it clear that the financial implications of enforcing some of the measures weigh heavily against their implementation. We are told that the cost of compulsory pilotage and maintaining contact with coastal radio stations would have to be borne by the shipping industry. We regret the imposition of financial burdens, but they should not be allowed to deter the pursuit of greater safety. We are also told that the costs of coastal stations to inform each other of vessel movements would fall on the Department. That looks like another example of the Department shrinking from its responsibility for the maintenance and improvement of transport infrastructure. The spate of recent accidents suggests that we cannot afford to withhold spending on marine safety.

Are the Government taking any independent steps to ensure that dangerous goods are not carried unnotified on ships? Can the Minister inform us of any alternatives to the measures in this directive? It would be useful to know how many unannounced inspections of ships for dangerous cargoes have taken place during the past five years and whether the Government plan to step up staffing levels for the inspectorate.

The Government's response to the directive has been to emphasise the proposals' negative aspect. They have failed to admit that the essence of those proposals is already embodied in United Kingdom legislation in relation to oil and chemical tankers. Therefore, they have a duty to explain why the same kind of regulations should not apply to dry cargo ships carrying dangerous goods in large and small quantities.

The European document exposes a gap in United Kingdom legislation. Although we are not uncritical enthusiasts for the European directive, it contains some useful measures which appear to have been dismissed too lightly.

10.10 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): It would appear that, in this enlightened era, all political parties support, or at least claim to support, proposals that would lead to a safer and cleaner environment. Where we differ is on how, when and at what cost we should implement proposals to achieve that aim.

The problem with the Government's aim is that it is full of fine rhetoric but has little substance and very little action. The record is not good, particularly on implementing European Community directives. The directives on the transfrontier shipment of hazardous waste were not acted on until the threat of legal action made it embarrassing for the Government not to act.

We are asked to believe that there has been a change of heart in relation to environmental issues, but unfortunately, when the Government talk about such issues, there always seems to be a caveat which goes something like, "We shall act to protect the environment, so long as such action does not interfere with the economy of the country or the profits of business." It is time that we realised that saving our environment will cost money. It will be difficult and it may create more work and administration, but it is vital for us to act. We cannot afford not to.

So I challenge the Government: if they are in earnest in their desire to create a safer environment, why not stop the trade in toxic wastes and prohibit their import? The scale of this trade and the problem that it presents should not be under-estimated. The amount of waste arriving at our ports has risen alarmingly in the past few years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should stop all ships with any toxic waste coming into our ports?

Mr. Fearn: Yes. I thought that I was quite positive in the statement that I made.

The amount of waste arriving at our ports has arisen alarmingly in recent years. In 1981-82, 3,786 tonnes of toxic waste was imported into this country; by 1986-87, the amount had grown to 52,981 tonnes, as enormous increase.

This small land of ours, surrounded by seas, cannot afford to continue to allow those seas to be polluted. Southport, a thriving resort on the Irish sea, has problems because of pollution from land-based activites, including

those of Sellafield and Springfield. We do not want more pollution on top of that. Marine life vital to our own is threatened. Let us act to reduce the threat.

Let us examine ways to encourage the International Maritime Organisation and the EC to prohibit the transportation by sea of substances such as PCBs and radioactive material. If we cannot get a ban, let us quickly at least have some strict rules that would prevent the fiasco of last year when ships were travelling the high seas with highly dangerous toxic waste but nowhere to berth.

The directive is concerned with vessels carrying packaged dangerous goods, and I know that the feeling in shipping circles is similar to that which has been expressed by the Government. The Freight Transport Association believes that many of the requirements are already covered by existing law, or will be as a result of reforms being introduced by the IMO. Those reforms are to be welcomed, but they should not preclude further measures being introduced by the EC or, for that matter, by unilateral action.

The EC directive builds on and expands the regulations, particularly in the area of pollutants, and we should welcome such moves. But there are plenty of instances where ships can carry dangerous cargo despite the rules and regulations. We should consider closing some of those loopholes if we are to continue to transport dangerous and harmful cargo either in bulk or packaged.

Relative authorities should be in a position to identify in detail any such cargo in the interest of an immediate response to accidents. The sinking of the Muree last October and the consequent washing up of canisters containing chemicals on south coast beaches may be a case in point.

I was somewhat concerned to learn from the Minister's reply to my question on 22 June 1989 that, if the marine pollution control unit decides that it is not necessary to relocate and recover drums of chemical material after an accident, no permanent record is kept. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that. We are all aware that we do not always know what materials are on board ships. How many substances have, in the past, been pronounced harmless that today are known to have devastating effects on the environment and on individual's health? I hope that the practice of not keeping permanent records will be rectified. I also hope that, under the merchant shipping regulations, any investigation of or inquiry into an accident will be open and that the conclusions of the report will be published.

I must thank the National Union of Seamen for its briefing. Although I already had some of the information to hand, I recognise how helpful the NUS can be for future briefings. It is clear that, no matter how many restrictions we may place on the transport of dangerous goods by sea, the restrictions in themselves will not prevent accidents. We need to consider other means, such as improvement in proficiency of navigation through training of personnel and improvement in equipment and design. Perhaps we need to examine the laws of the sea and the numbers, size and speed of sea craft. Perhaps we should more closely consider the enforcement of present laws with more realistic penalties for non-compliance.

Enforcement of article 5 of the proposed directive is one of the arguments against it. I am not sure that we should so easily accept that, because something is difficult to enforce, we should not bring it into law. If we followed that argument, much that is on the statute book would not be there. On second thoughts, perhaps that might be a good thing. Surely it is good practice, and worth encouraging, that masters of ships carrying potentially dangerous cargo should maintain radio or radar contact with a coastal station. That is worth pursuing and should not be discarded, as the Minister did earlier.

The Government's explanation of their concern about the article covering pilotage is not tenable, because the EC requirements go further than the Pilotage Act 1987. This should not be a cause to rule them out. I hope that the Government's over-zealous opposition to anything that comes from Europe is not clouding their vision. If we are in earnest and wish to reduce the risk to our environment from the potential damage posed by the transportation of hazardous cargo, we should be supporting, investing in and acting on such proposed directives as the one before us today. Let us find a way of incorporating the proposals in the directive with the reforms proposed by the International Maritime Organisation. There is no reason why that should not be investigated and an incorporation brought about.

10.18 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I have a few questions for the Minister concerning the documents. First, I refer to the proposal for a directive. I think that I am correct in saying that a directive does not carry the power of a regulation. I direct the Minister's attention to article 5 on page 3 of the proposal. It says that there is a need for vessels to

"communicate to the competent authority in the Member State in which the port of berthing or departure is located".

Can the Minister confirm that that is precisely what happens with regard to tankers coming into Sullom Voe for cargoes, and that the Sullom Voe authorities have advance notice of the movement of such large vessels?

Article 5(iv) of the directive refers to the need of masters to avail themselves of the pilot services available. Is it not the case—I am sure that the Minister will give me a prompt answer—that the pilotage authority can demand that a vessel master employ the services of a pilot?

Mr. McLoughlin *indicated assent.*

Dr. Godman: I wondered whether any disputes between the pilotage authorities and masters of ships refusing such services had come to his notice.

Article 7 says:

"Pilots engaged in the berthing or departure of the vessels concerned shall immediately inform the competent authority"

if they have any concerns or anxieties. Has the Department of Transport advised the pilotage authorities that, if they have any concern about the competence of crews or about the manoeuvrability of vessels, they should inform the appropriate authorities?

I move now to statutory instrument No. 1172—the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations 1989. I want to put to the Minister several questions regarding the safety of fishing vessels. There will be no point in the Minister saying that the matter of fishing vessels is tangential to this debate. I remind him that fishing vessels are mentioned several times in the statutory instrument.

Are lessons that have been learnt from investigations into the stranding or foundering of vessels acted upon? I ask that question in the light of the involvement of United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels in what I can only describe as extremely dangerous waters. The stern fishing vessel the Gaul was lost in 1972. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) will remember this well because, sad to say, constituents of his were lost with that vessel. What lessons were learnt from that tragic loss?

I am thinking of the allocation of domestic fishing catches to United Kingdom vessels. I have written to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary is aware of my letter—warning of the dangers of inexperienced skippers fishing off the east coast of Greenland in winter.

Fishing off the west coast of Greenland at this time of the year is dangerous enough. I speak from what I might call indirect personal knowledge, as my brother Leslie is the mate of the filleter/freezer the Arctic Corsair, which at this very minute is fishing off the west coast of Greenland. Fishermen with experience of Greenland waters say that, relatively speaking, fishing off the east coast—in the Denmark straits—is much more dangerous than fishing off the west coast.

My letter to the Minister of Agriculture stressed the need to allocate that east coast Greenland cod catch to fishermen who were experienced in those extremely hazardous waters. Hence my question about whether the results of earlier investigations are taken into account in discussions between the Department of Transport and the Ministry of Agriculture, on the safety of fishing vessels. I do not need to remind the Minister that, between 1984 and 1988, 135 United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels were lost as they went about their extremely difficult business.

Following such an investigation, has the Department of Transport ever received a strongly worded recommendation that the carriage of immersion suits in fishing vessels is an important safety measure? The Minister knows that, when his old friend Mr. Albert McQuarrie introduced his Safety at Sea Bill in 1985, I tabled a new clause on the carriage of immersion suits on fishing vessels of 10 m and above in length. That new clause was not supported by Mr. McQuarrie and others on Report, but have any of the recent investigations given rise to such a recommendation?

Some few years ago, in a February gale, rather like the one that we have suffered over the past few hours, a French trawler foundered off the west coast of Scotland. I am sure that the Under-Secretary knows the case in point. There were some 28 men on board that ship, and about 12 or13 of them had sufficient time to don their immersion suits. The other poor souls went overboard in their underwear, roused from their bunks. The men who went overboard in their immersion suits survived for upwards of three hours before a helicopter arrived to pluck them from the heavy swell. The poor souls who went overboard without immersion suits quickly perished.

I have previously discussed with the Minister the need to carry immersion suits, and he has said that he is willing to listen sympathetically to my plea, for which I am deeply grateful. I hope that he will take my plea on board. I know that fishermen are not too keen on the carriage of immersion suits because they are expensive. I think that they cost £400 plus. French trawlers of a certain size cannot leave port unless they have immersion suits on board; the same should hold for United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels.

Regulation 2(b) of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations contains the words

"a ship is lost or presumed to be lost, or is abandoned or materially damaged".

Does a fishing vessel that experiences material damage because it has scooped up in its nets debris from the offshore oil and gas industries come within that definition? If it does, would it be in order for the skipper or the owner of the vessel to ask for an inquiry into the incident?

As for regulation 2(1)(d)—a disabled ship—and regulation 2(1)(e)—any material damage having been caused by a ship—does damage caused by a ship include vessels belonging to the Royal Navy or the United States navy? I refer specifically to nuclear submarines entering and leaving the firth of Clyde. Very small fishing vessels have trawled up huge—compared with fishing vessels—nuclear submarines. It is very dangerous when two such vessels come into contact with each other.

I speak on behalf of the members of the Clyde Fishermen's Association when I ask the Minister whether

fishermen have the right under the regulations to ask for an inquiry. Even if the fishing vessel does not sink, such a collision can cause serious damage to its gear.

The regulation on page 5, headed "Reopening of Investigation", says:

"The Chief Inspector may cause any investigation to be reopened".

If there were a collision between a submarine and a fishing vessel's gear, could the skipper ask for the investigation of the incident to be reopened, in the light of fresh evidence concerning the movement of naval vessels?

I have a great deal of respect for the captains and crews of nuclear submarines. I have visited Faslane and the American base at Holy Loch. The previous Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister arranged the visit, for which my colleagues and I were extremely grateful. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), within whose constituency the bases are located, accompanied us.

During our visit, and in subsequent correspondence with Ministers at the Ministry of Defence, I sought to establish whether the captains and crews of nuclear vessels are sufficiently familiar with the different types of fishing vessels and fishing gear to be able to take avoiding action when moving below the surface. When they are moving through fishing grounds, they ought, whenever and wherever possible—I accept that we must take account of security—travel on the surface. Their acoustic equipment is sometimes not sufficiently sophisticated, to detect certain types of fishing gear.

I put my questions to the Minister in, I hope, my usual fair-minded way. I am not here to score party political points, but, as someone who is a member of a fishing family and honorary president of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, for me these are very important questions concerning inexperienced fisherman fishing in very dangerous waters and the need to keep nuclear submarines coming in and out of the firth of Clyde away from the vessels of our inshore fisherman.

Finally, I come back to the very sad question of the sinking of the multi-fishing vessel, the Destiny. The skipper of that vessel, Billy Irvine, a man known to me, was drowned, with five other men, on that disastrous Sunday. I regret to say that their bodies have not yet been recovered. I know that the sinking of that vessel and the tragic death of those men are the subject of an inquiry by an inspector, but in my view the sinking poses certain questions that can be answered only by what we in Scotland call a fatal accident inquiry.

I know that this is nothing to do with the Minister, but the present investigation has a deal to do with him and his Department. I want to know when that investigation is likely to be concluded and when the report will be presented to his Department. Only then can I approach the Lord Advocate again with a formal request that he institute a fatal accident inquiry into that loss.

I have sought in this brief intervention to put to the Minister certain questions concerning this document. I think it is a useful document in some respects, although I accept the reservations of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) earlier. But the thorough, comprehensive, tough-minded investigation of the sinking of any vessel is absolutely essential, particularly in the light of the recommendations made by those who conduct those investigations, in order that, among other things, such founderings can in the future be reduced to the barest minimum.

10.38 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful to those who have enabled us to debate these matters. I do not intend to add to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) on the "take note" motion on the European Community document. In other circumstances, I should not have been taking part in this debate. Had it not been for the fact that, coincidentally, on the morning when I was due to go on my holiday last summer, I was phoned at 2 am to be told that a boat had sunk in the Thames and that much of that week and a considerable time thereafter has been occupied in thinking through and trying to assist with the consequences of that accident, I might not have thought that this was a matter that need detain me. An accident of that severity, with the loss of life that occurred, happening literally on one's doorstep, makes one think again about such issues.

I want first to comment on what is paradoxical—although no criticism is implied—in the implementation dates of the two regulations. The Minister will be aware that the implementation date of the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations was 19 November 1989, after the Marchioness sank in the Thames. The implementation date of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations was 7 August 1989—just a matter of days before the Marchioness sank. When the Marchioness sank, the new mechanism for investigating accidents was in force, but the new tightened regulations on the avoidance of collisions were not yet in force.

I should be grateful for a response from the Minister —later, if not tonight—on whether the investigations, which I am not trying to prejudice in any way, will consider whether the new regulations that came into force in November would have made a difference had they been in force in August. I ask that for two reasons. First, as is made clear in the note that accompanies the regulations, they have brought about various changes to the rules. There is now a discretion under rule 1(e) that certain vessels need not comply fully with the general requirements concerning lights and shapes and sound-signalling appliances. There are widened exemption powers. I always worry when an international convention gives wider powers for nation states to exempt vessels from such requirements.

Secondly, the regulations amend rule 8. They add a paragraph which sets out in greater detail the duties of the vessels in so far as they are required not to impede other vessels and the duties of the vessels that are not to be impeded. That tightening of the regulations affects vessels travelling in each direction down a major waterway. Is the inquiry considering whether the amendment to rule 8 would have made any difference, had it been in force and had everyone been aware of it?

Mr. McLoughlin: The international regulations that we are discussing are intended for the high seas and navigation areas such as the Dover straits. Different regulations and byelaws apply to inland rivers. There was an interim report by the inspectorate, and we accepted the points that it raised, but it is important not to think that the international regulations that came into force on 19 November would have made any difference. I am not trying to preclude any findings by the inspectorate, and I

[Mr. McLoughlin]

can assure the hon. Gentleman that the inspectorate is carrying out a most thorough investigation into that incident. Although regulations came into force on 7 August 1989, they were made on 6 July and were brought before the House well before 7 August.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister, but he will understand the concern that we are dealing with navigation on a tidal river such as the Thames and the amount of traffic on it, even these days. All concerned—the skippers, the crew, users of the waterway, the port of London Authority and all the passengers who use passenger, pleasure and commercial vessels—want to know that the highest international standards that apply to tidal waters anywhere, be they inland or offshore, are applied to the Thames. That is why the question whether the regulations would have made any difference is relevant. I hope that the inspectorate is addressing that issue, so that at least we can be given the reassurance that they would have made no difference or the comment that they would have made a difference.

Given that the collision regulations came into force in November, I assume that everyone concerned with navigation is aware of them, that they are being enforced and that the mechanism for doing so is in place. Obviously, people who are responsible for training and retraining will be made aware of them. I am aware of the methods by which crews are trained, but it is important that the Minister assures hon. Members that we are complying with the regulations. I am anxious that Britain does not plead for, and benefit from, exemptions, thereby reducing safety.

I have a question about regulation 3(2) of the accident investigation regulations, which says:

"The Regulations apply to accidents involving or occurring on board—any United Kingdom ship except that regulation 5 shall not apply to pleasure craft".

Regulation 5 provides a duty to report accidents. I should be interested to know why regulation 5 does not apply to pleasure craft—I believe that it should.

I have a further question on regulation 9, which deals with the report that the Minister mentioned. What are the criteria for the Secretary of State to order a formal investigation under the Merchant Shipping Act 1970, which takes any investigation out of the rules set down in the regulations? What is the dividing line between an investigation under the Act, which prevents the regulations from coming into operation, and the rules?

I asked the Minister about the interrelationship between the inspector's report and prosecution. That is partly dealt with by regulation 9, which makes it clear that if, when a report is being compiled, there is any hint of a breach of the law and that prosecution should be considered, the report should not be published until that has been considered.

I have been in touch many times with the Minister of State about an investigation, and possible prosecution, by the railway inspectorate. I am not making any criticism, but I am concerned about the time lapse between accidents and inquiries. The bereaved must be assured that quick progress is being made in an investigation. Sometimes, when a thorough report is published that leads to complicated legal questions about whether there should be a prosecution, there is a long silence and it appears that the authorities are not taking action.

I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) that it is important that the inspectorate should not be timid about prosecutions. I am not saying that the crew of the Bow Belle or the skipper of the Marchioness were to blame—that is not for me or the House—but there is a provision in English law whereby, if people are criminally negligent, they should be liable to prosecution.

I heard your intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the speech of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), so I do not propose to say any more about the Herald of Free Enterprise case, except to reaffirm that the fact that a legal process is available and that people can be prosecuted should require us to consider whether there has been criminal negligence in any case involving death. It is important to do so, because those in charge must be accountable.

I welcome the change in regulation 9(4), which allows comment by interested parties. I also welcome the fact that the chief inspector can issue information during an investigation. I told the Secretary of State that I welcomed the interim report on the Marchioness. I compliment and thank the Secretary of State and the Minister of State for acting promptly. They acted reassuringly. I understand that they must await the final report before taking any further decisions. I also welcome the fact that summaries of the report can and will be made available to anyone with a legitimate interest.

I am concerned, however, that a spot check investigation of some vessels on the Thames carried out by the *Evening Standard* a matter of weeks ago apparently revealed—I relate this to the Minister so that he can make departmental inquiries—that some of the requirements made by the Secretary of State after the sinking of the Marchioness were still not being complied with. It is not for me to judge whether that is true, but it is vital that we should have the most stringent safety measures for the prevention of collisions and for the reporting and investigation of accidents and that they should be enforced properly. As Opposition Members often say, if more people should be put in post to enforce safety requirements, we must put more people in post. No price can be too high to pay for employing as many people as necessary to ensure that the highest safety standards are in force.

The lesson that I have learnt from the sinking of the Marchioness is that, in spite of the general good conduct and great experience of many of those involved, we were not doing the absolute maximum that could be done to avoid an accident. I hope that the new regulations and enforcement measures will prevent such accidents in future.

10.51 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This has been a useful debate. I shall do my best to answer most of the questions that have been asked, but I may need to write to hon. Members on some. I hope that hon. Members will understand that some of the matters

raised were fairly technical and that, rather than give a false impression tonight, I should like to take the time to find out the correct answers.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to the Perintis. In an Adjournment debate initiated by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 23 October 1989, I referred to that incident, and as it is important that the House should be aware of our powers to deal with such incidents, I propose to quote what I said on that occasion:

"In an incident threatening grave or imminent pollution we shall not hesitate to use those powers if need be. This was demonstrated in March of this year when a small Panamanian-registered, Indonesian-owned ship, the Perintis, capsised and sank in international waters in the middle of the English channel, about 35 miles south-east of Brixham."

I hope that the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) will take note of that important point, because a ban on all ships coming into British ports would not solve the problem of incidents in international waters that may nevertheless threaten our coastline.

I continued:

"The vessel had a quantity of toxic pesticides on board and the expert advice to the marine pollution control unit was that the chemicals posed a major pollution threat to the marine environment and to United Kingdom fishery interests in particular. The owner of the vessel was not intending to do anything about the chemicals, and accordingly the Secretary of State authorised the MPCU to take direct action to recover the drums of pesticide which were scattered over the sea bed when the vessel capsised. Later, 28 of the 32 drums of toxic chemicals were successfully recovered. Tests showed that they had a much lower rate of solubility in sea water than first feared and scientific advice was that a continued search for the remaining drums was not therefore justified.

The Governments response on that occasion shows that we are conscious of the environmental hazards posed by the loss of dangerous goods being transported by sea, and we are ready to take action where it is practicable to do so."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1989; Vol. 158, c. 639.]

It is important to emphasise that, as some may too easily think that our attitude is rather laid back and lackadaisical. It is not.

Let me deal with what the hon. Member for Southport said. To believe that we could ban or stop all ships carrying dangerous or chemical cargo coming into British ports is to live in cloud cuckoo land. If that were the policy of Liberal Members, I wonder what they would do in the North sea. Oil is a dangerous cargo. If it is spilt, it has immense environmental consequences on a coastline. Would Liberal party stop any oil tankers coming to the North sea because of the possible damage to the environment? Of course they would not.

Mr. Fearn: That applies only to toxic waste.

Mr. McLoughlin: They have refined their policy now. Before, they said dangerous waste, but they have refined it to toxic waste. Perhaps they should consider more carefully what they say before they give categorical assurances.

Among other things, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) asked about research into roll-on roll-off ferries. It is due to be published soon. We hope that once it is published we shall have a full discussion with the architects, the industry, the National Union of Seamen and other interested bodies.

The hon. Lady also asked about inspection of vessels. At present, we inspect about 25 per cent., of vessels, which is what we are required to do. We inspect all types of vessels which come into our ports.

No decision has yet been made on a public inquiry into the loss of the Marchioness. The inspector's inquiry by the investigation branch is still in progress, and a decision will be taken when it is completed. I hope that that will be in the near future, but I explained earlier some of the natural delays that will take place. It is not that we are simply waiting for the report. We must give the people who may be criticised in the report time to respond and to include their comments in it.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The inquiry is important. Conservative and Opposition Members wish to impress on the Minister the fact that if the inquiry shows that blame can be apportioned, to several people, as will probably be the case, relatives and many hon. Members want a public inquiry to follow. We cannot impress it too much on the Minister that that should be taken into account when a decision is made by the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. McLoughlin: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I shall not say any more, because I do not want to prejudice the outcome of the inquiry. I am sure that the House will understand that, if I said more, I might be in danger of doing that, I have not seen the report, but it would be dangerous if I gave the impression that I had some idea of what it contained.

Action has already been taken as a result of the Marchioness disaster. Six recommendations in the interim report identified shortcomings. If further shortcomings in the collision regulations are shown up, we shall take them up with the IMO and make further amendments. We can apply for byelaws to cover regulations on the Thames.

The hon. Lady referred to the collision last week between the Mayflower Garden and a barge. That is being investigated by the marine accident investigation branch and the Port of London Authority. However, the scale of that accident is not the same as that of the Marchioness tragedy.

The hon. Lady said that the MAIB should be made a separate body. I cannot help thinking that that is a response to her party's policy in the 1970s when the Department of Transport sponsored the industry. There is a difference between setting out the regulations and expecting independent owners to abide by and accept them. That is the difference. We do not own any boats or aircraft. However, we will act whenever the investigation branches give us sound advice on safety matters that need to be looked into. Therefore, we do not accept that there is any necessity to split these functions away from the Department.

As I am running a little short of time, I shall be unable to answer as many of the points that have been made as I should have liked. I shall try to deal with as many points as possibly generally, instead of dealing with those raised by each hon. Member in turn.

We do not accept the need for a blanket imposition of compulsory pilotage irrespective of the views of the harbour authorities. In any event, that could be applied only when a vessel was within United Kingdom territorial waters. We have no jurisdiction to support the extension of compulsory pilotage outside such waters, and we therefore believe that to leave the decision to the harbour authorities, which can rightly say whether pilotage is necessary, is the best way to move forward.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

In response to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow, I should say that, if a pilot saw or felt that something was definitely wrong, he should draw that to the attention of the port control authorities and, if it was felt necessary and desirable, an inspection would ensue. One has to rely on the good sense of the pilot, who might not have specific technical qualifications but who would have the knowledge of the waterways.

It has been said that we are not implementing the directive because of the cost. That is certainly not the case because no detailed costing has been carried out. It is doubtful whether any meaningful figure could be arrived at. As I said, even on the European Commission's own research, it is estimated that 4,000 ships might be required. As that relates only to the United Kingdom's coastal waters, we are talking about an incredible and technical job which would be fairly unmanageable. That is one reason why we are not sure about the practicalities of implementing some of the provisions of the directive.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked why pleasure craft are excluded from the provisions. The regulations extend to fishing vessels and pleasure craft, except that pleasure craft are not required to report accidents. That is because many of them are small yachts and are susceptible to minor incidents, and it would not be practicable to insist that they report all accidents. Obviously, if there is a major accident or if something is drawn to his attention, the inspector can investigate it and report on it if necessary.

I was grateful that one of the Defence Ministers joined me on the Treasury Bench during the debate and was able to put me right on some of the points made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow about the problem of fishing vessels sometimes getting their nets caught on Royal Navy equipment. I am advised that any complaints made are investigated fully and that compensation is payable. In the light of what the hon. Gentleman said, I shall of course check how the regulations require those affected to register their case.

This has been a useful debate. There is general agreement about the marine accident investigation branch. We place a high regard on environmental protection in relation to our shipping industry. When something goes wrong, it is at great cost to the shipping industry and, if a captain is involved in a collision, he loses part of his standing. Obviously, nobody on the high seas wants to be involved in any sort of collision. As has rightly been said, fatal accident investigations are matters solely for the discretion of the Law Officers in Scotland.

I hope that the report does not take too long, but I cannot and would not like to say. I do not want to rush the report. It relates to a completely different kind of accident from that involving the Marchioness, so perhaps we shall not have to wait too long, but I cannot give any assurances about exactly when the report will be available. I hope that it will be as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7074/89 relating to requirements for vessels carrying packaged dangerous goods when using Community ports; considers that Community legislation does not represent the most appropriate means of securing the development of effective provisions to enhance environmental safety in this area; and endorses the Government's view that any new measures should be adopted and implemented on a wider international basis through the International Maritime Organisation.

Waste Dumping (North Sea)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

11.5 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am very glad to have the opportunity to debate in the House the issue of the dumping of waste in the North sea. I make no bones about it: as far as I am concerned, the purpose of this debate is to continue to bring pressure on the Government to put an end to this filthy British habit of dumping industrial and chemical waste in the North sea. The immediate precursor of this debate is probably the incidents last week when the Greenpeace ship Sirius attempted to stop the dumping of fly ash by the Central Electricity Generating Board off the north-east coast of England—and it did for a short time disrupt that process.

Much more to the point, the action highlighted what was going on, not only with the dumping of fly ash but also in the licences that were still in force and the new applications being considered and made by the British Government for the dumping of chemical waste in the North sea. There were at that time three applications for licences outstanding, and a fourth application has been submitted this week.

Those licences have drawn the fury of the other countries around the North sea who are signatories to the Oslo Commission and the North sea anti-dumping agreement. Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Holland have all said that they do not accept the prior justification arguments put forward by the British Government, that inadequate information has been provided and that no case has been made that either these materials are harmless or that there is no adequate alternative method of disposal —the prime considerations of the prior justification procedure.

I have seen the letters submitted by several of those Governments and they contain the nub of the argument. For example, the Swedish objection says:

"In our view the proposed dumping of industrial waste, MAFF/DAS752, is not in accordance with the decision taken by the commission in 1989 . . . According to your report there also seem to be alternative synthesis routes available, routes that other producers have found practicable and economically feasible."

The Dutch Government have gone somewhat further and said:

"As indicated in Berlin and Ghent it is very difficult to assess the availability of alternatives if so little detailed information is given. The present information is more detailed, in comparison with the data submitted in Berlin. Nevertheless the level of detail is still not sufficient to enable outsiders to assess and to advise on possible alternatives. . . . The documentation of no alternative treatment is very poor and it is therefore difficult to accept the conclusion."

Norway, on behalf of the Oslo Commission, has asked for an urgent meeting to discuss Britain's continuing dumping of waste in the North sea.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth) *rose*——

Mr. Bruce: I have very little time.

This, I understand, is to take place on 14 February in London, but the Minister will no doubt tell us when he replies. My understanding is that the Government intend to maintain a robust line, defending their position.

I have also been advised that the application by Fisons, who wanted to dump 4,000 tonnes of waste from Intal allergy/asthma medicine, has been withdrawn by the company, fundamentally because of the adverse public reaction, and presumably the judgment that it is not good for the company's image to be associated with that kind of dumping. Sterling Organics still wants to dump 42,000 tonnes of waste from paracetemol. I understand that it is para-aminophenol, which is known to be toxic. Orsynthetics wants to dump 3,000 tonnes of waste from the production of ortholybignanide.

In addition, Fine Organics has apparently, through the British Government, applied for a licence, for which prior justification is sought by the British Government, to dump 8,000 tonnes of chemical waste. I am told that the waste is mostly alcohol, which has a very high oxygen demand and is likely to have a negative effect on marine environment.

The important point is that the British Government's line tends to be, "We have no evidence that these substances are harmful. They are diluted and dispersed. Therefore, we should dump them." My challenge to the Government is, is it not high time, in the changing circumstances and with the pressure from other countries, to presume that substances which are certainly not beneficial or naturally occurring in the North sea should not be dumped where they cannot be monitored and where the consequences cannot be determined? The Government should consider whether there are other means of disposal which allow for proper monitoring and control.

That raises another factor—whether adequate monitoring takes place of the dump sites in the North sea. The evidence is that the Department has inadequate resources to conduct monitoring satisfactorily, and that we are continuing to dump without knowing the consequences.

Another question that arises is whether these companies, and presumably other companies which operate under licences, were told of the implications of the North sea agreement. Were they given an indication that dumping was to end and that they should be looking for alternatives, or were they told nothing? Worse still, were they told not to worry, that the Government, under the prior justification procedure, would ensure that they could carry on dumping, and that this was simply a fig leaf to give the impression that Britain had taken an initiative to advance the limitation of dumping in the North sea, when in reality it was attempting to get out of the commitment? I am afraid that that is becoming increasingly the way the British Government choose to operate—claiming rhetorically that a great deal is being done to advance environmental protection, when they are actually trying to find methods of escaping their obligations.

Indeed, through the Environmental Protection Bill, the Government are seeking to write the prior justification procedure into the law. For those who might not appreciate the implications, it might look good in the Bill but, far from tightening the law, the Government are trying to give a new reinforcement to their unilateral action, which has been roundly condemned in many parts of Europe.

The evidence of waste build-up in the North sea justifies concern. A report in August 1988 states:

"A joint monitoring programme carried out by the North Sea states under the aegis of the Oslo and Paris Commissions has shown that concentrations of mercury, cadmium and polychlorinated biphenyls"——

mostly from sewage sludge——

"in coastal waters have declined less rapidly than have pollutant loads, but that pollution levels are at worst stable and at best falling slowly in virtually every area."

[Mr. Bruce]

So there is no justification for carrying on a process that all other countries have recognised should end, and have ended.

The position gets worse. The countries in the Oslo Commission are also trying to tighten the controls on the dumping of sewage sludge. Britain is the worst offender. There are two draft final declarations for the third North sea conference in March this year. One states that the objective as regards the disposal of sewage sludge in the North sea should be

"(a) to monitor and review dumping operations with regard to paragraph 21 of the London Declaration with a view to adopting land based means of disposal whenever this becomes a practicable alternative;

(b) to continue their efforts to reduce the contamination of such sludges by materials that are persistent, toxic or liable to bioaccumulate, so that they pose no hazard to the marine environment and to ensure that the quantities of such contaminants disposed to sea by this pathway in the immediate future do not increase"

above 1987 levels.

That is the British Government's submission. Let us compare that with the submission of the Federal Republic of Germany, supported by most other countries:

"(a) to gradually reduce the dumping of sewage sludge in the North sea, aiming at a termination within a transitional period"—

of five years—

"(b) to launch as soon as possible a programme to achieve such a reduction".

In other words, there is a clear, unequivocal objective to put a stop to the process, but the British Government will not sign it. We have tabled an alternative, which effectively would allow us to carry on dumping.

Interestingly, the Government complain about their image. *The Guardian*, on 6 December 1989 reported the Secretary of State for the Environment as saying:

"I am tired of seeing the UK pilloried as the dirty man of Europe. That tag is simply not accurate."

The Government do not have the slightest chance of getting rid of that tag as long as they carry on with such actions. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food cannot state, as he did in his written answer of 4 December:

"The United Kingdom is fully meeting international agreements reached unanimously by the North sea countries."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. *104*.]

Ours is the only country that believes that to be true. Every other signatory is protesting vehemently about our interpretation of the treaty. To blame Germany for polluting the North sea through its rivers is not a relevant response.

The Government are certainly in spirit, and possibly even in the letter, flouting the agreement to stop dumping chemical industrial wastes in the North sea. In so doing, they are becoming the biggest threat to marine life and the total ecosystem of the North sea as far as Britain is responsible for it.

The evidence may not be automatically connected, but once-common seals are dying in their hundreds, dolphins are fighting for their very existence and fish stocks are falling disastrously, with appalling economic consequences for fishing communities, especially in Scotland. The Government's response to the problem is to carry on dumping, because they say that there is no evidence that what they are doing is harmful and they do not intend to comply with what every other member state expects them to do. While every other country has stopped waste dumping, Britain carries on. The Government say that it is harmless and there is no risk—they should tell that to the marine environment.

Britain alone continues to dump sewage sludge—3·5 million tonnes was dumped in 1989, contaminated with heavy metals. The Government say that that poses no risk. Britain continues to incinerate 90,000 tonnes of highly toxic waste off the coast of Scarborough every year, and claims that that is harmless. No wonder the other nations around the North sea are outraged by Britain's cynicism in allowing 22 dumping licences to continue in operation, with one more being sought. Among its neighbours, Britain is simply becoming an environmental outcast.

The fly ash dumping, although not the subject of the complaint, is a real issue, because it suffocates marine life. It sets like concrete on the sea bed and sterilises that area. Some 98·5 per cent. of all fly ash is disposed of in other ways, so it is ludicrous to suggest that there is no other way of doing so. A local company, Thermalite, in the north-east of England, has said that it could have taken it all and coverted it to breeze blocks. Fly ash dumping, therefore, should come to an end.

The objections which have come from the Nordic countries and Holland not only require answer at the Oslo Commission, but the matter is to be debated at the European Parliament, by its environment committee on 1 and 2 February. The German Government have called for a stop, and Mrs. Maji-Waggen, the Dutch Minister of Public Works and Transport, who will chair the next North sea conference in March, has called Britain's explanations unsatisfactory and said that Britain appears to stick to procedures, not agreements. We hail our agreement as a great breakthrough and then cop out on the technicalities afterwards.

The North sea is becoming seriously polluted. The information may not be fully available and may be disputed, but it is no longer justified to go on adding to a problem which we have not yet learnt how to tackle and solve.

The Secretary of State for the Environment should be ashamed of himself. It is not his Department that issues these licences or answers this debate. He should get a grip on the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make it stop its filthy habits. He should ensure that, if Britain is to take a lead on environmental issues, it honours the obligations that it has signed, not just in the letter, but in the spirit.

He should ensure that it puts pressure—this is an important point—on companies to recognise that they cannot rely on cheap dumping of waste at sea, but must find ways of reducing the waste, recycling material and developing the best techniques to ensure that waste is handled well, minimised and, when disposed of, done so in a way that can be seen to be least harmful and most effectively monitored.

Companies must not be allowed simply to toss waste into the environment, without any possibility of retrieval, effective monitoring and seeming to say, in a cavalier manner, "We do not believe it is harmful, so we do not propose to stop it." That is against the evidence of all the marine life in the North sea, which is facing a fight for its very survival.

The Government rightly stand condemned, and they will not be able to clean up their act until they ensure that British industry cleans up its act and stops the filthy habit of dumping rubbish in our North sea.

11.20 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) for raising this subject, albeit in a frantic sort of way. I found some of his remarks rather bizarre. The idea that fish stocks have declined principally because of pollution is daft. They have declined basically because of over-fishing. When that has ceased and there has been restraint—for example, in herring—the stocks have come back very strongly indeed.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned incineration. He failed to mention that the United Kingdom incinerates less than 5 per cent. of the total amount and that it is all done aboard a Dutch ship, which is presumably registered by the Dutch Minister to whom he referred. Many of his remarks in that context bore the same hallmark of a sort of frantic objection without looking at the facts of the case. He is anxious to paint us as the villain of the North sea, but I decline that mantle of villainy.

I should make clearly at the outset an essential point. The Government fully endorse the objective of stopping the dumping of liquid industrial waste, so there is no difference between us on that. We are committed to stopping it at the earliest practicable date, and where we differ appears to be on those practicabilities. Our position is clear-cut: we shall terminate the licences as soon as safe alternatives of disposal are available on land.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Really!

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman, who has spoken at length on other matters earlier tonight, will listen to me, he will hear that I have figures to sustain the point that I am making.

It might be helpful if I were to distinguish the various categories of dumping at sea which we license. The hon. Member for Gordon referred to industrial waste. There are certain categories of waste which nobody has the intention of phasing out in dumping at sea. For example, there is dredged spoil. Most companies dump that at sea, because disposal on land can be difficult. Most North sea countries dump dredged spoil in their inshore waters. There is no question of a ban on dumping at sea in general by anybody; nobody has suggested that.

There is sewage sludge, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Then there is the industrial waste in its solid and liquid form. The North sea conference declaration exempted inert material, of which minestone is the only one being dumped to any degree, from its controls. For the other industrial wastes, the declaration envisages that dumping will stop. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the North sea conference is made up of the eight North sea riparian states, and covers all means of polluting the sea.

We do not for a minute believe that we are in breach of the international commitment that we accepted in that declaration. It is not the case that there was to be a complete ban on the dumping of industrial waste from the end of 1989. The ministerial declaration stated that the dumping of industrial waste in the North sea should be phased out by the end of December 1989, except for inert materials of natural origin or other materials which could be shown to the competent international organisation to cause no harm in the marine environment.

It was also agreed as a matter of principle that waste should not be dumped unless there were no practical alternatives on land. Indeed, the Oslo Commission, at the request of the North sea conference, specifically developed a procedure for licensing industrial waste after 1989, and through that we are required to demonstrate that particular wastes cause no harm in the marine environment and that there are no practical alternatives for dumping the wastes on land. That is the procedure that we are now following.

The special meeting to which the hon. Gentleman referred—it was requested by the Swedes, Norwegians and Danes—will take place on 14 February. Objections came from those three countries and from the Netherlands, and informal objection came from Germany. Seven members have not so far registered any objection.

We are committed to phasing out the dumping of liquid industrial wastes. We are not licensing new wastes. We are requiring exising licensees to take all necessary steps to stop the dumping at the earliest possible time. Any suggestion that my Department is somehow giving the nod and the wink to companies, saying, "Don't worry chaps, go ahead, we will make it possible for you to do it," could not be further from the truth.

We are making good progress. There were more than 100 liquid industrial licences in 1980. By the time of the second North sea conference, that figure was down to 20. Between the second North sea conference and the end of last year, we got rid of more than half of those. Last week, I announced that Fisons would not receive a licence in 1990 because an alternative method of disposal appeared practicable. That leaves eight liquid industrial waste licences. More will go during 1990, and virtually all the remainder by the end of 1991. By that date, there will be virtually no licences. There may be the odd exception, and I shall refer to that later.

I want the practicalities to be understood. Disposal arrangements on land can not be set up overnight, and research will be needed into appropriate methods of treatment. We want recycling or re-use of waste to be considered. When a method is found, it must be engineered, an investment made and the plans tested. Immediate termination of sea disposal could be done only if environmentally risky disposal methods on land were used, and we do not intend to breach our established environmental guidelines and risk harm on land.

The only alternative is to stop production, and that is not a practical course. For example, Tate and Lyle dumps certain products. It refines sugar from the Commonwealth countries, and there has been a great deal of debate about the company. It is not a practical option to say, "Let us not have the product; then we can get away from the manifestation of it." It is more sensible to drive forward in our search for alternatives, so that in a short time we can say that dumping at sea is no longer necessary. That is the policy of my Department, and I have cited figures to show the determination with which we are pursuing it.

Mr. Trotter: Unfortunately there is an image, fostered by some of the campaigners, that the position is new and

[Mr. Trotter]

becoming worse. In fact, it has existed for decades and is becoming better. Will my hon. Friend spell out the Government's determination that dumping will cease?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend represents a north-east constituency where these matters are important. I say without equivocation that it is the Government's policy to bring to an end the dumping of industrial waste at sea. We intend to drive forward with that policy and expect that, within two years, there will be virtually no dumping—although there may be the odd exception where limited dumping will be permitted.

The wastes do not cause harm in the sea. It is all too easy to refer to "toxic" chemical wastes—if they were toxic, we would not issue a licence. Some of the wastes are acid or alkaline, and when they enter the sea a chemical reaction takes place and the wastes are neutralised into salts and water. The salts concerned are already present in the sea in large quantities. There are also trace elements in the wastes.

It is not the case that there are large quantities of heavy metals. In fact, metals are naturally present in the sea, as I know the hon. Member for Gordon appreciates. Often, no metals are detectable in the waste. There are some organic substances that biodegrade rapidly. After five minutes in the water, the phenol in the waste is at a concentration of about one thousandth of that used in a mouth gargle. The sugar refining waste is composed only of chalk and materials that were approved for food production use.

Each waste that we licence has been thoroughly scrutinised, and we know exactly what it contains. We also know how it will behave in the sea. We have carried out monitoring work, and licence-holders have carried out their own programmes. We have published the results of our work. We also have a substantial annual monitoring programme for contaminants in fish and shellfish in our waters. The results are also published. They show that contaminants concentrations in fish taken from areas used for dumping are no higher than for other areas.

I know that the hon. Member for Gordon and my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) have a special interest in fly ash. That waste is covered by the same North sea conference rules as liquid industrial waste. There are two dump sites off the north-east coast of England, which serve three power stations. National Power has carried out studies of alternative options for disposal and is now urgently working on detailed proposals—with more than encouragement from my Department.

If there is a market for re-use of the fly ash, it will no doubt wish to re-use it, and I shall draw the company's attention to the suggestion of the hon. Member for Gordon that there is a potential customer for the product. That will be good news, if it is substantiated. However, markets cannot be generated out of thin air. If the company has to dispose of the waste on land, this will have its own environmental problems. My hon. Friend will appreciate that, if it comes to applications for permission to build dump sites on the land or to put waste down holes, there will clearly be problems. There will be objections from local communities. There is no easy solution in the case of a product like this, which everybody agrees is not simply going to go away.

Mr. Trotter: I accept what the Minister says. Obviously there are very considerable difficulties in finding a land solution. But it is a fact that every other power station in the country found such a solution, and one will have to be found for these power stations in the north-east.

Mr. Curry: I have drawn precisely that point to the attention of National Power in relation to these power stations, as an encouragement to it to make even greater efforts to find an alternative solution. National Power will have to address these arguments effectively. We shall not extend the licence until it is absolutely necessary and until we are convinced that a genuine search for alternatives is being undertaken by the company.

It is suggested that our licensed dumping is harming the marine environment. Let me just put this matter in context. Dumping on this site began in the early 1960s—well before there were licence controls at all. We have actually reduced the area that may be used for dumping. Dumping may now be carried out only on an area already smothered by unlicensed dumping.

I do not dispute the smothering effect of the product—I do not dispute the chemistry of the process—but I must insist that we are very restrictive about where it is allowed to be dumped. Before licensing was introduced, it was already taking place. The licensed area is rather smaller, and our monitoring shows that areas of the sea bed that were once dumped upon, but are no longer, are now recovering and regenerating.

Many North sea countries dump dredged spoil, which has a smothering effect. There is no proposal to ban dredged spoil disposal at sea. The concern expressed by other North sea countries relates to their concern that fly ash might be toxic in the sea. This is not the case. Indeed, delay in recovery of the areas affected by fly ash can probably be put down to the fact that the material is so inert. We shall shortly be submitting a paper to the Oslo Commission as required by these procedures. This will give the evidence for our position that this waste is harmless.

As for dredged materials, we must not forget that the bulk of dumping at sea is carried out by North sea countries and consists of disposal of the spoil dredged from ports and navigations in order to keep shipping lanes open. But dumping of dredged spoil is also kept under strict controls. There are Oslo Commission guidelines, which the United Kingdom played a leading role in developing, and we are pleased that other countries have been able to agree to conform to these guidelines.

Minestone is not covered by the North sea conference rules. However, it is our policy that dumping of minestone at sea should also be terminated as soon as possible. This will not be easy. A number of reviews have been carried out of possible land disposal options for minestone. Nevertheless, we are continuing to press for land disposal options to be thoroughly examined.

Let me make the Government's position absolutely clear. We accept that dumping of these products at sea will have to cease. With our conference signature, we undertook quite clearly that we would work as rapidly as practicable towards that objective. Within the last few minutes, I have quoted figures to show that we have made rapid progress towards that end.

I have also said that, within the next two years, there will be virtually no necessity to continue dumping. The principal exception that I have in mind is, as the hon. Member will be aware, that ICI is investing £30 million in

a plant to dispose alternatively of some of its wastes, and the construction of that plant may go a little beyond the deadline to which I have been referring.

Where we are convinced that there is an alternative, we will not be prepared to give a licence. The reason for the refusal to renew the Fisons licence was that our investigations suggested that there was an alternative. If one looks at the number of companies involved and at the products being disposed of, one will find that, in many cases, the alternative that appears to be the most practical is to treat the product so that it is purified to the degree at which it can go into the sewage treatment works.

From the list of possibilities in front of me, it is quite clear that that is one of the major options where a product is more bulky. Drying and use for, say, road building is a real possibility. Various forms of recycling is feasible. So, we are not talking about an enormous time scale: we are talking about measures that are feasible, with investment, engineering and determination. My Department is determined to see that those things come together.

I am sure that we can look the other members of the North sea conference in the face, because we have made extremely rapid progress. That progress has been substantial. My Department, far from conniving in the practice, as the hon. Gentleman seemed to imply, is the driving force in getting rid of the practice. We agree with the tide of public opinion that thinks that it should stop, and we intend to promote that end.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 26 January 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Consumer Guarantees Bill

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the storms and the extensive damage throughout the country, I wonder whether you have had any indication that there will be a statement today, and whether the Minister will pay tribute to the ambulance men and women who have given devoted service alongside the firemen. As a result, will the Government allow the linkage payment to be made to the ambulance workers so that we can get this thing settled once and for all?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no indication yet of a statement but I do not need to know that before 10 o'clock.

9.36 am

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a privilege and a pleasure to move the Second Reading of the Consumer Guarantees Bill. I was not sure that I would be able to be here today as I came down with cook-chill disease yesterday and was laid up for most of the day. I hope to be able to make my entire speech, although I shall not delay the House too long.

The Bill is widely supported in the House and outside, and I hope that we can give it the wholehearted support that it deserves. The Bill falls into two distinct yet complementary parts. First, it takes an idea developed by the National Consumer Council for a consumer guarantee, which has been reformulated in the light of comments from business, industry, legal experts and, of course, the Department of Trade and Industry. The second part implements the Government's changes to the sale and supply of goods laws. I have incorporated those changes into the Bill at the request of the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, who supplied me with the official draft from his Department.

The two parts of the Bill are complementary because they are both concerned with consumers. One part deals with their rights and the other with remedies. It is equally true that one part is concerned with prevention and the other with cure. Hon. Members who have read the National Consumer Council's report, "The Consumer Guarantee" will know that that part of the Bill is a natural and logical development from the part implementing new formulae for the sale and supply of goods laws. This morning I shall talk principally about the consumer guarantee. That does not mean that the rest of the Bill is less important, but simply that more needs to be said about the consumer guarantee for reasons that will become apparent—if they are not already. The second part of the Bill should be uncontentious.

First, I pay tribute to the National Consumer Council and its staff for what can only be described as an excellent job. Many people have been involved in the project, but I should like to single out Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes who was the driving force behind the idea. Her major contribution to the Bill emphasises that it is not a party political issue. I know that hon. Members from both sides of the House will support the Bill today, as their constituents would want them to do. In so doing they will reassert the sovereignty of Parliament and emphasise our role representing the interests of those who send us here. I believe, as someone who worked in quality control in industry for 19 years, that the Bill will be good not only for consumers but for British business.

The objectives of the Bill are to secure full competition in the high street, to provide consumers with a clear and simple statement of their rights and redress and to promote high standards of quality control. It will do so by defining a clear and simple guarantee, backed by legislation. That will allow consumers to choose a product by reference to its quality, reliability and after-sales service, not simply by its price. Businesses will not be required to give such guarantees, but producers of motor vehicles and major household appliances will be obliged to state whether they offer that protection. Consumers will be aware which manufacturers are prepared to stand by their products, and that will force manufacturers diligently to address the issue of product quality and customer service. As will be clear, the Bill will ensure that the benefits of legal protection and competition are harnessed to serve consumers and business.

The emphasis on the role of competition has caused some controversy. Many people have argued that the consumer guarantee should offer a minimum right. I have some sympathy with that view, but I have been persuaded that the National Consumer Council's approach to industry—"this is your last chance"—is right.

Yesterday, I received a letter from Sir Gordon Borrie, the Director General of Fair Trading. He welcomes the approach that the Bill takes and wishes it success today. However, he has a number of detailed reservations which he hopes the House will consider. They are important, because Sir Gordon is not only an eminent lawyer but the guardian of competition and fair trading. He says:

> "My basic worry arises from the attempt to proceed on a 'voluntary' basis."

That bold truth comes from the man behind many codes of practice and other examples of self-regulation, which many hon. Members believe leave much to be desired. He further says that the voluntary scheme could increase confusion. The solution that he advocates is that the consumer guarantee should be developed into a statutory mandatory right. Many hon. Members will treat Sir Gordon's advice with the respect that it warrants: his views can be adopted through amendments made in Committee, should the Committee agree.

The House will want to know that I have received advice from other lawyers expert in this sector and in the intricacies of law reform. In the light of the few detailed concerns that they have expressed, I shall recommend three specific amendments in Committee to ensure that the regime is legally sound and has the endorsement of the

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

most eminent lawyers in the land. The first detailed point that they make is about the burden of proof on the existence of the defect. That was the last point of the Confederation of British Industry when it made six criticisms of the original consumer guarantee report. Five of those criticisms were taken up by the National Consumer Council, and I intend to take up the last one if the Bill is given a Second Reading.

The second point that lawyers made was the right of the consumer to notify the retailer of a claim against the guarantor. I shall drop that point to avoid the confusion that the Minister apparently fears. The third is the risk that a business man might be able to recover financial losses, say from a lost contract, due to a defect in a car. I am sure that the House will agree that those matters should be carefully considered.

I do not want to bore hon. Members with the detailed principles of something which I am sure they support, but I shall deal with some of the points that the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs may make. First, in the *Today* newspaper on 22 January, the Minister said that he is not aware of support for these measures. I find that odd, and I ask the Minister to listen to my hon. Friends today and to remember an Adjournment debate in December initiated by the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter). Secondly, I refer the Minister to his written answer of 22 January, which clearly mentions bodies that support these measures. Thirdly, I refer him to the results of a MORI poll, of which he and the Department have been informed, showing that 87 per cent. of people think that the guarantee is important and that 96 per cent. of voters want their Members of Parliament to support the Bill.

Fourthly, I refer the Minister to editorials in *Today*, the *Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express*, *The Guardian*, the *Western Daily Press* and the *Newcastle Journal*, not to mention other regional papers for East Anglia, Wales and many other parts of the country.

Fifthly, I ask the Minister to pay attention to views expressed by hon. Members and their constituents which have been forwarded to him and to which he has replied. Sixthly, I refer him to about 100 written responses that the National Consumer Council has given to his Department, showing support from consumer groups, manufacturers —including Hotpoint and Volvo—and retailers such as Comet, Argos, the Co-op, and the Retail Consortium.

I suspect that the Minister may select aspects of various responses to show some opposition to the Bill. The Consumers Association is delighted that it incorporates the Law Commission's amendments to the Sale of Goods Act 1979, and I am sure that that eminent body is equally satisfied with the changes that the Bill makes to the National Consumer Council's report.

I gather that the CBI still has some reservations about the Bill. No hon. Member would expect it to call for legislation to protect the consumer, but it would be a matter of considerable concern if it opposed a measure aimed at securing full competition, especially as all its detailed objections have now been met. Like most individuals, I should like to know what it believes should happen if I am sold a car or washing machine that turns out to be a lemon. If it believes that the seller rather than the manufacturer of a defective product should be liable, let it so persuade the House by moving amendments to part V of the Bill.

I understand that the Minister thinks that the guarantee may be a burden on business. I find that a strange argument, because no business will have to offer the guarantee: only certain manufacturers will have to state whether they offer it. It is not a burden but an incentive to compete in quality.

The Minister is reported as saying that the Bill is unnecessary. I refer him once again to Sir Gordon Borrie's letter, which could not be clearer. He says:

"There is undoubtedly a need for greater clarity and transparency about the rights of consumers faced with defective products."

I refer the Minister to a 1986 report, "Consumer Dissatisfaction", for which one of his senior officials at the Department of Trade and Industry was responsible when he was at the Office of Fair Trading. It shows that each year 14 million people are dissatisfied with products that they buy; that only half will have their problems resolved; and that over £5 billion is spent each year on products that turn out to be unsatisfactory. That is an appalling indictment of our industry.

I beseech the Minister to listen to the views of experts, colleagues, advisers, constituents, Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes—it matters not who—because anyone with eyes, ears and a modicum of intelligence can see that this is a necessary change in the law.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's case. Concern has been expressed about the Bill, especially about its breadth of application. Much of the earlier discussion was on the Bill applying to cars and "brown" goods, but not necessarily to "white" goods or television sets. Manufacturers of those items believe that they offer satisfactory guarantees. If the Bill progresses, will he be prepared to consider a list of products to which it will apply, with a view perhaps to restricting the Bill if it can be shown that the manufacturers of those products have satisfactory guarantee arrangements?

Mr. Jones: I should be delighted to consider in Committee a list of specified products and I am sure that a list could be drawn up to answer the hon. Gentleman's criticisms but with the aims and principles of the Bill in mind.

The Minister is also reported as having criticised the measure on the grounds that it is bureaucratic. At first, I wondered whether the report was accurate, but the same word was used in *The Times* and the *Sunday Telegraph*.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): It must be accurate then.

Mr. Jones: I want to put it on record that the Minister agrees that the wording in *The Times* and the *Sunday Telegraph* is accurate.

I have looked hard for bureaucracy in the Bill and I am forced to conclude that the Minister has either been criticising a different measure or believes that the disclosure of information on which the consumer choice must be exercised is in itself bureaucratic. If the latter is the case, I reassure him that, with his blessing and support, I

know that the House will drop that so-called bureaucracy and make the guarantee mandatory, as Sir Gordon Borrie recommends.

I understand that the Minister has also said that the Bill is over-prescriptive. It is hard to imagine a milder medicine for this widespread malady. Anything that is simple and equitable, such as the consumer guarantee, must be prescribed. If the public are to have any confidence in the scheme, it should be set out in legislation. Business men themselves see merit in such detail being prescribed in legislation.

The Minister and his colleagues keep saying that it is not for Government to tell business how to run itself. But that must cut both ways. We are talking about the well-being of our industry and the quality of life of our citizens. Surely on such issues, unbridled ideology is inappropriate. We should listen to people who know and work together for the public good.

The public deserve the Bill now and business must have it if its quality control is to be sharpened up in time for 1992. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.52 am

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I praise the initiative of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) in choosing an extension of consumer rights as the subject of his private Member's Bill. As the House knows, I have a long standing interest in consumer matters and I chose consumer safety as the subject of my private Member's Bill in 1986. I believe that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West came first in the ballot whereas I came 20th on that occasion. Despite all the frustrations and difficulties that I understand the hon. Gentleman has already experienced, and the frustrations and difficulties that I predict he will have in future, I urge him to stick to his guns. If I can come in 20th in the ballot and find my Bill on the statute book, there is every reason for him to hope that his Bill, too, will become law.

The case for legislation is overwhelming. An enormous amount of confusion exists over a multitude of guarantees and warranties. It is essential that when a prospective purchaser looks at goods, he is aware whether there is a guarantee and, if there is, of his rights under it. We in Britain throw away £3,500 million on unsatisfactory cars and a further £346 million on faulty household goods.

Many hon. Members will remember the case of Mr. Bernstein a couple of years ago. Only a minority of cars is purchased by private consumers, but the brand-new car that Mr. Bernstein purchased was not a fleet car. He took the car away and the engine seized up after only 140 miles. He took the car back to the garage where more than 100 faults were identified. Much to my surprise, and no doubt to the surprise of many of our constituents, the High Court ruled against him on the ground that he should have taken adequate care and made adequate inquiry on the forecourt before taking the car away. That makes nonsense of consumer rights and guarantees. I feel for the Mr. Bernsteins of this world. The Bill would outlaw such practices.

Shoddy goods will disappear from our stores only when retailers and manufacturers realise that they have a duty to act responsibly. It is all too easy to lose the guarantee card for a new cooker, mowing machine or car and hope that all will be well but then find that the small print and the lack of responsiveness are in stark contrast to the early charms of the sales person in closing the sale.

The Bill aims to cut through the red tape. There are two choices—a solid guarantee to compensate or replace the goods or a clear label stating that the product carries "no consumer guarantee". It is right to require free repairs, including labour costs and the loan of an article to perform the same functions, or compensation, in the meantime. The compensation that the hon. Member for Clwyd South-West suggests is extremely modest. I should have liked him to suggest not the value of the goods but one and a half times or double their value. That could have been whittled down in Committee, no doubt under pressure from the Minister. The hon. Gentleman has instead chosen a modest clause, which I hope he will not allow to be rescinded.

The surprise is that this important Bill falls in private Member's time and is not part of the Government's programme. The Conservative party may not be at the height of its popularity, and a caring piece of legislation designed to protect Mr. and Mrs. Typical Shopper would do wonders for its image and for the Minister's prospects.

The promoter rightly referred to the initiative of the National Consumer Council whose report "The Consumer Guarantee" mirrors in many ways the "lemon" laws in the North American states. The report was welcomed by my trading standards body, North Yorkshire county council, whose diligent trading standards officer Gordon Gresty, is a first-class local government officer. Countless examples will be given in this debate and in Committee of the problems that consumers have had, especially with cars and white goods. The Bill has my overwhelming support and I commend it to the House.

9.56 am

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I apologise to the House—if it is not self-evident—that although I have a different ailment from the promoter of the Bill, my voice may not last out. No doubt my hon. Friends will be reassured by that.

I declare a long-standing interest. I first joined what was then Lombard Banking in 1968 and I was with that institution when I was elected in 1979. I have continued with an interest. Although the institution has not asked me to speak today, I am speaking with the knowledge of, and with the advantage of information from the Finance Houses Association of which Lombard North Central is a major part. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones). He will get used to us trotting out our own experiences. A few years ago I was fortunate enough to be able to introduce the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that he will find it a rewarding experience and—whatever my inevitable reservations may be—I am sure that he will end up with legislation on the statute book, and I wish him well. I am grateful to the Finance Houses Association for its assistance. It submitted a detailed response to the National Consumer Council paper, "Competing in Quality", published in June last year. While endorsing the aims of the consumer guarantee, it suggested that the position of the finance houses had not been properly considered.

To be fair, in its final report the NCC acknowledged that the position of finance houses had been the most

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difficult matter that it had had to address and it attempted to answer some of the difficulties that had been outlined in the Finance Houses Association response. There remained some problems on which a further response was submitted to the NCC. Subject to their resolution, the Finance Houses Association has asked me to make it clear that it remains happy to support the proposals for a consumer guarantee.

Unfortunately, the Bill as drafted appears to be based on a number of misconceptions and fails adequately to accommodate arrangements involving a finance house. I shall be brief, but I hope that the House will understand if I explain the different types of agreement in a little detail so that the thrust of the Finance Houses Association's reservations can be understood.

First, let me refer to to the application of the Bill. Clause 15 attempts to set out definitions of the parties to which the Bill will apply. It will apply to loans. Credit agreeements have been given the Consumer Credit Act 1974, section 137 definition. As a result, the Bill will apply to loans regulated by the Consumer Credit Act and loans not regulated by it. Regulated loans fall into various categories, such as debtor-creditor, debtor-creditor—supplier, fixed sum and running account credit—I shall not bore the House with full details. The Bill also covers asset-based credit agreements which, again, can be regulated or unregulated. Hire purchase, conditional sale and credit sale are included under that heading.

Hiring agreements can be regulated or unregulated. Although the FHA was led to understand that the Bill was intended to apply only to individual consumers, the definition of "consumer" in clause 15 seems to go beyond that. Clause 3 says:

"a specified product means one which is . . .

(ii) ordinarily supplied for private use or consumption",

which clouds the issue even more. What criteria will be used to judge whether a product is "ordinarily" for private use? It seems illogical to extend the guarantee to certain business users when it has already been agreed by Ministers that that will be taken out of the scope of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. We are told that legislation initiated in November 1987 by my noble Friend Lord Young, the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, is merely awaiting parliamentary time.

Clause 2 attempts to cover special provisions in relation to finance agreements. Clause 2(1) specifies that it will be applicable only to goods

"supplied to a consumer under a credit agreement or a consumer hire agreement."

The clause appears to be intended to cover all the agreements that I have mentioned, athough in many cases that would be wholly inappropriate. Alternatively, as a result of the way in which the Bill is drafted, clause 2 might not apply at all to loans. "Supply" has been given the same meaning as in section 46 of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and means, therefore,

"selling, hiring out or lending the goods",

or

"entering into a hire-purchase agreement to furnish the goods".

It may be arguable that under the definition of "supply", finance houses do not fall within the scope of clause 2. That definition of supply would apply unless

"the context otherwise requires".

It may be necessary to consider the ordinary meaning of the word "supplied". Can it be said that goods are "supplied" under a loan contract? The central point is whether a loan contract constitutes supplying goods. The answer is by no means certain in law and clarification is essential. I argue that it would probably not be a supply of goods and, therefore, clause 2—which is an important clause—would apply only to hire purchase, contract hire and rental agreements.

Clause 2(2) stipulates that where a consumer claims a refund, the guarantor, acting as an agent for the consumer will pay

"such amounts as would be necessary under . . . the Consumer Credit Act 1974 to discharge the consumer's indebtedness"

to the finance house and repay to the consumer what he has already paid. There is a defect in the drafting, in that sections 94 to 96 of the Consumer Credit Act apply only to certain types of agreement. Various types of agreement would not be included, such as unregulated agreements and consumer hire agreements. Ironically, if the definition that I gave a moment ago on loans is correct, and only consumer hire agreements are included, broadly speaking, we are now excluding those agreements under sections 94 to 96. What agreements will be covered by the Bill? Other agreements that would not be included are those where the charges are calculated on a daily basis, running account agreements and regulated hire agreements.

Provision will have to be made for the calculation of the amount due to the finance house in those cases, which could form a substantial proportion of all the cases that will arise under the Bill—because I hope that it will become an Act. It may be agreed that the Consumer Credit Act 1974 rules could be made to apply to unregulated loans but, as there are no Consumer Credit Act rules for most of the categories that I have outlined, there is an obvious central flaw.

There is a particular difficulty with hire agreements. A refund based on the total rentals may not be sufficient to pay off the finance company. The rentals, especially in the case of motor cars, may have taken into consideration tax allowances and the residual value of the car. In that case, the recovery of the residual value may depend on a pre-existing obligation to resell the supplying dealer. In cases where both the manufacturer and the car to the supplier of goods offer a consumer guarantee, it is uncertain who will be liable to pay the consumer's indebtedness to the finance house. The assumption must be that they will be jointly and severally liable, but that has not been made clear in the Bill.

A small adjustment is needed in clause 2(2)(b). The words "consumer credit agreement" are used, but the word "consumer" is wrong in that context. Clause 2(3) states that where a guarantor has satisfied his obligations under clause 2(2),

"he shall be entitled to recover the product."

However, it should be remembered that where the agreement is a hire purchase or conditional sale agreement, the customer becomes the owner of the goods upon payment of the indebtedness, so there will have to be further provision to ensure that title to the goods rests in the guarantor. If the goods are provided under a loan agreement, the customer will already have title to them, so it will be necessary to provide for the transfer of the title.

At what point will title and risk in the goods pass to the guarantor? The FHA assumes that that will be when

payment in full is made by the guarantor, but it could be when delivery is made to the guarantor. That point requires clarification. Although, separately, most of these are small points; collectively, they highlight the fact that a substantial amount of clarification is needed if the legislation is to to be fully acceptable.

Various items, which arguably should be covered in the Bill, are missing. There are no provisions, for example, relating to the impact of the supply of replacement goods, although that would have a major effect on finance houses. If goods are provided on hire purchase, conditional sale or consumer hire, title to the replacement goods must be passed to the finance company. It will be necessary, again, to identify at what point that happens. New documentation will have to be completed if the agreement is a regulated agreement. That is an important point as there could be an onerous administrative burden if many guarantees were exercised.

In fairness to many hon. Members who are waiting to speak, I shall gloss over some of the fiscal aspects of the proposals, which are not covered fully and which need greater attention. I shall draw them to the promoter's attention in a separate letter. The Bill does not take account of the fact that a guarantor may be unaware of the existence of a finance agreement. Where the guarantor is the manufacturer, it is unlikely that he will be aware that the goods in question are subject to a finance agreement. The FHA does not believe that it will always be possible to rely on the customer giving that information.

Clause 13 gives the Secretary of State excessive powers, it may be argued, to make regulations. My hon. Friend the Minister, who is well known for his sterling upholding of Conservative qualities on law and order and the importance of punitive action, must recognise that clause 13(1)(o) and (p) offer what may be unnecessary and undesirable powers to create new criminal offences. I realise that I may be attracting my hon. Friend to the Bill by highlighting that point, and I know that he will examine it closely.

Part V puts forward several important amendments to the Sale of Goods Act 1979, many of which deal with commercial rather than consumer sales. Perhaps the short title to the Bill should be "Consumer Guarantees and Sale of Goods (Amendment) Bill." The Bill raises important matters, that, are inevitably legalistic, and I apologise to the House for being rather dryer than most hon. Members will be. However, a substantial proportion of the sales of the goods that the promoter intends the Bill to cover are achieved by means of loan, hire purchase or other forms of agreement. In 1988 alone, the value of store goods supplied on credit was £2·794 billion, which is a staggering figure. It is important that we get this right. The Bill is important and I support it, with reservations. I wish the promoter well and I very much hope that the provisions about which I have reservations will be amended in Committee.

10.9 am

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on his fortune in coming first in the ballot and on his choice of subject for the Bill. The hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) referred to the Bill's implications for finance houses and mentioned the Consumer Credit Act 1974. I was fortunate to be the Minister of State in 1974 and I guided that Act in the first independent Department of Consumer Affairs. The present Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, embodies the residue of that Department and I am glad to see him here today. High though my regard is for the Minister and much though I like him, from where I stand, his Department does not look impressive.

The arguments of the hon. Member for Hornchurch about finance houses are legitimate and deserve consideration. When the Consumer Credit Act 1974 was enacted, there was no intention that business users would be the beneficiaries. The aim was to protect the individual in the market place. It was obvious from the opening and closing comments of the hon. Member for Hornchurch that we have his good will and I am sure that it will be possible for my hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South-West and his sponsors to accommodate the serious points that need to be made on behalf of the finance houses. That can be achieved in Committee.

The Consumer Guarantees Bill is one step in a succession of legislative steps intended to overcome the problems that have arisen from the emergence of the consumer society which is the product of a mass production economy. We now mass-produce goods remotely, in isolation, from consumers who will be using those products. Much Government time is spent trying to ensure consumer protection. They have been trying to give consumers the information that they need when they buy goods which have inevitably become enormously complex. They become complex not just in the technicality of production, but in the technology embodied in the products. That technology is often incomprehensible and unascertainable at the time of purchase. We need only consider the use of electronics in cars today to realise that the days of home car repairs are limited. Kits are sold in the United States to convert older cars back to manual as their electronics begin to give trouble. Those unconverted cars are unsaleable because their second-hand value falls so much.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): In addition to the problems that the right hon. Gentleman described, does he agree that the problems are often compounded by the apparent inability of any western nation to write instruction literature in such a form that it can be understood by anyone other than the person who built the appliance concerned?

Mr. Williams: I attempted the apparently simple process of assembling a desk unit with my daughter. One would have thought that little could be simpler. However, we sat scratching our heads for nearly half an hour trying to interpret what at first seemed to be a simple diagram and trying to work out where to install a particular support piece. The problem is that the person writing the instructions knows what he means and presumes a level of knowledge in the readers which in many cases may not exist—it certainly does not in my case.

The complexity of products has made it much more difficult for the consumer at the time of purchase to know whether the goods are up to the required standard or of the standard described. The Bill goes a short way towards ensuring that what we cannot always ascertain from personal inspection can be taken for granted because of the guarantee that accompanies the product.

[Mr. Williams]

Some vested interests oppose that principle for reasons that we can understand. All too often the faults that aggravate the consumer and take up so much of his time—the faults which cause products to be out of use or mean that the car stays in the garage for long periods—are often minor. Those faults could be engineered out and reliability could be engineered in. At the design and specification stage it is possible to engineer in greater reliability at relatively minor cost. Often, the faults that arise from production can equally be engineered out at low cost in the production process.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): With regard to minor defects, will the right hon. Gentleman respond to a point made by the motor manufacturers which was not answered by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones)? The manufacturers claim that

"satisfactory quality may include the freedom from minor defects. While we agree that a manufacturer must ensure that such defects are repaired, we do not believe that a minor defect, such as an intermittent fault with an interior light, should allow the consumer to claim a refund or replacement."

Is that not a serious point? Why should such an onus be placed on the retailer and manufacturer for what might be a very minor defect?

Mr. Williams: That is an arguable point. My hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South-West is reasonable and I am sure that he will be willing to see how far such points can be accommodated. If there is good will on both sides, I do not see why there should be a confrontation on that issue. All hon. Members and their families are consumers. We all have the same interest in ensuring that we and our constituents have reliable goods. All too often it is possible to engineer in, at low cost, protections for the consumer which would incur high costs if the faults were allowed to enter production.

A couple of years after my consumer job, I was involved in the Department of Industry in dealing with the inability of the British television industry to sell components. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) was a Minister in the Department with me at the time and may remember what happened. British manufacturers claimed that they could not sell components to Japanese companies operating in the United Kingdom because the Japanese demanded utterly unrealistic standards of performance and reliability from the components. They would accept only minuscule faults in batches delivered to them. We were told that that was an example of the Japanese at it again and that it was a wily endeavour on their part to ensure that British industry could not sell to them.

One of my officials at the Department of Industry took on the task of investigating Japanese standards. He spoke to the Japanese companies to see whether we could discover common ground between them and the British manufacturers. It emerged that the Japanese were asking for component standards in this country no higher than they expected and received from components manufacturers in their own country. More damning—this is why I do not regard too seriously many of the criticisms from industry about the Bill—the same component manufacturers who claimed that the Japanese standards were unattainable were meeting such standards in their Government defence contracts.

We must put pressure on companies to provide goods of the quality that the public has a right to expect. There is no mandatory element in the Bill and that is important. If I refer to a company by name, I do so for example and not because I am pinpointing it for any other reason. For example, if Ford believes that it cannot meet a guarantee because of production difficulties with a particular component, it does not have to give that guarantee and it is also likely that Ford's competitors would face the same problems. It will not lose the competitive advantage. But if one company is failing at a technical level and another is succeeding, the public have a right to know that the product from that company is more reliable than that produced by the other. The onus is on the company at fault to put its house in order. It should not hide behind a lack of information that prevents the public from discovering the inherent problems in its product.

I was surprised to note the Minister's facial expressions when my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West spoke about bureaucracy. Although there are elements of the Bill that we might want to discuss or, conceivably, to amend, I cannot see how it could be described as bureaucratic. One of its main advantages is that it would be self-policing to a great extent and, therefore, of little or no cost to the Government.

Industry may argue that the Bill is too costly, but if industry does not want to meet the cost of ensuring that its products are of a standard that consumers have a right to expect, that is industry's decision. There will be no compulsion on industry, but it cannot expect the consumer to be misled any longer by the type of guarantee given at the time of purchase. I do not believe that the Bill need cost industry.

I was surprised to see a report at the weekend suggesting that the Department wanted to see the Bill killed. I am sorry that the Minister was pinpointed as the initiator of that plan. I would be delighted if he assured me that that was not so. I should be sorry if an attempt were made to talk the Bill out. It would be difficult for the Department to recover its standing with the consumer organisations if it was seen to abuse the advice proffered by those organisations and by the Office of Fair Trading.

Our constituents are the consumers who would be affected by the Bill. At the very least we should ensure that it is not killed off after a cursory Second Reading examination. We owe it to our constituents to give the Bill a detailed examination, with the possibility of amendment, in Committee. That would give us the opportunity to consider many of the problems that legitimately need to be discussed on behalf of consumers. On Third Reading we would then have the opportunity to decide whether the Bill deserved to be supported.

On Second Reading it would be premature for anyone to attempt to frustrate the progress of the Bill. I sincerely hope that that will not happen and I hope that the Minister would not dream of being party to it.

10.22 am

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Rarely is a Bill more timely. The daily experience of all the citizens advice bureaux, trading standards officers and all those involved

in the front line of consumer affairs can be added to the evidence gathered by the National Consumer Council—all of which demonstrates there are loopholes in existing consumer legislation. Perhaps that is a generous way in which to describe what most would see as whole rungs missing on a long ladder. The Bill will not solve everything, but its precise certainty should help enormously.

I understand why some of my hon. Friends have reservations about the principles of the Bill—and certainly some have doubts about the details. The Retail Consortium has written to me—I imagine it has also written to other hon. Members—but I submit that none of its objections should prevent the Bill from going to Committee.

What first turned my mind towards, and awakened my interest in, consumer protection was a succession of horror stories that I heard in my surgeries about cars, household goods, toys, builders, replacement windows, holidays and even British Rail. I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), not only on coming top in the ballot—after all, that is the luck of the draw, the hand of fate—but on positively taking up the Bill as his choice.

There has been a fair amount of press and media coverage about the Bill, but there is constant press and media coverage about shoddy goods, lemons and rip-offs. There has always been a torrent of post from individuals —taxpayers, voters, customers and clients—who are landed daily with shoddy goods. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West, mentioned that the Office of Fair Trading had estimated that 14 million people a year buy products that turn out to be lemons. Let us suppose that that is a wild over-estimation and let us suppose that those affected amount to 7 million people only. Let us assume that one can shop for 365 days a year—ignoring Sundays, bank holidays and half-days. That means that 20,000 people purchase shoddy goods each day—about 40 a minute in trading hours. Therefore, while I have been talking, another 100 or so people have bought unsatisfactory goods. When they complain, about 50 of them will be fobbed off and they will give up because they feel that there is nothing they can do.

I should like the modest, reasonable expectation of quality, which will be backed up by a guaranteeing act of faith for replacement or compensation, refund or replacement, extended to services. In May, in a ten-minute Bill I sought to supply a measure of compensation, as of right, where public services such as British Rail, the Post Office and local authorities failed to deliver an agreed enforceable minimum standard of service. It was a great idea, but I could not progress with it.

In an Adjournment debate in December, I called for a consumers interests authority—a CIA for Britain. It would be a sort of high street ombudsman, a beefed-up trading standards service acting on behalf of the consumer. That authority could cut through the red tape and bureaucracy when the market could not or would not help the consumer. It was another great idea, but I could not progress with it. Today, I am delighted to be a co-sponsor of this Bill. It is a great idea that can progress, but whether it will is for the House to decide. I am looking forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister's views on it, as they are crucial.

Just as there are some cowboy dealers, I accept that there are some pirate customers who seek to abuse existing legislation and good trade practices. That still leaves many people who fall victim in the grey areas when seeking redress against retailers and who have expectations about manufacturers' products. The Bill will clarify the relationship. The simple beauty of not requiring manufacturers to offer the no-quibble guarantee, but requiring them only to display the warning "no consumer guarantee" will, I hope, appeal to the House. It would certainly appeal to reasonable people on both sides of each consumer trade deal.

In an ideal world, of endless time in the school day, we might well require that consumer education, credit management and consumer rights be part of the national curriculum. Such conditions do not exist, but the broad thrust of the Bill will lend a framework of certainty to the consumer. I should have thought that that would be a welcome spur to the manufacturers, the retailers and suppliers, and the buyers.

It has been argued that the protection offered by the Bill is all too much and that we already have the small claims court procedure to enable consumers to seek redress. All too often, that procedure is patently too daunting and too legalistic. In some cases, it is another field day for lawyers. It has been argued that one could raise the small claims court threshold, but it would still not be customer-friendly. Controls, if they work and are trusted, can be voluntary or they can be part of civil or criminal law, but to initiate such legal controls involves the drawbacks I have already mentioned. The Bill, however, treads a middle path—it represents an achievable one step at a time.

I like the twin aims of the Bill, and I hope that it will be supported. When one peruses a line of cars, videos, tumble driers or whatever in a showroom, the eye will see the warning "no consumer guarantee" displayed on some items. Therefore, every potential customer who can recognise that sign will have a potent weapon with which to enter the battlefield of choice.

The Bill represents a charter for anyone who buys anything big as an aid to modern living. It is therefore a charter for a great many people. Those people may find it difficult to understand should the House not give the Bill a Second Reading today. I add my support to it and I urge the House to say Aye.

10.29 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on choosing this subject and on winning the first opportunity to present a Bill. Many hon. Members do not have such an opportunity throughout their careers. He has used his opportunity wisely, and I hope that both Conservative and Opposition Members acknowledge it.

As sponsor of the Bill, the hon. Gentleman has had support from both Conservative and Opposition Members, including that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, and that of other members of my party. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I understand that my right hon. Friend has gone to see the storm damage in his village, where several roofs have been destroyed and properties have been wrecked. As we are discussing the difficulties that people have in their day-to-day lives, hon. Members should acknowledge the need for him to do that.

Mr. Stern: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are all in the same position? There is considerable damage in

[Mr. Stern]

Bristol, and I hope to go down there later this afternoon to see it. Why does the leader of the hon. Gentleman's party require special privileges?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman treads a risky line, in view of the few Front-Bench members of his own party who are present. However, we should not waste time on politicking when discussing a subject such as this.

Some hon. Members—I understand that the Minister is among them—may seek to oppose the Bill and prevent it from continuing through the House. If so, it is much to be regretted. Both Conservative and Opposition Members should recognise the great popular support for a measure such as this. The representations that have been made and opinion polls that have been undertaken have already been mentioned.

Perhaps more importantly, any hon. Member will have been approached by constituents who complain about the service that they received from manufacturers. People complain because they expect the standard of service that is written into this Bill to be provided automatically. They do not believe that they should have to fight for it. Yet all too often it is not provided.

The Bill is not about creating added bureaucracy but about responding to the natural and proper expectations of all consumers when they purchase goods for a considerable sum. They expect good service over a considerable period.

I do not claim that the Bill is correct in every detail. That is a matter to be taken up in Committee. If problems cannot be resolved, the House will have a chance on Third Reading to sum up the results of the Committee. If it does not like the Committee's results, it can reject the Bill then. However, at this stage we must acknowledge that if an individual walks into a shop or on to a garage forecourt and parts with a large sum of money for goods which are designed to perform a specific purpose for a long period and to a good standard, he should expect some rights if they do not do so.

The Bill is a modest interpretation of what people naturally expect from manufacturers. In some ways, it is too modest. It is modest because its sponsors intended it to complete its passage through the House, and acknowledge that not all hon. Members see the position in the same way.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The hon. Gentleman said that everyone who goes into a shop or on to a garage forecourt should have rights. Is he not aware that they already have rights? It is one thing to say that people's rights are not strong enough, but let us not pretend that they have no rights.

Mr. Taylor: I do not pretend that people have no rights, but people do not have the rights that they properly expect when they purchase high-cost goods. We should acknowledge that, because at some time we have all worked with constituents who come to us about defective goods. We find that we cannot help them because they do not have the rights that we, too, assume they have.

It has been suggested that the Bill will affect the competitiveness of British industry, increase costs and impose a burden on industry. I believe that the contrary is true. First, many manufacturers already sell precisely the goods affected by the Bill in countries which already demand consumer guarantees. In the United States, the demands made on manufacturers are stronger than those contained in the Bill. Secondly, if the Japanese lesson has taught us anything, surely it is that guaranteed and perceived quality sell products. Sometimes they may sell products that are otherwise less desirable than goods which do not have perceived quality. If we impose this burden—as the Minister may like to call it—on British industry, we shall find that it benefits directly, as firms tighten up their quality. That will be recognised in markets around the world and British competitiveness will be increased.

I see no reason why the Minister and the Department of Trade and Industry should oppose the Bill or seek to delay it. I hope that the Minister will give that his backing and allow it to go into Committee, perhaps to be amended, and eventually to reach the statute book. If he does not give his support, he does not deserve the title of Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responsible for consumer affairs.

10.35 am

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), not only on his good fortune but on his good judgment in choosing this subject.

From the outset, I have supported the principle of the Bill, but I have some reservations about its detail. The purpose of all law is to regulate relationships between individuals. The purpose of justice is to ensure that such relationships are regulated fairly and equitably. The law of contract is particularly important in this respect. It often has to take account of the unequal bargaining positions of parties to a contract. Over the years, contract law has developed through case law. While that has been a good indicator of the problems which come before the courts, it is not always the best way of ensuring that justice is given to individuals.

One recognises the creative judgments of judges such as Lord Denning in deciding how best to interpret contractual terms when they seek to exclude, exempt or limit the rights of a party to a contract. However, from time to time, elements of case law have to be codified into a form of legislation. The Sale of Goods Act 1893 and subsequently the Sale of Goods (Implied Terms) Act 1973, the Sale of Goods Act 1979, and the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977 were all attempts to strike a fair balance between the consumer or purchaser and the manufacturer, or retailer.

Often manufacturers avoid their clear obligation to the ultimate purchaser by sheltering behind the protection of the law of contract and saying that there is no contract between the manufacturer and the ultimate user, the purchaser. They say that any redress should be through the retailer. In strict law, that is right. Fortunately, the law of tort came to the aid of the law of contract and expanded the idea that anyone who manufactures anything has a duty of care towards the ultimate user. Contract and tort, and statute law are coming closer together.

The Bill does a great deal to assist consumers in the problem that I have described and to give additional support to otherwise defenceless consumers in the face of a monolithic and all-powerful manufacturer or supplier. I am sure that we have all had personal experience of buying defective goods and corresponding with the manufacturer

who tells us that our duty or claim lies against the retailer, but if we go to the retailer, he says that the liability lies with the manufacturer. In such circumstances, when even we who are perhaps more articulate and who have the ability to write such letters are often given the runaround, how much more is that the case for those who do not have the opportunity to make such representations?

It is sad that the word "guarantee" has been misued over the years by many manufacturers. People have innocently felt that, if they signed their name at the bottom of the printed form and sent it off to the manufacturer, they would be protecting their rights, whereas in the past they have often been doing precisely the reverse, limiting or excluding the rights that they might otherwise have had. Therefore, the idea that there should be a "no consumer guarantee" statement on goods, a "consumer guarantee" or a "consumer guarantee plus" statement is a good thing.

I have long advocated that, if a manufacturer or supplier or attaches something in gothic letters that says "guarantee" at the top of the piece of paper, written underneath should be the clear words, "It is the large print which giveth, but the small print which taketh away." That would make it quite clear to anybody purchasing the goods that they do not have any clear rights and that they should make sure that they know what is in the small print.

I know that this morning many hon. Members themselves will be looking at the small print on their insurance policies and that this weekend they will be assisting their constituents to ascertain whether they are covered for any damage that they may have suffered as a result of yesterday's storms. It is therefore apposite that we should discuss this subject this morning.

In giving the Bill my broad support, I must strike a warning note about the difficulty of including words of absolute meaning or of being absolutely precise about how many days, in any one year—two, four or 21, for example, —are allowed for the rectification of a fault.

The law of contract, which regulates relationships between suppliers and consumers, is a subtle instrument and has relied in the past on the use of words such as "reasonable". Although the word "reasonable" does not admit of any precise definition, in isolation it is readily recognised by the majority of people who use the word in a given context, not only by lawyers but also by laymen.

We all recognise reasonable and unreasonable behaviour. The difficulty lies in defining where the line should be drawn between the two in grey areas. That has been the problem faced by the courts in the past and, indeed, those are the cases that come to court for a decision. Laying down in absolute terms the precise number of days that should be allowed for the rectification of a fault has its own inherent problems, but I do not find that point entirely damaging to the concept of the Bill.

In the circumstances it is important that we give the Bill a fair hearing in Committee so that we can discuss these issues and decide what is meant by a "complaint" and whether an oral statement to a mechanic is sufficient to constitute a "complaint" to the manufacturer. These are matters of more precise definition than the Bill at present allows. Therefore, while commending the Bill to the House in principle, I sound that warning note about the precise details.

10.43 am

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I rise to support the Bill, which is not particularly revolutionary. The duty of legislation to create conditions so that a trustworthy market can operate for the benefit of the consumer has a long and honourable tradition. In its statutory form, we think especially of the Sale of Goods Act 1893, but before that common law gave many rights to consumers which were then codified in that Act. The legislation on weights and measures is an example of the way in which the market was forced to operate fairly and where intervention was required.

I have absolutely no doubt that setting standards so that the market can operate in that way is good for business. I agree with the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on that point. I have experience not only of practising at the Bar and having to advise clients and appear in court on matters of this kind many years ago, but also as the director of a family caravan business that was originally involved in residential caravan parks and in the sale of caravans and motor homes. Therefore, I know what it is like from both sides.

We used to operate residential caravan park homes before 1975 when the private Member's Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) sought to protect the rights of those occupying mobile homes. Before that measure, there was little legislation to give the consumer rights in that market. As my late father founded the business in 1930, we had been in the business for a long time and welcomed the Act when it was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater.

That Act set standards in the market place and raised the reputation of those who operated proper parks. Its provisions tallied completely with the way in which we had operated our parks for many years, although the cowboys involved in the business had been getting away with giving us all a bad reputation. Such legislation can be good for business because, just as weights and measures are regulated, we can ensure that the marketplace operates correctly.

The Bill will also clear away some of the archaic language that has been attached to this sphere of consumer interest. I refer to terms such as "merchantable quality" which are well—or at least half well—understood by lawyers and which have been well interpreted over the years to keep pace with the changes in consumer law and consumer expectations. However, they have remained somewhat arcane to members of the public, who increasingly want to be aware of their rights but who are not necessarily aware of the definition of "merchantable quality". Its meaning is fit for sale, fit for its purpose or for its ordinary use. In ordinary English that means "of satisfactory quality", which is precisely what the Bill aims to establish.

I have not been too depressed by thinking about how my hon. Friend the Minister for Consumer Affairs will react to this legislation. To give myself some encouragement, I did not consult *The Times* or *The Daily Telegraph*, to which the hon. Member for Clwyd South-West (Mr. Jones) referred but looked in Andrew Roth's "Parliamentary Profiles" to see whether there was anything there that could give me hope. I passed over the description of my hon. Friend as an "anti-interventionist" and as "The Boris Karloff of the House" and the phrase

[Mr. David Martin]

that he "grins like a rattlesnake". I did not think that those features would be particularly helpful to the future of the Bill. However, I noticed that it is reported that, in October 1986, on his return from the United States of America, my hon. Friend acclaimed its "customer is always right" philosophy.

As has been said, guarantees in the United States of America last longer than one year, faults are put right quickly and salesmen are sometimes criticised for being too eager and too keen to get in touch with the customer after the sale to make sure that everything is all right. The United States recognises that the customer is always right, and having see what happens in the United States my hon. Friend the Minister was converted to that view. That country is right to do so, because it is good for business and the future. It ensures that the free market, free enterprise and capitalism have the best of the argument whenever they are under threat.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has slightly misunderstood what was in my mind at the time. I indeed raise to the highest level the importance of the relationship between the customer or consumer and the supplier and the marketplace. However, I slightly object to and have reservations about interposing the lawyer between them. Our American friends have gone farther down that route, and I hope that we shall resist that.

Mr. Martin: I entirely accept what my hon. Friend has said. However, the law comes very much into this at the moment and has done for many years, especially since 1893 and the interpretations of the various Acts that followed the Sale of Goods Act. History is encrusted with the examples of lawyers. I made a very good living myself from interpreting the law in this area when I practised at the Bar. However, I believe that the Bill will simplify the existing law and make lawyers less able to make money out of the unfortunate experiences of consumers in the particular market to which it is directed.

According to a report in *The Independent* in May 1989, my hon. Friend the Minister is reported as saying that intervention is seldom needed to protect well-informed, intelligent, educated consumers. Of course I agree with that. I do not know whether it applies to all hon. Members, but I certainly put my hon. Friend the Minister in the category of well-informed, intelligent and educated consumer. However, the Bill is not needed to protect that category of people.

I recently bought a compact disc player at my local Dixons' store. Unfortunately, it will not be covered by the Bill, but, in Committee, hon. Members can examine categories and see whether hi-fi equipment could be included. I took it home, and it did not work, so I rang Dixons' and said, "Your CD player does not work." I was the intelligent, well-informed, educated consumer whom the Minister accepts does not need protection. I was told that to investigate the matter, I would have to pay a £10 call-out fee. I said, "But it's new—I have just bought it. I do not have time to go back to your store today." Dixons' insisted that I would still have to pay the fee. I said, "I am not going to pay it."

I took the CD player back next week. All hon. Members have constituency duties, and I could not get back to the store for another week. When I could, I took the CD player back and saw the manager. I made a tremendous fuss. I said, "If you like, I will shout out in the store that this CD player is not working. I am going to go away with a new one in my hand." I gloss over the fact that the CD player had gone through their repair department, and the form was ticked to state that there was no fault in it. I got a new CD player, and it works very well, Madam Deputy Speaker. I had to go through all that. I have no doubt that few people will go to those lengths.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): My hon. Friend has been through an awful procedure. No doubt many hon. Members have also been through it. My hon. Friend was aware of his rights under the Sale of Goods Act 1979, pointed that out to the manager, and got his way. Of course, any other consumer could have done that, too. How will the Bill help that problem? I do not think that it will. My hon. Friend has addressed the fundamental problem, but I do not know how the Bill will help.

Mr. Martin: The Bill makes a manufacturer liable for the standard of goods that he produces, and it marks a much clearer line of responsibility. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) said, manufacturers will not be able to say that it is the retailer's responsibility, and a retailer will not be able to say that it is the manufacturer's responsibility, particularly if one is involved in correspondence, rather than doing what I did, which is self-help. One can say, "Regardless of my rights, I have something that does not work. I want it changed." If my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) reads the detail of the Bill, he will see that it improves consumers' rights to redress in a more indirect way than the method I used.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend has described an incident that has happened to many people. He referred to a portable appliance. I accept that we could deal with this point in Committee, but, as presently drafted, the Bill appears to be silent about items that are not transportable. Some years ago, I bought a computer desk which collapsed after a few weeks, and I literally had to throw it away. Although the manufacturer was quite happy to accept responsibility, he did not have the ability to come to my house and pick up the pieces, nor did I have the ability to transport them. If I had had to pay for a van to take the pieces back to the shop, it would have amounted to more than the cost of the desk anyway.

Mr. Martin: I sympathise with my hon. Friend. Many of us have had similar experiences. We must strengthen the law, as this Bill will do, so that proper redress will be achieved.

Only 14 per cent. of our people stay at school beyond the age of 16. We do not always create laws for those who are as well-informed, intelligent and dedicated as ourselves. I do not wish to be patronising, but it is a fact also that people are shy and do not wish to press their rights. Very often, they are ignorant of their rights.

The best firms already carry out procedures of this kind. The Bill will codify the best practice. I speak with experience in the law and in business. Someone is just as much a cheat if he sells shoddy goods as new and then argues the toss about putting them right as he would be if he sold underweight goods or short measures of booze. In

Committee hon. Members will be able to clear up many problems. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give the Bill a fair wind.

10.54 am

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I join hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones). I am honoured to be a co-sponsor of the Bill. Consequently, my remarks will be in support of it.

No hon. Member likes to think that we are giving in to unreasonable pressure. Pressure is part of our job in the House, but, sometimes something comes along which is so obviously in need of reform that the pressure to which we are subject suggests that it would be foolish to ignore it. Our personal judgment would otherwise be eroded.

A report was produced by the National Consumer Council, which was chaired by Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes. She sent all her colleagues her findings and those of her council about people's experience with goods that do not come up to expectations. I was particularly impressed that the study had taken place over two years. A study which reaches a conclusion after such a time deserves respect.

All of us are confused about our rights if something should go wrong. Of course, if an item does not fit, we are told in advance, "We will change it if it is not right." We may also be told that it will not be exchanged. We may be told that it is a sale item and that exchange is not permitted. That is fair enough. Every customer needs to know where he or she stands. Some customers, such as I and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), the learned editor of "Bowden on Contracts", are well aware of their rights under the law. They are well aware of the Sale of Goods Act 1893 and that goods must be of merchantable quality. However, the problem with the 1983 Act is that the matter is subject to proof and that a person must be willing to go to court for a remedy if the trader proves to be difficult.

Sometimes, in the case of heavy goods, a consumer is offered a guarantee. "Pressed to take" is a more accurate description of the system of guarantees. It is sometimes impressed on one that a guarantee is part of the deal and that, if one is taking the item, one takes the guarantee. Guarantees are often worthless. They not only remove one's rights under the Sale of Goods Act but they are so hedged about with requirements for the purchaser that he or she just gives up.

Often, one must send the item not to where one bought it but to the manufacturer's head office. Often, one must pay a call-out charge or such sum as the manufacturer may require to post back an item after he has repaired his own faulty goods. That is not much of a guarantee. Under many guarantees, unless one actually does everything strictly by the rules of the guarantee certificate, one loses one's rights under the so-called guarantee. All rights can be rescinded if one accepts a guarantee such as is offered.

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you wish me to conclude on that point and resume after the statement?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can continue for half a minute.

Mr. Alexander: I am happy to do that, but I was about to start another paragraph.

It will be much easier for the consumer if he knows that unless the trader tells him specifically that he has no guarantee, he will have one——

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Storm Damage

11 am

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the storms on 25 January and the damage that they caused.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. David Hunt): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to tell the House about the violent storm that hit much of the country yesterday. Sadly, we understand that as many as 40 people lost their lives, and many more were injured. I expect that many here today were, as I was, especially saddened to hear of the deaths of the two schoolgirls while at their schools in Swindon and Bristol and the many tragic deaths which occurred. I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in offering heartfelt condolences to the relatives and friends of all those who died, and also in wishing those who have been injured a swift recovery. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

The storm cut across the south, the midlands and East Anglia, with areas further north also being affected. While I understand that the gusts themselves were not quite as strong as in the great storm of October 1987, they nevertheless hit a much wider area and, of course, this time the storm occurred in the middle of the working day. There has been widespread damage to property. Road and rail links have been blocked and electricity and telephone lines have been down in many areas. We have again lost trees, many apparently weakened by the storm of two years ago. Some casualties were again caused by falling trees.

I am sure that I speak for the whole House in expressing gratitude and admiration for the way in which the emergency and voluntary services, the local authorities, the electricity supply industry and the armed forces have coped with this emergency. They have done a truly magnificent job. The primary responsibility for dealing with emergencies lies with the emergency services and with local authorities. Local authorities have wide discretionary powers to spend money for such purposes under section 138 of the Local Government Act 1972, and they usually include an amount in their budgets to meet such contingencies. They also have the necessary local knowledge, resources and expertise to deal with such emergencies.

It is, of course, much too soon to obtain an accurate picture of the amount of damage that has been done, or the amount of work that has been necessary and will continue to be necessary. However, it is clear that the scale of yesterday's storm was such that some authorities are likely to have incurred costs in dealing with the emergency that are beyond what they reasonably could be expected to bear. For that reason, we announced last night the Government's decision that the special financial arrangements to help local authorities in emergencies—known as the Bellwin scheme—have now been activated and will be available for the areas affected by the storm. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be making a separate announcement about similar arrangements for Wales. The damage in Scotland has been considerably less than south of the border, but my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland, is keeping a close eye on the position.

Under the Bellwin scheme the Government provide financial assistance to local authorities to help with the additional cost of immediate work to safeguard life or property and to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience. Where the expenditure exceeds a threshold equivalent to a 1p rate for a county council and 0·15p for a shire district, the Government will pay 75 per cent. of the cost. My Department is issuing details about the scheme and the arrangements for claiming help. I should make it clear, however, that the scheme as originally conceived does not cover insurable costs. However, the arrangements are well known to all the local authorities concerned. The expenditure covered by insurance will not be constrained by the controls on local authority capital finance. Where authorities do need to incur capital expenditure that is not covered by insurance, they will be expected to find the money from within their own resources, but where they believe they are unable to do so, I shall consider granting supplementary capital allocations, or credit approvals, in order to allow repairs to go ahead as quickly as possible.

I hope that, given those assurances on financial matters, local authorities will not be hindered from doing all that is necessary to ensure a swift and effective response to the storm. We have made available the resources of the armed forces to help local authorities and the emergency services where needed. I am satisfied that all available resources are being applied where necessary.

Mr. Harris: The whole House will be grateful to my hon. Friend for that statement and will join him in expressing sympathy to the relations of those who died and all those who suffered damage to property. The House will also want to join him in paying tribute to all the members of the emergency services, especially the ambulance men —[HON MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and to those who worked long and hard to try to deal with the aftermath of the storm.

Is my hon. Friend aware that large areas of the south-west, especially Cornwall, are still without electricity? Will he consider further help to correct that position? My hon. Friend will be aware that this is the second time within a month that Cornwall—and my constituency in particular—has suffered from ferocious storms and gales. In making available to local authorities the money that he has spoken about, will my hon. Friend sympathetically consider including in the calculation the costs involved in dealing with the pre-Christmas storms? That is very important.

Finally, will my hon. Friend consider meeting a delegation from Cornwall county council and district councils to discuss not just the cost of clearing up the storm damage, but the longer-term implications, and especially the cost of improving the sea defences, as this is the second time in a month that Cornwall has been hit? I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food sitting next to the Minister.

Mr. Hunt: First, in paying tribute to the emergency services—as he did at the start of his speech—my hon. Friend received the approval of the whole House.

I will not just consider sympathetically his request that we should take into account the expenditure incurred under the Bellwin scheme in dealing with the emergency on 16 and 17 December: I will say positively now that that expenditure will be taken into account.

On my hon. Friend's second question, I am willing to meet a delegation to discuss the issues that he has outlined. As he said, a considerable number of people are still without electricity, but every effort is being made to secure their position as quickly as possible. The Government's response in all Departments concerned is being co-ordinated by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Minister mentioned the timing of the storm, the emergency services, the police and the ambulance service, because they have to come into action. Were the Meteorological Office warnings sent to local authorities in good time? Was an ops room set up in his Department and the Department of Transport to deal quickly with a storm that should have been known about before it struck?

Mr. Hunt: There were warnings by the Meteorological Office, and that is not in question. All Army districts were warned at 19.28 hours on 24 January of impending storms and were instructed to respond to any requests from local authorities for assistance. I will investigate the right hon. Gentleman's points, but there was an immediate and swift response by the emergency services. I commend them for the way that they responded to the serious position.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the emergency services and in expressing sympathy for those who have suffered from the storm. Does my hon. Friend recall that a similar statement on finance was made after the hurricane in 1987? It was discovered then that, because of the way in which the grant system worked, local authorities did not get the benefit expected. Initially, it was discovered that West Sussex council would have been refunding money to the Treasury. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that this will not happen again?

Mr. Hunt: As my right hon. Friend knows, with all his financial experience, a different local authority expenditure regime was in place then. I should like to make it clear that the authorities' expenditure in connection with this emergency will not affect the amount of grant that they receive.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I should like to extend our condolences to the families of the bereaved and those who have been injured, and our congratulations to the emergency services—not least the ambulance services—for the effort, hard work and bravery that they have shown once again during these problems.

Has the Minister yet set in place a review of the Bellwin scheme, given the changes that have taken place in local authority funding? Is it possible to bring such a review forward? I believe that the scheme is not sufficiently generous. I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's response to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) that the damage caused in the two storms which have already hit Cornwall will be included in the calculations, but more help is needed. This matter needs clarification.

Have the Minister and the military services considered the possibility of the armed forces helping to track down breaks in the electricity lines? As the hon. Member for St. Ives said, large parts of Cornwall still have no electricity service.

Mr. Hunt: The House joins the hon. Gentleman in paying those tributes to the emergency services. Obviously, a 1p rate will no longer be relevant in the new system of local government finance which commences on 1 April. We intend to continue the Bellwin scheme, and we shall announce proposals on which we shall consult local authorities. The hon. Gentleman need have no fears about that.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy is doing everything he can to restore electricity supplies, and is working in conjuction with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to ensure that all the services are given the support that they need. I understand that all affected police forces issued warnings through the media about the dangers of travel. Devon and Cornwall issued an advance warning in the morning based on the Meteorological Office storm warning. Other forces would have received the Meteorological Office warning and would have been prepared to respond when the situation in their area became threatening.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Does my hon. Friend appreciate that two groups have worked very hard? Electricity workers have worked constantly since the start of the storm, including all night, to restore electricity supplies. They have been doing a remarkable job in the south-west, as have those who were called in to clear the roads. One of the great problems was the blockage caused by traffic, and considerable work has been done to relieve that problem.

Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that there will be no cut-off date on which funds for damage clearance will be stopped? It will be a considerable time before all the clearance can be completed.

Does my hon. Friend realise that, for most of us in the south-west, the cost will be way above a 1p rate? It has been estimated that it will add 2p to the community charge. That will not be easy to bear. Should not certain areas, especially those that have suffered damage before, be considered more favourably than they would be under the Bellwin scheme? Will my hon. Friend consider the special cases sympathetically?

Mr. Hunt: Having listened to the tributes paid by right hon. and hon. Members, I will ensure as soon as I leave the Chamber that their messages are passed immediately to the emergency services concerned.

I was sad to hear that up to 1 million consumers are still cut off from electricity supplies. The worst damage has occured in the areas of the south-west, south and south-east boards; the eastern area is fairly badly hit; and there has been some disruption in south Wales and the midlands.

Help is being given by boards further north and by Northern Ireland and Eire when they can spare it. The less badly affected areas aim to restore all supplies today. Sadly, supplies in the south-west, south and south-east board areas may not be restored until Sunday or Monday. Every attempt is being made to help the individuals involved.

I have announced in response to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) that we shall include the damage caused on 16 and 17 December when calculating the threshold above which the Bellwin scheme will operate.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): When the Minister passes on the views and thanks of the House to the

[Mr. Stanley Orme]

emergency services, whose work has been magnificent, will he also take account of the fact that the ambulance services turned out overwhelmingly, although many were involved in an industrial dispute? Will the hon. Gentleman bear in mind the fact that the police, ambulance and fire services and the armed forces are necessary and that the public find it extraordinary that the Government should continue a dispute with the ambulance services which could be resolved? Will the hon. Gentleman pass on to his colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Health, the message that another endeavour should be made to resolve that dispute?

Mr. Hunt: We are extremely grateful to, and commend, those ambulance men and women who suspended their industrial action and turned out to help, but we should not turn this occasion into an opportunity for making political points about the stoppages.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Was not much of the property owned by district and county councils in October 1987 either uninsured or under-insured? Will my hon. Friend make it clear that taxpayers' money will not be used to assist those local authorities which either have decided not to insure against insurable risks or which are under-insured?

Mr. Hunt: I give my hon. Friend that assurance.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I believe that the Minister said that the Army was notified the day before the storm. Will he explain to the public why no public warnings were given? Does he realise that, when a hurricane is pending in the United States, there are constant warnings not just of the scale of the storm but of particular hazards that need to be avoided? Had such warnings been issued yesterday, some of the deaths might well have been avoided.

On Bellwin, will the hon. Gentleman note that to most of us his comments were inadequate? Because of massive damage to council housing stock, my authority will have to meet the first £430,000 of the repair costs plus one quarter of all further costs. We are nearing the end of the financial year: the council has no funds in reserve; and it is under pressure from the Secretary of State for the Environment to hold the poll tax down. We need money from the Government, and we need it now.

Mr. Hunt: As I understand it, public warnings were issued. If the right hon. Gentleman will reflect on what I said, he will understand that I made that absolutely clear.

A Conservative Government introduced the Bellwin scheme, which was the first comprehensive attempt to meet this sort of problem. We have kept the threshold to exactly the level it was several years ago, when the scheme was originally announced. We have not uprated the 1p rate in accordance with inflation. It is a generous scheme. The important thing is that local authorities all know exactly where they stand. It is a long-proven scheme, and they all know its details. Therefore, our announcement last night made it clear how the bills would be paid, so that local authorities and everyone else could concentrate on protecting people and property.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I know that all right hon. and hon. Members join me and the Minister in expressing sympathy with people who suffered injury, damage and loss last night. Kent county council has asked me to express to the Minister and to his colleagues their tremendous appreciation for the speed with which the Department has moved, and for the statement this morning. The chief executive told me this morning that Kent is likely to have suffered losses of £5 million, and that figure is still rising.

My hon. Friend will know that, following the storms of 1987, there was some delay in processing the claims that the Department were good enough to meet, due to the assessment of damage resulting from the storm and damage that might be construed as improvement. I hope that we shall not suffer the same delays again.

Finally, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. David Hunt: May I deal with the Bellwin points first, so that everyone is clear about the criteria? The damage must have arisen on 25 January and expenditure must be used for carrying out immediate works to safeguard life or property or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience.

We are writing to local authorities to remind them of details of the scheme, and to outline how claims can be made. I shall certainly consider carefully the matter that my hon. Friend has raised—that claims must be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I must remind the House that this is a private Members' day, so I urge hon. Members to confine themselves to specific questions, and perhaps ones that have not been asked before.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): May I tell the Minister that the Bellwin scheme is not good enough? Local authorities are at the end of their financial year and some of them, such as my own, are under spending restrictions. We have had to rehouse 70 families from two tower blocks, when we already have 2,000 homeless. First, will he reconsider the matter, because the cost to local authorities that are already hard-pressed could be enormous? Secondly, is it not correct that under the new housing finance regime, housing costs could be ring-fenced and would fall upon other housing tenants? Thirdly, the frames of two tower blocks in my constituency may have been twisted by the wind. In view of that, will he reconsider the restrictions on capital expenditure, which is almost being used as blackmail because people will not accept a housing action trust scheme?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman was in the last Labour Government, and if he examines what we are doing on this occasion he will find that there are generous provisions under the Bellwin scheme. Every local authority knows the scheme well and knows how to operate it. Therefore, last night, when we made the immediate decision to invoke the scheme, they were able to concentrate on protecting people and property.

I shall consider the point that the hon. Gentleman raised about ring-fencing the housing revenue account, and write to him. I am unaware that it would have that effect.

I have already made absolutely clear what the effects will be on capital restrictions and the way in which I shall consider supplementary credit approvals and capital allocations.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement, and in particular, what he said about Bristol. Would he briefly explain the effects of the Bellwin scheme on statutory authorities other than local authorities? I am thinking about the severe damage to the roof of a national landmark—Temple Meads station in Bristol. I am not sure whether provision for repairs will necessarily be made by British Rail.

Mr. Hunt: I am concerned to hear about the damage to Temple Meads station because I know the building well. That gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to British Rail because there was considerable destruction last night and already there has been a significant recovery in services. I wish to commend the staff and all those involved within British Rail who responded so quickly to the emergency. I understand that British Rail provided accommodation for people who were stranded at stations, and I think they set a good example.

I shall study the question of Temple Meads station and write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Mon): Although we welcome the hon. Gentleman's statement and its effects on local authorities, I am concerned that there is no Welsh Office Minister present, bearing in mind that ferocious gales lashed Wales yesterday. In addition to the finance to local authorities, and following on the matter raised by the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), will he ensure that, if finance is necessary to repair the Cambrian coastline service—I understand that the station at Llangelynnin was demolished yesterday and I pay tribute to the six railway men who worked hard to ensure that no danger to the public resulted—and if British Rail requires funds for that work, its applications will be met by the Government?

Mr. Hunt: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is co-ordinating all Government Departments and is closely in touch with Ministers from the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office, as well as other Ministers involved. Therefore, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is right to make an issue of the absence of a Welsh Office Minister in the House today. I know that they are actively considering the position and doing everything they can.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Following the previous great storm, the Secretary of State asked the Countryside Commission to set up a special programme to save damaged trees. Since then, about £5 million in grants has been paid out, and more than 800,000 trees have been funded as a result. Can my hon. Friend give a commitment today that he will consider extending that scheme to other parts of the country and to continue it if necessary?

Mr Hunt: I should like to respond positively to my hon. Friend. The royal parks are the direct responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. We are assessing the situation, but we are determined to make good the losses and to replant so that future generations will continue to enjoy our heritage of fine trees. My hon. Friend is right to refer to the question raised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The unit Task Force Trees has been working through local authorities and other organisations to assess damage and priorities for action and to give advice. It will be arranging payments of grants. We are considering a continuation of Task Force Trees and an extension of its remit to all affected areas of the country.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The Secretary of State was kind enough to mention the areas gravely affected by the storm last night. In Cleveland, a Middlesbrough man was killed in his car by a falling tree, and electricity supplies have been cut off. May I have his assurance that the Bellwin scheme will apply to Cleveland? May I also refer the Secretary of State to a statement in today's *Daily Mirror* which says that Gorden Kaye, the actor, was taken to hospital after being rescued by the ambulance services. On his way to hospital he said to them, "You are worth more than 10 per cent."

Mr. Hunt: On the first point, my announcement about the Bellwin scheme applies throughout England. I am aware that the storm has hit certain parts of the country badly and has left few areas totally unaffected.

On the second point, I am a great admirer of the star of "'Allo 'Allo" and I am sad to hear that he has been injured, but I do not think that he would want the hon. Gentleman to raise the matter he has just raised in this context.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Is there any possibility that the European Commission will assist us? Will my hon. Friend confirm that they made finance available for those people who lost their lives, for the bereaved and for people who suffered damage in the December storms. Will there be any assistance from the social fund for yesterday's storm?

Mr. Hunt: I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is in touch with the European Commission. The EC social fund gave the United Kingdom some £220,000, after the December storms, for individuals who lost relatives or suffered loss or hardship. The Commission is meeting this afternoon to consider whether to make a further grant for yesterday's storm, and I hope that it will be sympathetic.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the Minister acknowledge that, whenever serious problems of this sort occur, it is not central Government that have the job of clearing up the mess, nor the private sector, but local authorities and local authority manual workers? Will he also acknowledge that the professionalism of local government has been constantly and consistently undermined by 10 years of Conservative Government? As a result of what happened yesterday, rather than take the easy conclusion of the one-off payment to deal with the problem, will the hon. Gentleman draw the more important general conclusion that local authorities must have their confidence and professionalism restored?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman has the picture wrong. I made the comment earlier, and I now reinforce it, that I pay warm tribute to all those in local authorities who responded so magnificently to this problem. They have done so with great professionalism and skill and at obvious cost to themselves in their personal lives. I think

[Mr. Hunt]

that the hon. Gentleman will find that the atmosphere in local government is not as he describes. I shall be going from the Chamber to join one local authority which is already dealing very effectively with the situation.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Is the Minister aware that south Devon and Dartmoor were particularly badly hit last night and that north Dorset was hit by a tornado? Two of my constituents who live on the edge of Dartmoor lost their lives. Will he please explain to the South Hams district council, whose 1p rate amounts to only £90,000, how it will be able to repair over £100,000 worth of damage to council houses and over £800,000 worth of damage to roads and other structures?

Mr. Hunt: I made it absolutely clear, to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and other hon. Members, that, as yet, it is impossible to calculate what the final bills will be. However, as I said to my hon. Friend, I shall be very pleased to meet officials from his district council and to consider the position with them.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Should not the Bellwin scheme be used more widely? There is some doubt whether it is to be employed in Scotland. Furthermore, those authorities to which the Bellwin scheme applies will still have to meet well over 25 per cent. of the expenditure out of their contingency funds. That will have a knock-on effect on the poll tax. It will also have a knock-on effect in Scotland in connection with the poll tax. How will the Bellwin scheme rules affect the poll tax?

Mr. Hunt: I thought that what was most important last night was the need to establish certainty and to make it clear to local authorities that the Bellwin scheme, which they know well, will be put into operation immediately. We have done that. As for the amounts involved, I believe that it is a generous scheme. My right hon. Friend and I intend to incorporate the scheme into the new system. It gets the balance right between the taxpayer on the one hand and the ratepayer and the future community charge payer on the other.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my hon. Friend accept that his statement will be welcomed by local government? I am particularly pleased about his flexible attitude towards the Bellwin plan. I believe that it has cobwebs on it that need to be dusted off. Where there is strict control over the amount of money that can be given by central Government and open-ended expenditure by local authorities, that must give rise to concern.

I also pay tribute to the emergency services. However, on a slightly discordant note, I ought to point out that I believe that the Metropolitan Police could have done a great deal more to move London's traffic by the deployment of 40 to 50 policemen at strategic points where there were bottlenecks. No action whatsoever was taken. Even this morning there is slow-moving traffic in London because of failure by the police to control the traffic flow, which has absolutely nothing to do with the damage.

Mr. Hunt: For the avoidance of any doubt, I should say that I have not announced any flexibility in the Bellwin scheme. I have explained to Opposition Members that it introduces a note of certainty. Every local authority knows exactly where it is with the Bellwin scheme. I said that I intended to incorporate the Bellwin scheme into the new system of local government finance on 1 April. As for the Metropolitan Police, my hon. Friend is being a little unfair. I was in and around Westminster last night where there was a tremendous crush. I thought that the Metropolitan Police handled it extremely well and swiftly. Obviously, however, my hon. Friend's remarks will have been heard by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Will hon. Members who are rising to their feet please ask brief questions? I realise that the storm has affected most constituencies in the country, so I shall call all those hon. Members, but I ask them to be brief, please.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I do not think that anybody can criticise the Met Office this time for its storm prediction. However, when a storm of this intensity hits other countries, notably America, there are regular storm warnings. I refer in particular to the scaffolding and construction sheeting that was blown off buildings yesterday in urban areas, particularly in London. It caused damage, delays and disruption. Will the Government consider providing greater guidance and warning to those in the construction industry so that they can take steps to prevent that happening?

Mr. Hunt: May I just establish what happens over warnings? The emergency services have statutory and common law duties to preserve life and protect the public. In a major emergency, the police are responsible for the overall co-ordination at the scene of an incident and for allowing fire and ambulance staff to carry out their specialist functions. When a storm affects wide areas, the police are responsible for issuing public safety advice about the dangers of travelling, and they would close roads that were judged to be unsafe. That would be in addition to their particular functions. I understand that public warnings were issued. Nevertheless, we shall keep the matter under review in the light of what happened on this occasion. I believe that the emergency services responded in a magnificent and typically professional way.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Minister ensure that any consequences of the damage caused by the hurricane are not inhibited by the suggestion from the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) and that, if a council has been at fault, the fault should not be a burden on the people of that area because of under-insurance? That seemed to me to be a very mean suggestion. As local authorities will be the main organisations to carry out restoration after storm damage, will the Minister also take on board British Rail's difficult financial position and the fact that storm damage will have cost it several million pounds? Will the Government provide more capital so that British Rail can meet the additional cost? It is already absolutely hamstrung by cash shortages.

Mr. Hunt: I shall of course ensure that the hon. Gentleman's comments about British Rail are passed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. As for his point about insurable risks, the Bellwin scheme is very well known and has been in operation for a number of years. Local authorities know exactly where they stand. They know that the damage must, under the criteria, be

non-insurable. I should have thought, therefore, that every prudent and careful local authority would have adequate insurance.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The Minister will be aware that vesting day in the electricity supply industry is only about 65 days away. According to those in the industry to whom I have spoken, after that date no provision will be made for action such as that which was taken last night to switch linesmen from unaffected areas to carry out emergency repairs in affected areas. That was done magnificently in October 1987 and again last night. That was a well established procedure prior to vesting day. The new distribution companies will have a primary duty only to their shareholders. They will not have a primary duty to participate in emergency work. Is the Minister able to assure me that, if a storm occurs subsequent to vesting day, the same emergency arrangements will still apply, whereby linesmen from unaffected areas will be switched to affected areas where cables have been damaged?

Mr. Hunt: I do not think that that will be affected by statute. In an emergency, everybody responds. Last night, people, voluntarily and in accordance with their duties, combined to produce the maximum impact to help people and to protect property.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Some might argue that the Minister was a little lucky yesterday, with the emergency services being stretched as a result of the ambulance dispute, caused primarily by the Government. It makes sense for the Government in winter, when there are likely to be hurricanes and storms, to have all the emergency services at full tilt all the time. Is the Minister aware that he might well be hamstrung by the fact that he has already spent £30 million—or his hon. Friends have —on financing the alternative to the ambulance workers? As at least three months of the winter still remain, it would make sense to settle the ambulance dispute so that, if there is another emergency, the whole show is back on the road.

Mr. Hunt: I am pleased that so few Opposition Members have sought to make that kind of point. What makes me, and I believe the whole House, proud about our emergency services is that, whatever the background to the emergency, they immediately respond. They do so in a magnificent way, and I have already commended them for that.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Before he finishes, will the Minister pay a specific tribute to the ambulance workers for saving lives on a day when the courts at the behest of health managers and the Government, were preventing them from running emergency services in many parts of the country? Does he not think that that was obscene during a full-scale emergency?

Mr. Hunt: As so often, the hon. Gentleman has followed in the steps of his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I have already paid specific tribute to the ambulance men and women who gave so freely of their services and responded so magnificently during the currency of the dispute. I unhesitatingly do so again.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): May I join the Minister in offering our heartfelt sympathy for all those who were tragically bereaved, injured or suffered other serious loss as a consequence of the storms? May we also offer our gratitude and congratulations to the emergency and other services, who again demonstrated how much we depend on them at times of need and how unstintingly they give of their time, effort and courage when the call comes? Will the Minister recognise that the ambulance workers in particular—I am sorry that he did not feel able to mention them in his opening answers—have again shown that their sense of duty to the community overrides all other considerations? Can we hope that, when the current crisis is over, the Government in equal measure will recognise their reciprocal responsibilities to the ambulance workers and offer them a fair settlement?

I express our concern at the extent of the damage and disruption caused to property, to essential services and to our national heritage in Scotland and Wales as well as in England, and our awareness of the huge burden that that will mean for public, and particularly local, authorities. Therefore, I give a qualified welcome to the Minister's assurance that some resources will be available from central Government to meet those new and unexpected commitments.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the immediate problem may be cash flow—a problem exacerbated by the difficulties that many local authorities will face in the run-up to the poll tax—and that the immediacy of the help may be just as important as its quantity? Will he also give an assurance that, when the immediate crisis is cleared, the Government will not revert to their traditional attitude of hostility towards local government spending?

I must therefore express my disappointment and regret that the help being offered to local authorities is constrained by the limits implicit in the Bellwin scheme. As Conservative Members have pointed out, that means that we face a repeat of what happened in 1987, as local authorities are again required to find the first tranche of emergency expenditure from their own resources, but on this occasion those resources are in even scarcer supply, given the problems that local authorities face in relation to the poll tax.

Will the Minister assure us that there is no prospect —and there ought to be no prospect—that local authorities will be faced with penalties or that poll tax payers will be required to pick up the additional bill? Why cannot the Government reimburse local authorities for every penny of such unforeseen expenditure? Will he not reconsider that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) has asked him?

What arrangements has the Minister tried to make with his right hon. Friends in the Department of Social Security for those on income support who may now face substantial and unplanned expenditure?

Finally, although the storm was accurately forecast, we must now surely recognise that such storms are no longer a once-in-a-century phenomenon. Whether that is a consequence of global warming—although that possibility should give urgency to the measures we put in place to deal with that problem—we must now recognise that it is essential to prepare and co-ordinate better arrangements to reduce and prevent damage after such warnings. Will the Minister therefore tell us what long-term arrangements he has set in train to cope with the new situation?

Mr. Hunt: I counted 10 points in that question. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for joining in the tributes that the House has so warmly paid to the emergency services and the sympathy that it has extended to all those

[Mr. Hunt]

who have been seriously affected by what has happened. On the hon. Gentleman's third point about the ambulance services, I made it absolutely clear in my statement, saying:

"I am sure that I speak for the whole House in expressing gratitude and admiration for the way in which the emergency and voluntary services, the local authorities . . . coped with this emergency."

As soon as one of the emergency services had been singled out, I took the opportunity to pay tribute to it.

As the hon. Gentleman has done so, I must pay tribute to the other emergency services for the magnificent way in which they responded. As soon as the ambulance services had been singled out, I immediately paid tribute to those ambulance men and women who so swiftly came to the assistance of people in trouble. They always do that, and they have a magnificent record, but so have the police, the fire brigade and local authorities.

The hon. Gentleman's fourth point was to give a qualified welcome to my announcement. A qualified welcome from the hon. Gentleman is a great tribute, and I am grateful to him. He is right to welcome the announcement I have made, because local authorities know exactly where they stand. The scheme is long-established; there is no need for any local authority to query its application, as they know how it works. We believe that we have got the balance right between the taxpayer and the ratepayer and the future community charge payer. It is not Government money or local authority money: it is money that is raised from the people, and it is necessary to achieve a balance between the taxpayer and the person who is contributing to local authority spending.

The hon. Gentleman stressed the immediacy of help. Of course help must be immediate and swift, and we are making it clear to local authorities throughout the country that, as and when they have claimed under the scheme, those claims will be met as speedily as we can possibly pay them.

In regard to hostility to local authority spending, the hon. Gentleman is probably a little out of date. Many years ago, one of his right hon. Friends told local authorities, "The party's over." He may not remember that, but I do. There has always been a history of trying to contain local authority spending, and we are doing so more effectively than any previous Government.

There are no penalties on local authorities. I have made it absolutely clear that the expenditure by local authorities will not affect the amount of grant they will receive.

Those on income support will receive help from social security offices if they contact them, and will receive special help in special circumstances which rank for payment under the scheme which my right hon. Friends at the Department of Social Security are advancing.

In regard to global warming, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now in Africa making a speech about the problems of global warming and following up the lead that Britain has given the world in seeking to address that problem. We should be aware of that, and the Opposition should pay tribute to it.

In the long term, we shall consider every situation to discover how the arrangements can be improved—*[Interruption.]*—yes, which way improvements can be made to the existing arrangements—but I said absolutely clearly that we are satisfied that there has been an immediate and effective response and we shall do our best under the leadership of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, to ensure that that response continues for as long as necessary.

Consumer Guarantees Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: In fairness to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), who has had some time taken from the debate on his private Bill, may I ask hon. Members now participating in the debate to adjust their speeches so that he does not lose any more time.

11.48 am

Mr. Alexander: The House was wise to receive that exchange of concern, although it took place just as I was warming to my theme.

I was explaining the difficulties experienced when a customer finds that the goods that he has bought do not come up to his original expectations. I was arguing that it would be much easier if the customer knew, unless he was prominently informed otherwise, that he will have a guarantee. It is wrong and frustrating when something goes wrong with an item that one has bought within a year, because one must either comply with the restrictive terms of the so-called guarantee or wait for the item to be sent back to the works, where the defect may be dealt with some time in the future.

Even more frustrating for the customer is to be told that, as he has used an item—driven it, washed something in it, or watched something on it—for a month or two he has no redress. All hon. Members want business to succeed and do not want the Bill to harm or be a burden on it, but if business is encouraged to sharpen its service to the customer it will achieve greater success. A business that stands by its work deserves to succeed.

It is important to point out that the provisions of the Bill are not compulsory. Nothing obliges the manufacturer or trader to give a guarantee, but it enables the customer to know where he stands.

I speak as a qualified solicitor, although I am not declaring an interest, as I am no longer a partner in a firm. It has been suggested inside and outside the House that if consumer problems are not resolved simply, lawyers will gain business.

Mr. Stern: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Alexander: May I make a little progress?

In my experience, no family solicitor likes to take on a client who has a claim about defective goods, because he knows that it will be tedious, time-consuming and frustrating for the client, for whom almost invariably he will be unable to get much satisfaction. I should like it to be known that the legal profession does not seek the business of dissatisfied customers who have goods with which they are not satisfied.

I have been impressed that almost all the organisations that have contacted me and the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), although they may have ideas on improving the Bill, have accepted the principle behind it. Perhaps a little to my surprise, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, almost all the major car manufacturers and the Retail Consortium, which sent a useful briefing, accept the Bill in principle.

It seems that only my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs is hostile to it. I await his speech with interest, but I gather from the press that he feels that it would be too bureaucratic. I can understand the Minister believing that any legislation, particularly that emanating from his Department, is likely to be bureaucratic—bureaucracy is involved in much legislation—but I would like him to reflect on the fact that Ministers have hardly ever commended reforming legislation under the private Members' ballot. Ministers usually say that such Bills involve bureaucracy and that they cannot commend them to the House.

Mr. Forth: So that there is no misunderstanding, and to be fair to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders —I may not have a chance to deal with the problem in my speech—let me make it clear to the House that I have a letter from the society, which I have its permission to use, which states:

"the Bill contains a number of serious flaws which will only give rise to dispute should the Bill become law . . . we believe that legislation of this sort should not be rushed through Parliament by way of a Private Member's Bill."

I think that the House should know that that is the position.

Mr. Alexander: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for correcting me. I had understood from press releases that the society was in favour, but if that is its view, I unreservedly withdraw my remark.

My hon. Friend the present Minister is a successor of Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes, who was Minister for Consumer Affairs—a very distinguished one, too—when I first came to the House. She promoted the idea behind the Bill. She clearly thought that it would be workable and that such proposals could be commended to the House.

For the customer, the Bill should be simplicity itself. The customer will know that he or she has the right to a replacement or a refund if something goes wrong during the first 12 months after the purchase has been made. The manufacturer will know that, if he gives that guarantee, his product will be enhanced. The Bill certainly needs some smartening up—no private Member's Bill does not—and amendments will be made as it proceeds through the House, but that is not a reason to reject the Bill, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not advise us to reject a measure of such obvious benefit to our constituents.

It is the most vulnerable of our constituents who will benefit if the Bill becomes law—the person who is too intimidated to go to law or too confused to argue his case with the manufacturers, the trader or even the small claims court. It is a Bill that gives such obvious national benefit that I should be astonished to find anyone voting against it or anyone completely against it. I join the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West in commending it to the House.

11.58 am

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): After the private notice question about the storm, we have to get back into the swing of the debate, so let me begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on drawing first place in the ballot. Goodness only knows how he did it. I think that next time we have a ballot I shall ask him to write my name in the book for me, then perhaps some of his good luck will rub off on me.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West does not have more of his own hon. Friends here to support him today. It is true that the storm may have something to do with it, but some of the Labour Members who have been stuck at King's Cross and Euston

[Mr. Hugo Summerson]

might have taken the opportunity to come rushing back to support him. That was not to be, but the hon. Gentleman seems to be getting plenty of support from Conservative Benches.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to assure the House that my hon. Friend has a great deal of support from Opposition Members, but we are anxious that the Bill should be given its Second Reading this morning, so I have prevailed on my hon. Friends not to make long speeches. We could do so if necessary. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands.

Mr. Summerson: Of course, I understand that and I join the hon. Gentleman in his wish that the Bill should have its Second Reading.

To start with, I had strong reservations about the Bill. I have always been a firm believer in the efficacy of the market and I have always believed that regulation or prospective regulation should be looked at closely. However, I also believe that a measure of regulation can be helpful to the market. The market is sometimes a muddled place. Anyone who walks down a street market will see the basics of a market at work and that there can be a muddle. Once I had read through the Bill—I assure the House that I have—I thought that many of its provisions were excellent and would add a great deal to consumer choice.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) described the Bill as a "caring" Bill. As he used those words, I am sure that I saw my hon. Friend the Minister's teeth growing longer and more pointed. However, I see that his teeth have now receded and I hope that when he comments on the Bill, he will accept that many Conservative Members have made comments in favour of it. It is not an especially long or stringent measure and it places great stress on voluntary co-operation with manufacturers, which has persuaded me to support it.

What is the present process when we go into a shop and buy goods, and how do guarantees arise? When one buys goods, one spends half an hour back home unpacking the item, by which time the floor is probably covered in shavings, packaging and bits of cardboard which, in turn, give rise to rubbish. One tends to think about recycling, but I must not be diverted. Doubtless a small postcard eventually falls out of the packaging. Attached to the postcard are a number of paragraphs of extraordinary verbiage, which no one can understand, and small print which goes on at length. One will find somewhere that one is enjoined to fill in the card and return it to the manufacturer.

All too often, one forgets either to fill it in or to post it. If one gets as far as filling it in, putting a stamp on it and posting it, there is always the thought at the back of one's mind that one will be submerged in floods of junk mail. One thinks, "Will the manufacturer put me on the lists of all his chums in the trade?" Next, the postman staggers up the stairs weighed down with junk mail. I have moved house three or four times in the past three years and at the last address but three, bagfulls of junk mail are still arriving, which drive the present owner of the house mad. I have had to incur expenditure in going to the local post office, filling out yet another card and paying an extraordinarily fat fee to the Post Office for the privilege and pleasure of ensuring that all that junk mail is forwarded to me at my present address. That does no one but the Post Office any good.

People come to my surgery, as other hon. Members have said, to complain about goods that they have bought, which are shoddily manufactured and which give bad service. They say, "What is the law on this point?" People think that as we make the laws, we should know what the laws are. They invariably look disappointed when I say that I am sorry that I do not know what the law is on the subject and that I shall have to find out. They say, "For goodness sake, you are a Member of Parliament and Parliament makes the laws. Why don't you know what is in them?" I say that they have only to look at the previous Session, when goodness knows how many Bills were passed. I confess that I have not even looked at quite a few of them. As a result, people go away thinking that their Member of Parliament is not giving them a very good service. If I say that they should consult a solicitor, they think that I am in cahoots with the local solicitors, which is not true.

Should manufacturers give a consumer guarantee? I can think of some firms that would have no hesitation in giving a guarantee and the name Rolls-Royce springs instantly to mind. Rolls-Royce is a simile for excellent workmanship, pride in craftsmanship and British endeavour. I am sure that Rolls-Royce would have no hesitation in giving a consumer guarantee on its products.

According to the Bill, the consumer guarantee will be purely voluntary. However, if manufacturers provided such a guarantee, they would discover that it gave a fillip to sales. People would see the guarantee and believe that the manufacturer was taking pride in his product and had no worries about providing the guarantee. I am also sure that those manufacturers would find that their sales abroad would increase. No manufacturer in his right mind would set up two production lines, one for consumer-guaranteed products and the other labelled, "Shoddy products to go abroad". All goods would come off the same production line and would be built to the same high standard.

If a product carrying a consumer guarantee goes wrong, the manufacturer will hasten to put it right. He will not want to be dragged through the courts because that would not be good for his name. If a manufacturer takes great pride in his product, he will have no hesitation in giving it a consumer guarantee.

The consumer guarantee is of particular relevance to microwave ovens. Schedule II refers directly to those ovens. I noted what the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West said about the state of his health and what happened when he misused his microwave oven. We are all aware of recent incidents when microwave ovens have not heated food to the required temperature and people have become ill after eating food cooked in them. If a manufacturer provides a consumer guarantee for his microwave oven, that will ensure that the oven heats food to the correct temperature.

Why is the Bill necessary? As I said, all hon. Members receive complaints at their surgeries about shoddy goods. If all goods were well made, no one would complain and there would be no need for the Bill. Unfortunately, all goods—I was about to say that all goods are not well made, but I would have got myself into a proper tangle. I meant to say that many goods are not well made and that is why the Bill is necessary.

It has been claimed that people who are not satisfied with their goods can go to the small claims court. However, people are scared stiff of going to court.If someone buys something that does not do the job that it is designed to do, he wants only to take it back to the shop and to tell the retailer that it does not work. The retailer should then say that he is sorry and give a replacement. That was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin).

I am sorry that my hon. Friend has left the Chamber because I am sure that he would be nodding his head furiously if he were present. I was interested to learn that he had a problem with something that he bought from Dixons. My wife told me that it was high time that I brought myself into the 1990s, so last summer I went off to Dixons and bought myself an Amstrad word-processor. The thing arrived and the customary guarantee card fell out of the packaging. I looked at it and then went back to the shop to ask exactly what sort of guarantee was being offered.

It turned out that there were two sorts of guarantee, but I cannot recollect exactly what they were. I filled in a card and paid a fee of about £50, which meant that if that expensive product went wrong, all I had to do was ring up a certain number to ask someone to come to fix it. The thing did go wrong and it turned out to be a problem associated with one of the disks. I rang the given number, and someone came to look at it, but told me that there was a call-out charge of £51. I said that I had already paid £50 so that if it went wrong someone would come to fix it and I asked why on earth I had to pay the call-out charge. I was then told that all I had to do was reclaim the charge under the terms of the guarantee. What a performance.

There was no question of picking up the word-processor and putting it in the back of my car to take it back to Dixons. It comes in three parts and it is rather heavy. Moreover, because of lack of space in my flat, I had not kept the wood shavings and cartons that were used to package the delicate parts of the mechanism. If I had taken it back to Dixons in Victoria street I should have had to park on a double-yellow line and, probably, I would have got a parking ticket or my car would have been towed away. What a lot of fuss.

I filled in the claim form and I sent it off. I received notification from Dixons to say that it could not handle that refund application and that I had to do it through some other channel. That form is now sitting on my desk under piles of paper. Doubtless I shall get round to it some time, but, by then, I shall probably be told that the guarantee is out of date. One cannot win.

The example that I have given demonstrates the need for the Bill. It places no burden on the manufacturer. Should he voluntarily guarantee his products, however, the consumer, on seeing that label, will think, "Marvellous. I have a consumer guarantee." Consumers will be able to buy that product with great confidence and, as a result, the manufacturers' sales will increase at home and abroad. Manufacturers who know that their goods are shoddy will never dare to display a consumer guarantee on their goods. They will find that their sales will drop, so they will either have to update their products or go out of business.

Doubtless my hon. Friend the Minister thinks that I am being far too optimistic and that I am painting a rosy picture.

Mr. Forth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Summerson: Well, never mind. I support the principle behind the Bill and if it is given its Second Reading I have no doubt that it will be made even better in Committee. I commend the Bill.

12.12 pm

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): I believe that I am in a minority of one. I do not oppose the Bill, but I am somewhat agnostic about its provisions. I need to be persuaded that it is likely to achieve the effects expected by its sponsors.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) is to be congratulated on picking a subject of undoubted importance to our constituents and ourselves. Everyone who has spoken this morning has identified the problem —that consumers are ripped off and, sold shoddy goods and that retailers and manufacturers do not honour their commitments, either under guarantees or under existing legislation. However, those hon. Members who naively expect the Bill to correct those people who do not honour their obligations have failed to address the central problem —the ability of consumers to enforce their legal rights. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) is, with the greatest respect, somewhat naive to believe that the Bill will change the behaviour of retailers. They will not take back shoddy goods simply because a consumer guarantee exists. That arrangement will be voluntary and I cannot see how retailers' behaviour will improve as a result.

Mr. Martyn Jones: The point about the Bill is that it will act against the manufacturer. The retailer will not be all that concerned and will be happy to pass the responsibility on to the manufacturer.

Mr. Maples: I accept that, but all the examples cited concern people who have been unable to enforce manufacturers' guarantees. Problems arise with the retailer and the manufacturer and I doubt whether people will be any more likely to achieve their rights under such guarantees as a result of the Bill. I question the assumption that legislation is the right way to deal with the problem. General legal rights are available to everyone. I am not sure that the right solution is to put a rigid framework of guarantees and legislation round contracts for the sale of particular types of goods.

Unscrupulous traders and shoddy goods pose a problem, but competition between manufacturers and traders provide a solution. Part of competition is to be prepared to take back shoddy goods, and we know of good retailers who will do that.

I welcome the Bill's reforms of the Sale of Goods Act 1979, about which I shall speak later, but I do not welcome the guarantee provisions. I am somewhat agnostic about the Bill. I do not believe that it is either wonderful or terrible. I simply need to be persuaded that it will have the effects that are touted for it. I have a general prejudice against legislating when it is not certain that the law will have the desired effect. There is already a great deal of unnecessary legislation on the statute book.

I was and still am a lawyer but I am not about to join in the plethora of special pleading that we have heard from lawyers in this and other debates. When I was studying law the Sale of Goods Act 1893 had to be learned by heart. To follow an established tradition of contributing useless

[Mr. Maples]

pieces of information to debates, that Act is usually misnamed. It did not receive Royal Assent until 1894. That is an easy way of winning £1 in a bet with a lawyer, because not many know that.

The Sale of Goods Act 1893, as amended in 1979, provides some good fundamental rules that are legally enforceable. One rule is that goods must be of merchantable quality. That means that the goods should be reasonably fit for the normal purpose, taking into account their price, nature, any description applied to them and any other relevant circumstances. In practical terms that means, for example, that a garden hose should not have a hole in it and the handle of a suitcase should not break the first time it is used. If goods are cheap one should not expect top quality but whatever the price, they should not be faulty. That is a good fundamental legal rule. It is available to everyone who buys something. Admittedly, it is available only against the retailer but it is a legal remedy.

Other rules say that goods must be fit for any particular purpose made known expressly or by implication by the buyer to the seller and that goods must be as described. A leather wallet should not turn out to be made of plastic and furniture that claims to be made of wood should not turn out to be veneered. Those three basic rules are good fundamental consumer protection. They provide remedies that are available to everyone. The difficulty is in using them. The proposal in the Bill to allow the small claims court to be used to enforce guarantees could be extended to allow claims under the Sales of Goods Act 1979 to be enforced there.

The Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977 makes it clear that guarantees can no longer exclude customers' fundamental rights. There was a time when guarantees were used to reduce consumers' rights under the sale of goods legislation and substitute less advantageous rights. Now that cannot be done.

There is a basis in law for consumer protection. It provides remedies, depending on whether one is deemed to have accepted the goods, which allow the consumer either to seek a replacement, his money back, or damages. That is a well-established framework which has been around for some time.

The Law Commission was asked to examine the framework of consumer protection. In 1987 it produced a report in which it recommended some changes, most of which have been included in the Bill. Its main recommendation dealt with the phrase "merchantable quality", which is rather archaic. It recommended substituting the phrase "acceptable quality", while the phrase in the Bill is "satisfactory". The Law Commission also recommended that the concept of acceptance by a consumer should be varied so that the consumer was not deemed to have accepted goods which he had not accepted or not had the opportunity to decide whether he wanted to accept.

The Law Commission recommended against some changes in the Bill. The most important recommendation was against a cure scheme whereby a retailer could be deemed to have cured a defect by putting matters right. The Bill seems to give better protection for consumers than would those provisions. However, the Law Commission suggested that we should not go too far the other way and provide no time limit to the right of consumers to get all their money back. It stated that a cure scheme would be extremely complicated and that it wanted to keep the procedure simple. Its report came down against those provisions on the grounds that it was not sufficiently confident that that would be more beneficial to buyers and sellers generally than the present law. It feared that such a provision would become a fertile source of dispute and legislation.

On the more pertinent point of no time limit on the right to get one's money back, the Law Commission stated that it did not think there should be a change to the present requirement that a buyer should be deemed to have accepted the goods when, after the lapse of a reasonable time, he retains the goods without intimating to the seller that he has rejected them. The Commission discussed and came down against a new general long-term right to reject a sales transaction. It concluded against the long-term right to reject goods because of latent defects or lack of durability on the grounds that such a right would effectively amount to the same thing as a general long-term right to reject. It then considered replacing the expression "reasonable time' with "a fixed period of time" within which the buyer would retain his right of rejection, but concluded that it could not suggest a better answer than the wording of the present law, given that it applies to every sort of good. However, the report mentions an alternative way forward and suggests that consideration might be given to laws applicable only to specific types of goods, for which fixed time limits would apply. That is an important point and it is one into which the consumer guarantee proposed by the Bill would run. We should bear in mind that the Law Commission considered that point and rejected it.

Mr. Leigh: Does my hon. Friend agree that in discussing the point about "reasonable time", it is important that nothing affects the buyer's right to damages for any defect?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend makes that point well. I do not know whether I would have come to it, but I am glad that he reminded the House that the rights under the Sale of Goods Act, to which every consumer has redress, are limited by the statute of limitations and not by an artificial period of, say, six or 12 months.

I understand that the Government are committed to introducing the Law Commission's recommendations. In answer to a parliamentary question, my hon. Friend the Minister said that the Government intend to implement the changes recommended by the Law Commission which will clarify consumers' rights, in particular by replacing the present requirement of "merchantable quality" with a more up-to-date definition. He also said that a new Act would spell out the relevant aspects of determining "satisfactory quality", including fitness for the purpose intended, appearance and finish of the goods, freedom from minor as well as major defects, safety and durability. The Government have announced their intention to introduce legislation to implement those changes to clarify and strengthen consumer rights. My hon. Friend also pointed out that the Law Commission has rejected other proposals. He said that the Law Commission gave careful consideration to all the arguments when it considered the issue, but recommended against the creation of a long-term right of rejection.

The Law Commission argued that such a right would be a major commercial uncertainty that would be extremely unfair to sellers. Consumers who bought a defective product would, in effect, get free use of it until the defect appeared, but the seller would then be obliged to take back the used product and refund the purchase price in full. Suppliers would be obliged to hedge against the commercial uncertainties of such a regime, with unwelcome implications for consumer prices. My hon. Friend said that he wants to avoid that. The important thing is that my hon. Friend has reiterated what the Law Commission has already said.

The National Consumer Council stated in its report that we should create a long-term right of rejection, which is what led to its conclusion that there should be a consumer guarantee, and to the Bill's proposals for such a guarantee but the council did not recommend a change in the Sale of Goods Act 1979 to produce that.

However, the Bill amends the Sale of Goods Act in several ways that were recommended by the Law Commission. Clause 16 is the most pertinent and seeks to replace the phrase "merchantable quality" with "satisfactory quality", which seems more likely to mean something to the average consumer. The clause states:

"Goods are of satisfactory quality if they meet the standard that a reasonable person would regard as satisfactory, taking account of any description of the goods, the price . . . and all the other relevant circumstances."

The clause then lists certain characteristics that should be taken into account in deciding whether the goods meet that definition.

Clauses 17 and 18 implement the Law Commission's recommendations on acceptance and introduce the concept of partial acceptance. The Law Commission was worried about the circumstances in which a buyer could be deemed to have accepted goods when it was unfair to think that he had. Clause 17(6) states:

"(6) The buyer is not by virtue of this section deemed to have accepted the goods merely because (for example)—

(a) he asks for, or agrees to, their repair by or under an arrangement with the seller, or

(b) the goods are delivered to another under a sub-sale or other disposition."

He is not deemed to have accepted the goods if he signs the receipt on a delivery note.

Those changes seem to strengthen the basic protection that the law gives to consumers in the Sale of Goods Act 1979. They are good remedies, and I wholly welcome them. They are the result of a commitment that the Government would legislate along the lines recommended by the Law Commission. I do not think that hon. Members will have any difficulty supporting that part of the Bill.

The Law Commission specifically rejected the concept of long-term right of rejection, and at this point I start to have difficulties with the Bill. As I said, it does not lead me to believe that the Bill is wholly wrong, but I need to be persuaded that it is right, or that it is likely to have any effect with the guarantees scheme.

Do we want to go further than the Sale of Goods Act provides? That is a fundamental question. The Sale of Goods Act provides some remedies, but I shall deal with how difficult it is to enforce those remedies. Do we want to introduce more law along the lines of compulsory guarantees?

The Bill allows only one form of guarantee for goods in the schedule. One either has a schedule or one does not. If one has a guarantee, it is in the form stated in the Bill. In many respects, the Sale of Goods Act gives better rights than do guarantees. We know that most traders and retailers behave reasonably. If one buys something in Marks and Spencer, John Lewis, Sainsburys, or Tesco and it is no good, one can take it back. I have never had any difficulty getting something substituted. Obviously, there are problems, but most respectable retailers realise that it is in their interests to provide a good service. If, by accident, they happen to sell something shoddy, they will replace it. No doubt they go back to the manufacturer who supplied the item and say, "This does not work. We want another one." That works reasonably well.

The problem lies with a minority of traders, but it affects many consumers. It was identified by the Office of Fair Trading as long ago as 1986, and it is the nub of the problem. The Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Gordon Borrie, said:

"Guarantees offered by manufacturers and suppliers can be of great benefit to the consumer, but all too often they are used merely as a marketing ploy or as an additional source of income for the trader. Trading insolvency may leave the consumers with a worthless piece of paper and a guarantee may be used to divert consumers' attention away from their basic legal rights."

He seems to be saying that a guarantee is useful if a manufacturer or retailer honours it. The problem is that companies can go bust or refuse to honour guarantees, or make it difficult for consumers to enforce them. The Bill is unlikely to make any difference to the difficulty of enforcement by the consumer.

The recommendations of the Office of Fair Trading seem to call for a voluntary code of practice on guarantees rather than legislation. The Director General stated:

"I will not hesitate to use my powers under the Fair Trading Act and the Consumer Credit Act to take action against individuals or firms who refuse to honour guarantees or who offer guarantees which seriously mislead consumers. If manufacturers and traders do not bring about improvements voluntarily, I shall consider recommending legislation."

Sir Gordon obviously felt that the best way to deal with the problem would be by voluntary industrywide codes of practice. Some industries have particular problems, and cars are an obvious example. If motor traders were to form an organisation in which they promoted a guarantee which was particularly suitable to cars and, as an industry, police it and make sure that it was enforced, it would be a better system. It would be tailored to meet the needs of the car industry and consumers and would not be imposed by a legislative straitjacket.

In 1988, the National Consumer Council report reiterated some of those considerations and made clear the extent of the problem of many consumers. I was interested in page five of the report, which states:

"The Office of Fair Trading estimated that each year 38 per cent. of the adult population is dissatisfied with a purchase they make. This amounts to some 14 million people. A comparable survey by the OFT three years earlier put the figure at 28 per cent.

The OFT estimated . . . that nearly half of these people will not get the problem resolved.

This means that each year about six million consumers do not obtain redress for unsatisfactory goods. One part of the OFT data that is not questioned is that the dissatisfaction level for cars and household appliances far exceed the level from items purchased regularly, such as food, drink, fuels and toiletries."

[Mr. Maples]

From those data it is clear that the Bill, which many of my hon. Friends support, addresses a serious problem. There is no doubt that the information shows that consumers are getting a rough ride in some respects.

The problem, however, is not that the goods do not come with guarantees or that the fine print enables the manufacturer to slip out of its responsibilities, but that the retailer and the manufacturer do not honour their commitments or, as I often find with my constituents, that the shop from which they bought the goods has disappeared, or that the builder who gave them a roof guarantee for 20 years became insolvent and is now trading under another name next door.

This issue is the enforcement of consumer rights and it applies equally to consumer rights in common law. If the consumer found a mechanism that made it easier to enforce his legal rights under the Sale of Goods Act 1979, it would not be necessary for him to worry about enforcing guarantee obligations, too. The problem is that traders do not honour their guarantees. We need a simpler way of enforcing rights under the Sale of Goods Act, just as the Bill proposes that rights under the consumer guarantee should be enforceable in the small claims court. That provision is sensible. If there is to be a guarantee, let it be enforceable in the small claims court. Lawyers could not then run up huge bills and the consumer would be on an equal footing with the supplier and the manufacturer.

That provision could be extended to the remedies under the Sale of Goods Act, although I am aware of difficulties with the level of jurisdiction of the small claims court in the Courts and Legal Services Bill that is currently being considered in another place. I hope that when that Bill comes to Committee we can ensure that the limit is raised to a point that would cover most of the items in schedule 2 of this Bill, although whether it could cover the most expensive cars is debatable.

If enforcement were available in the small claims courts of those new and extended rights that the Bill will give to consumers under the Sale of Goods Act, is it necessary to go further and impose a fairly rigid guarantee? The manufacturer either has to offer this guarantee or no guarantee at all. Consumers will not necessarily gain some rights by being able to enforce the provisions of that guarantee rather than their rights under the Sale of Goods Act. I doubt whether a dishonest or disreputable trader is more likely to honour the consumer guarantee any more than he honours his present obligations under existing guarantees or the Sale of Goods Act.

I want to deal with a point made by the Minister in his reply to an Adjournment debate. After-sales service and guarantees of quality are proper subjects of competition between businesses and proper areas for the exercise of consumer choice. Consumer magazines write up products and say which product is better than another, which provides better after-sales service and which is more reliable. Those are items that consumers should be able to take into account when making their choice between different products. I have no doubt that those characteristics will often, although not always, be reflected in the price of a product. The nature of the guarantee and the reliability of its being honoured are important factors in competition.

If one manufacturer is prepared to offer a two-year guarantee while another will offer only a six-month guarantee, but the six-month guarantee costs £50 less than the two year guarantee, the consumer could choose between them. Extended guarantees cost manufacturers money. The consumer guarantee proposed in the Bill could, in some industries, add considerable costs. The consumer should have the right to choose between paying for the extended guarantee, knowing that he has that comfort, or paying a little less and taking the risk of having to pay for the repairs himself. I question whether it is right to introduce the law into that circumstance.

I am not convinced that there is no room for the law in this arrangement. I have a predilection or prejudice—which is mild at this stage—for allowing the consumer to choose. If there is no guarantee, the consumer can draw his own conclusion. It may be that the product has no guarantee but is well written up in consumer magazines. It may have a terrific reputation. Many of the consumer's friends may have bought it, and he would rather buy it without the guarantee.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend agree that the idea of having a choice of guarantees would be welcome, especially to those consumers who have been taken for a ride by the offer of guarantees by companies which have then gone out of business? Does my hon. Friend agree that if such extended guarantees were made more generally available, it would be useful to have legislation to ensure that they were independently insured?

Mr. Maples: That would be an attraction that a manufacturer could offer in his guarantee. If he were prepared to insure his guarantee, it would be an added guarantee of the product's liability. No doubt it would cost something to insure the guarantee, but again that should be a subject of consumer choice. The consumer should be able to choose whether to pay a little extra and have the insured guarantee. In certain circumstances, I would welcome that offer and choose it.

I have some difficulty about the guarantee scheme outlined in the Bill. It imposes a uniform guarantee—one either has this guarantee or no guarantee at all. It results from the National Consumer Council report. I have quoted the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister that, in the Government's view, it goes too far. In another debate, my hon. Friend said:

> "I agree that guarantees should state their terms clearly and in plain English and I could support legislation that would make such guarantees legally enforceable. I fully endorse the view that any guarantee must be additional to existing statutory protection.

But I do not accept that it is necessary to lay down detailed terms or procedures which would attach to specific products covered by consumer guarantees.

The Sale of Goods Act provides the consumer with a clear right of action against the supplier, who is normally a retailer. The NCC proposals would involve the manufacturer, who is not normally a party to the contract. —*[Official Report,* 14 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. 1302.] I do not want to go into that last point, but those comments sum up the case against such a scheme.

The objectives set out by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West and the NCC are not likely to be achieved by the Bill. The hon. Gentleman described his three objectives in a press release and later in an article:

> "(a) to give consumers a clear and simple indication of the quality and especially the reliability of products;

(b) to promote high standards of quality control; and
(c) to seek fuller competition."

I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman was unlikely to achieve any of those objectives through the Bill. It is unlikely to promote high standards of quality control. It certainly will not achieve greater competition—if anything, it is likely to achieve less, because all guarantees will be the same. It will give consumers a clear and simple indication of their rights, but not of the quality or reliability of products. The fact that a product has a consumer guarantee no more guarantees the product's reliability than do existing guarantees.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. I wanted to put him straight on one matter. The point is not that this guarantee will replace all other guarantees. That is arrant nonsense. It will give a minimum level of guarantee and replacement or refund provisions will be enshrined in law.

Mr. Maples: I understand that point. I certainly did not mean to give the impression that the guarantee in the Bill had some other effect.

The NCC's report describes one of the objectives slightly differently. It referred to the aim

"to provide consumers with a clear and simple indication of their rights of redress".

That is an objective to be welcomed—consumers should understand exactly what kind of guarantee they have and what their rights are. I would have no problem in supporting that objective.

The NCC goes on to argue that this will help to promote competition, but I have doubts about that. The Bill will not make it easier to enforce guarantees. Consumers cannot enforce their rights under the Sale of Goods Act or their guarantees legally, and the Bill will not make it easier to do so. The exact form of guarantee is where I begin to have difficulties with the hon. Gentleman's Bill. A guarantor would have to repair any defects in a product, free of charge, although the obligation would not arise if the defect had been caused by misuse of the product. That would apply regardless of the time that had elapsed. The guarantor must provide the consumer with the use of a comparable replacement product free of charge, or must reimburse the consumer for any expenses that he incurred as a consequence of losing the use of the product, if the guarantor does not repair it within four relevant days.

If in any 12-month period—however late in the 12 months—the product is unrepaired for more than 21 days, a full refund or replacement must be offered. All those remedies must be provided free of charge within 12 months of purchase.

Those obligations are likely to lead to increased costs and a diminution of consumer choice between different forms of guarantee and are unlikely to be suitable for every type of consumer product to which they are intended to apply. We would be imposing one scheme on all products.

One criticism is that we would create a long-term right of rejection that would apply even if the defect were only minor, which would effectively give consumers free use of goods until unsatisfactory repair work triggered the right to a refund. The Law Commission in its review recommended that there should be no long-term right of rejection, as it would be unfair to sellers and would entitle consumers to full refunds for used goods, thereby creating major commercial uncertainties with adverse effects on prices. I think that is fair and trenchant criticism.

Other criticisms are that the Bill would create practical, administrative and bureaucratic difficulties for businesses, which would have to keep a history of the goods that they have sold. It would be anti-competitive, which is a point that I have made. It reverses the burden of proof because, although the supplier or manufacturer is not obliged to repair defects that are not his fault, effectively the burden of proof is on his shoulders.

There would be practical difficulties with the provision of loan goods. Perhaps that would not occur with an Amstrad computer, a video recorder of a compact disc player but it would be extremely unreasonable to expect a supplier to keep a stock of expensive motor cars on hand as temporary loan replacements to unhappy consumers.

A couple of other criticisms have been made of the Bill, and I should be interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs has to say about them. One is the impact of the Bill on credit agreements, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) mentioned in his speech. The second is the EC implications of the measure, because many consumer protection requirements and regulations will have to apply throughout the EC. I understand that the Commission is considering the issue at the moment. I shall be interested to know whether this will make life difficult for us in the future.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My hon. Friend said that if we pass such a measure it may be regarded as being in restraint of intra-Community trade. Does he believe that we might be taken to the European Court and would that not be bad for Britain's reputation.

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend knows more about the activities of the European Commission than I do. I understand that that is the nub of the problem. I have no objection to Europeanwide standards of consumer protection, and health and safety protection, and we do not want to get out of line. That would give rise to the consequences that my hon. Friend suggested, and we should not let ourselves in for that lightly.

I welcome in clause 14 the introduction of the small claims courts procedure for dealing with claims under guarantees. I suggest to my hon. Friend that he should extend the small claims courts' jurisdiction to actions under the Sale of Goods Act 1979 by consumers for the type of goods set out in the schedule, although that may create difficulties in the case of expensive cars.

To sum up my argument, substantial remedies are already available under the Sale of Goods Act 1979. The amendments proposed to strengthen those remedies and the consumer guarantee proposed by the Bill do not add to them and they will certainly incur costs. I am not at all sure that those costs do not outweigh the benefits of the guarantee. I welcome the provisions covering labelling, clarity and the small claims enforcement procedure, but I am concerned about the competition and expense implications of imposing a guarantee straitjacket on all these goods.

The central problem concerning consumer rights is not so much the nature of the rights but the difficulty of enforcing them. If we could encourage voluntary, industrywide schemes that gained credibility with

[Mr. Maples]

consumers, and if we could extend the small claims procedure to the Sale of Goods Act, we should go a long way towards meeting the promoter's objectives. I am not at all sure that the consumer guarantee provisions meet their stated objectives. It is also possible that the costs and other implications outweigh the benefits.

12.45 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You were not in the Chair for the private notice question; Mr. Speaker was. Three quarters of an hour of the time that had been allocated to the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) was taken up by the private notice question. Mr. Speaker made a pointed reference to the fact that time had been lost, and appealed to all hon. Members to speak briefly. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) was entitled to speak, but he has spoken for over half an hour. Previous speakers made brief speeches since a number of my hon. Friends want to make a contribution to the debate——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I believe that Mr. Speaker appealed for brief speeches, since time was lost due to the private notice question at 11 o'clock. I hope that hon. Members will bear Mr. Speaker's appeal in mind.

12.46 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I shall be commendably brief. There has been a considerable consensus, and I know that all hon. Members are waiting to hear the response of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) and I thank him for his courtesy in inviting me to be one of the sponsors of his Bill, which has my fullest support. I hope that it will swiftly find its way on to the statute book.

The Minister has a reputation for being extremely robust when defending and promoting free trade. Normally I agree with him. I am therefore a little disappointed that, on the radio this morning, I heard him say that he does not consider that the Bill would promote competition and trade. I believe that it will. To take the Minister back a few months, he will remember his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. He will recall that he said that his duty—not a labour of love—was to seek to implement a miserable European directive that abolished the country of origin marking on goods. He most certainly did his duty formidably, as he always does, but I do not believe that his support for that measure was any greater than mine. His heart was not in it.

The Minister has an opportunity today to undo a little of the damage that was done on that occasion and to lend his support to a measure that will lead to the return of a little and much needed bit of consumer protection.

I speak unashamedly on behalf of my constituents in general and of two categories in particular—the first-time buyer, the home maker, and those who are about to retire. I have many of both categories of constituents. I am thinking in particular of the young married couple who are setting up home for the first time and buying their first washing machine, cooker, record player, video and car. I am also thinking of the last-time buyer—those who are trading down and moving to the home where they expect to end their days and who, perhaps for the last time in their lives, are buying new and quite expensive goods on very limited incomes: their last car, cooker and all the other items that I have mentioned. They are entitled to the best of everything when they buy new goods.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said that those people have rights, but they do not want the right to go to a solicitor or a small claims court. They do not want the right to have something repaired or to have a new car with a second-hand or replacement gearbox. They bought a new car. That is what they paid for and that is what they want. It is that simple.

I buy British whenever I can, and I do not believe that any British manufacturer has anything to fear from the Bill —far from it. I believe that the Bill will stimulate competition and increase confidence, especially in British goods. People will know that they are not buying second best from Italy or Taiwan but the best, which is made in Britain and which says so because it is guaranteed. If we put this measure on the statute book, we shall have given the consumer something that many consumers believe they already have and most certainly want. I hope that the Minister will find it in is heart to see the merit of that and to support it.

12.50 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I join two other hon. Members in apologising to the House for the fact that the British winter is having its usual effect on my voice.

With my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples), I am in a minority because I have considerable doubts about the Bill, although I welcome much of it. I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on introducing the Bill and on enabling us to highlight a number of areas of obvious public concern which carry a great deal of public support. In fairness to him, I should deal first with those aspects of the Bill with which I am a little unhappy.

When I started training in accountancy at the age of 16 as an articled clerk—what a pity it is that that phrase has now disappeared from the English language—one of the first principles of English law I learned was "caveat emptor"—let the buyer beware. However much we desire to protect the interests of the consumer, and however much we recognise that the consumer is so often fighting an unequal battle against the large corporation—the business that does not care because it is simply looking for market share and is not concerned about repeat orders —we must be very wary about inculcating into the consumer the idea that he need have no care, that, provided that he buys from a recognised manufacturer or retailer and provided that the packaging looks nice, he has no further duty to take care and consider his assets and his rights.

My first worry is that a basic guarantee as proposed by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West would mean nannying the consumer just a little too much. I would urge caution in setting up such a guarantee and relieving the consumer of the power and duty of perception.

Mr. Summerson: If someone were to buy a house, if he were prudent he would get a chartered surveyor to look at

the house. Obviously a house is a large object and can be looked at by an expert. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if a consumer goes out to buy a video, for example, he cannot really get an expert to look over the product and give him an assurance that it is good enough for his purposes?

Mr. Stern: I entirely accept that. I am not trying to state an absolute principle that only the seller needs protection: I am saying that we must avoid legislation that might persuade consumers that they can afford to be careless.

My second worry is that the Bill seeks to interfere in the basic right of a seller and purchaser to enter into a contract. We should be wary of interfering in that right. It is basic to the Bill that, when a consumer buys goods he obtains rights against not only the retailer but the manufacturer, which is not aware who is buying its product, under what conditions and when.

I should like to instance the recent Monopolies and Mergers Commission report into credit card trading. It was news to me that, for many years, the high street banks had been secretly interfering in every contract between myself and the retailer from which I purchased, by saying that under civil law it is illegal for the retailer to make a different charge for goods depending on whether I used a credit card, which cost the retailer more, or cash. I strongly reject the principle that the high street banks had any right to interfere in a private contract, and I am delighted that the Government have decided to remove that right.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is an established principle of English law, whether or not there is a contract between the manufacturer and ultimate user, that if, through negligence, a manufacturer produces goods that are so deficient and defective that they cause injury to the ultimate user, the manufacturer is liable? Should not a manufacturer, which knows how the goods are manufactured and has the technical knowledge to certify them, have a similar liability, whatever the chain of contract between it and the ultimate user?

Mr. Stern: I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point. I am not trying to deal in absolutes, but one must consider the principles on both sides. A manufacturer whose goods are designed to be sold in certain circumstances and conditions may find that a retailer is selling them under different circumstances and conditions, yet under the Bill the manufacturer would be at least in some danger of being liable.

My third worry is about the right of rejection, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West expressed some doubt. We are all aware of circumstances in which the right of rejection should apply. A constituent of mine, Mr. Ken Evans, has written to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones)—I shall refer to Mr. Evans later—about a car that he purchased. It was in such an appalling condition that any reasonable person would have said that it should be taken off the road straight away and should never be driven by anyone, let alone such a pertinacious gentleman as Mr. Evans.

Nevertheless, some consumers would use the right of rejection to obtain goods on free permanent loan. They would return to the retailer about every three months with a marginal defect which might have arisen from use or manufacture and in many cases obtain a new product because the retailer would have his reputation to consider. The long-term right of rejection has been questioned by the Law Commission, and many people have considerable doubts about it. For those reasons, I shall not support the Bill.

Let me deal briefly with the respects in which I believe the hon. Gentleman is entirely right—as witness the organisations and people who have attacked the Bill. I do not have a substantial motor manufacturer in my constituency but like anyone who has bought a lemon car at any time in his life, I can say that in principle any Bill attacked by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders must have something good about it.

The reasons that the society has given for opposing the Bill suggest that the Bill may be necessary. The society refers to the problem of minor defects and suggests that it does not believe that a minor defect such as an intermittent fault in an interior light should allow the consumer to claim a refund or replacement. Taken out of context, one cannot argue with that statement, but we have all either purchased, or know people who have purchased, motor vehicles in which there has been not one minor defect but a different minor defect every day.

There are brands of car, regrettably manufactured in this country, which one knew one was buying for style and performance but certainly not for reliability. One knew that, every time one took the car in for a service, one would have to list not just the requirements of the service but 27 other faults that had to be put right. I accept the implication in the Bill that even minor defects can build up to the extent where there should be a right of rejection.

The purchaser of a particularly complex item should have the right to say to the retailer, and ultimately to the manufacturer; "This product is so bad that you should take it back and study it to find out why it went wrong." On a smaller scale, the personal stereo that I usually carry with me when I travel went wrong and the manufacturer had more use out of it than I did in the first year of my ownership, although admittedly, the manufacturer has the reputation of never repairing a product in under six weeks.

The right of rejection and it importation into law is necessary. My worry is that we have not yet reached the stage of research into consumer law at which we can lay down the circumstances in which that right should and should not apply.

As the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders rightly pointed out, the option of replacement or refund in the Bill gives rise to particular problems, especially with new cars. Many newly introduced cars are available only to those on a waiting list. When such a car is purchased and found to be defective, it would be wholly unreasonable to give the consumer the right to demand its replacement with an identical car. The only practicable remedy available to the motor trader to give in those circumstances is the right of full refund because he cannot get a replacement anyway and, even if he could, several other people would be waiting for it.

We have already referred to the fact that the society has offered help to draw up another Bill. I hope that, if the Bill goes into Committee, an amendment will be made to take into account not just the views of the manufacturers of expensive consumer goods such as motor cars but the views of a broad spectrum of experience of individual consumers such as Mr. Evans, who wrote to the promoter of the Bill. Those views would help us to arrive at a decision on what rights should be legally enforceable under the guarantees.

[Mr. Stern]

The British Radio and Electronic Equipment Manufacturers Association has also attacked the Bill, for somewhat specious reasons. It has said that it is generally the dealer who provides the repair service to the public. I suspect that any dealer in electronic goods who saw such a statement would immediately sue the manufacturers for libel. As we all know, the people who repair electronic goods that have to be sent away to be repaired cloak themselves in anonymity because they know of their reputation with the public. The poor dealer is usually the idiot who bears the opprobrium of the public for delays in servicing and for unsatisfactory servicing, when he is merely acting as a post office and sending goods away to the usually inadequate servicing facilities which are laid on by the manufacturer.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West has received a detailed communication on the Bill from Mr. Evans, a constituent of mine. I should explain that Mr. Evans is indefatigable in his pursuit of the rights of the consumer, for reasons that are based at least in part on his own experiences. He has gained a reputation locally as a person who never gives up. Frankly, his experiences with a couple of motor cars that he purchased have convinced me that it is in every way right and proper for him to act in that way. I praise his pertinacity and wish that more consumers would show the same quality.

Mr. Evans has suggested—I believe that the suggestion has considerable merit—that, rather than proposing an enforceable guarantee which would be available to every consumer, we should examine the current powers and duties of trading standards officers, and should perhaps extend their statutory powers so that they would have the opportunity, the obligation and the resources to enable them to take up, on behalf of the consumer, the problems that the Bill is designed to redress.

If the hon. Member for Clywd, South-West were to pursue that line, it would be necessary to make the trading standards service a national rather than a county-based organisation, or perhaps a national organisation with county branches. It is possible that my constituent's proposal, which I commend for consideration at least, would enable us to avoid some of the undoubted legal problems which have been described this morning and which are implicit in the Bill. Mr. Evans's suggestion would also give rather more power to the consumer in arguments with large manufacturers.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Clywd, South-West on bringing this measure forward. I cannot support him, but I hope that there is a fair chance of the Bill going into Committee.

1.8 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is anxious to speak soon, so I shall restrict my comments to six or seven minutes, which will enable the House to come to a decision on the Bill.

We have heard much today about the Sale of Goods Act 1979. It is true that the Act looks rather frayed at the edges, although it has served the country well. I was pleased by the recommendation of the Law Commission that the phrase "merchantable quality" should be changed. When I was a law student, I always had grave difficulty in understanding what the phrase meant, but I was too shy to ask my teachers. If I was too shy, I fear that the public may be even more so, and may be confused. The phrase rings of the grand Victorian days when British goods sailed the world. Phrases such as "satisfactory quality" or "acceptable quality" would be much better.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Sale of Goods Act 1979 is looking a little frayed at the edges, I am sure that we can still address these problems of consumer protection. We are all consumers and we all want to protect consumers. I am not yet convinced that the complex problems cannot be addressed simply by amending the Sale of Goods Act. Although I shall not oppose the Bill's Second Reading, I am not sure whether it will solve all the problems.

From a legal point of view, the beauty of the Sale of Goods Act is that it is easily understood. The consumer understands that he has a right of rejection, but he must exercise that right within a reasonable time. That concept, albeit enshrined in statute law, goes back to common law times and is based on sound common sense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) made a fair point. He said that goods are much more complex in this modern era, so it may take some time for a defect to become apparent. Indeed, several defects might build up. In that case, is it fair to require a consumer to exercise his right of rejection within the reasonable time aspect of the Sale of Goods Act? That is one of the soundest legal points that I have heard today. I am not sure how that problem can be addressed in amending the 1979 Act, but I do not see why we should throw over the 1979 Act and adopt the proposals in this Bill.

As I said earlier, although the provisions in the Sale of Goods Act are easily understood by the public, nothing in the Act affects the right of the public to damages, and that is important. Similarly, nothing affects the rights of the consumer under various guarantees. The public must be aware that, if guarantees are given, they in no way remove rights under the Sale of Goods Act.

Self-regulation by manufacturers has achieved a great deal and many of the proposals in the Bill are already enshrined in codes or practices. I am not saying that it would not be useful to enshrine codes of practice in law, but we should not assume that much has not already been achieved.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs is worried about the long-term right of rejection, which is the fatal logical flaw in the Bill. I do not believe that my hon. Friend the Minister was right to say that the Bill would be unnecessarily bureaucratic and restrictive. I hope that he will refer to that later, because I believe that he is not on sure ground there. I have tried to explain as simply as I can that the Sale of Goods Act is so clear that the Consumer Guarantees Bill, if enacted, might confuse the public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West referred to minor defects—a point that was also made by the motor manufacturers. Perhaps we should not place too much credence on what the motor manufacturers say. However, perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can tell us what happens if a car's interior light does not work. Under the Bill, would someone have the right to reject the whole car? That may be a philosophical point, but it is of interest.

When my hon. Friend the Minister describes the Bill as unduly bureaucratic, perhaps he is thinking of guarantors needing to monitor repair histories of individual products

to protect their interests. Any trends towards liberalisation of servicing might be set back by that. That is a fair point, and I hope that the Minister will refer to it.

I promised that I would sit down before 1.15 pm, so I shall conclude by saying that I am extremely worried about the reversal of burden of proof. We lawyers take that extremely seriously in the criminal and civil courts. I am not entirely convinced that we should proceed as far as the Bill suggests. Although the guarantor is not obliged to repair defects that are not his fault, proving so is an onerous burden on him. This is particularly serious as such radical remedies create an incentive for potential consumers abuse.

I am not suggesting that the Bill is not courageous; nor am I suggesting that it was wrong to introduce it. I believe, however, that we must consider it carefully in Committee.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): I begin by joining in the congratulations that have been offered by hon. Members, including many of my hon. Friends, to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on achieving the number one position in the private Members' ballot. That is a much coveted position each year and it occupies an important place in the parliamentary calendar.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for taking the trouble to see me early on in his considerations of this matter and for the discussions that we had. I hope that he agrees that they were friendly and constructive and I hope that we made each other's position clear. I made it clear to the hon. Gentleman that were he to proceed to amend the Sale of Goods Act 1979 he would have Government support and help. I made it equally clear, however, that I had serious reservations about the guarantee proposals in the National Consumer Council report, and I told him that if he proceeded with those proposals, the Government would have to express their reservations.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend is giving us an interesting insight into his thought process. I congratulate him on the statesmanlike approach that he has adopted towards the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones). My hon. Friend made it clear that he would not object automatically to the proposed Bill.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

I have given the background to the Bill because I wanted to make two things clear. The first is that from the start I have been prepared to be as helpful and open as I can. I hope that my hon. Friends will agree that that was the right position to adopt. The second is that it would be equally fair to the hon. Gentleman, however, to make it clear to him that were he to proceed down a certain route the Government would, inevitably, have some reservations about his Bill.

Another factor that has permeated our proceedings today gives a clue to the strength of my reservations. Speaker after speaker, including the promoter of the Bill, the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), and my hon. Friends the Members for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) and for Newark (Mr. Alexander), said that they liked the Bill, but that it was seriously flawed. They said, "It does not do quite the right thing, but never mind, it can be amended in Committee." That is a worrying attitude to adopt when setting out to introduce legislation. It is especially worrying when a Bill has received such little detailed consideration at this stage of its proceedings that even its supporters admit that it will require considerable amendment in Committee.

The truth is that we have no means of knowing, even remotely, at this stage, in what form the Bill will emerge from Committee. Some people want to strengthen it and others want to include other bits and pieces. That is all understandable, but it makes the process unpredictable and that is not the ideal way in which to legislate.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, particularly as I have not participated directly in the debate, but I heard the speeches to which he referred. He did not characterise those speeches fairly when he said that those hon. Members said that the Bill was fundamentally flawed. Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), were calling for matters of detail to be considered in Committee, but they did not call into question the principle of the Bill.

Mr. Forth: Our examination of *Hansard* will demonstrate where the emphasis lies. The House may want to bear in mind the fact that many hon. Members who were ostensibly in support of the measure felt obliged to express reservations about it. That seems an odd way to embark upon legislation.

To set in context the Government's view of the Bill I shall quote, as I often like to do on these occasions, the Department of Trade and Industry White Paper published in January 1988 which remains our bible and guiding philosophy. We said of the Government's approach:

> "In consumer protection the policy emphasis will reflect the Government's view that the best form of protection comes from consumers making well informed choices and acting in their own interests. To achieve this, information can be more effective than regulations. However where the case is made out for regulation on safety or other grounds, the Government will not hesitate to act."

Recent history has demonstrated that that is true. It is the correct, responsible and balanced approach to the matter and it will guide us in our response to the Bill. A balance must be struck between what regulations can offer and what the market place can offer through the power of the consumer.

Several hon. Members referred to the Law Commissions' review of consumer protection. I shall do so in more detail because it will be of help to the House. Hon. Members who are lawyers, solicitors or barristers and are familiar with the legislation will realise that what the Law Commissions say is vital to our understanding of the Bill. That has been said, before, but I wish to make sure that the House is aware of it.

In 1987 the Law Commission and the Scottish Law Commission completed a review of certain aspects of the law governing the sale and supply of goods. They examined the present statutory provisions for implied terms in contracts for sale, the remedies for breach of those terms and the present rules governing the loss of right to reject non-comforming goods. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) referred to that a moment ago. One can imagine the depth and thoroughness with which they examined the subject if I tell hon. Members that the deliberations were under way for some eight years, before publication of a comprehensive report which runs to over 100 pages. The list of people

[Mr. Forth]

and organisations who submitted comments on the Commissions' working paper runs to over 100 entries and covers, among others, representatives of industry and commerce, manufacturers, retailers, finance houses, consumer bodies and lawyers. That gave rise to the Law Commissions' recommendations which were published in May 1987.

The main change that was recommended, to which several Members referred, was to replace the present implied term "merchantable quality"—the phrase which gave my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle such trouble when he was studying law—with an up-to-date term that recognises the aspects of quality that are important for consumers as end users of the goods in question. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West emphasised that.

The amended Act would state explicitly that the relevant aspects in determining acceptable or—this would probably be preferable—satisfactory quality include fitness for purpose, the appearance and finish of the goods, their freedom from minor as well as major defects and their safety and durability.

The Law Commissions also considered the present rules governing acceptance and rejection. However, they proposed that no change be made to the customer's right to reject non-conforming goods. I have no doubt that they gave very careful consideration to all the arguments surrounding this issue. Their report comments that this issue attracted considerable comment during consultation and that their conclusion was generally—although not universally—supported. They recommended—this is crucial to the debate—against creating a long-term right of rejection. They considered that such a right would create major commercial uncertainties and would be extremely unfair to sellers.

The Law Commissions also recommended several other minor changes to the Sale of Goods Act 1979. I shall not mention them all today, but I draw particular attention to their recommendation for extension of some of the provisions of the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982 to Scotland. The situation has never been completely clear regarding the rights of consumers in Scotland when goods are hired, acquired as part of a trade-in, or received as a commercial gift. This extension would make it absolutely clear that consumers in Scotland who receive faulty goods in such circumstances would have exactly the same rights as though it had been a cash sale. As such, the proposed reform has the full backing of the Scottish Consumer Council.

The Government have announced their support for the Law Commissions' recommendations and their intention to introduce legislation to implement the recommendations, subject to some minor clarifying amendments. The amended Act will set a high standard for the quality which the consumer is entitled to expect, and will clarify and strengthen consumers' rights. These provisions are reflected in part V of the Bill and I thank the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West for that because it is a major step forward.

The subject of guarantees forms the bulk of the hon. Gentleman's Bill, which is probably one of the most substantial private Member's Bills to have been laid before the House for some time. That fact must also give us cause to wonder how it would fare in Committee because difficulties always arise when the House sets out to consider a Bill of substance and complexity in a private Member's Bill Committee. That is another source of my reservations. Nevertheless, the subject of guarantees has been scrutinised considerably over the years by the Office of Fair Trading and recently by the National Consumer Council, whose report gave rise to the Bill.

I turn now to a detailed consideration of the proposed legislation, especially in relation to guarantees, on which the bulk of the debate has concentrated. There is much common ground among all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate about the sale of goods part of the Bill, so I need not dwell on it at any length. However, it is right to consider the guarantee provisions in detail.

The Bill seeks to create the provison in law for a consumer guarantee. The essence of the proposed approach, as we see it, is to provide additional remedies against the guarantor, which would be enforceable in law. The measure would provide for rights to free repair of all defects and in some circumstances to refunds or replacements. The remedies would be against the manufacturer rather than the retailer, as under the Sale of Goods Act 1979. The Bill sets out a list of minimum terms —a prescription in fact—for a consumer guarantee. Although the offer of the guarantee would not be mandatory, consumer durables within certain categories would be required to carry a prominent indication of whether they are covered by a consumer guarantee. That might create some burdens and difficulties that have not been fully anticipated.

The supporters of the Bill have argued that it will strengthen consumers' protection against shoddy goods, that when disputes arise it will clarify the position to the benefit of both consumers and suppliers, that it will lead to improved quality control—a point stressed by the promoter of the Bill—and that it will stimulate competition between manufacturers on quality grounds. Of course, I support the objectives of such a proposal and share anyone's commitment to transparency of information for consumers, to improved product quality, and to free and full competition between producers. Few—and certainly not I—would argue with those objectives.

Nor would I dispute that guarantees are a subject that might merit further examination. It has been argued that the law is at present unclear about the exact status of a guarantee and whether it confers rights that are enforceable in law. The report published by the Office of Fair Trading in 1986 draws attention to a number of other practical aspects of the operation and enforcement of guarantees offered to consumers, which merit further consideration in the light of developments even since the publication of that report.

That much is common ground. I have indicated throughout to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West that I believe that the whole area of guarantees merits further examination. We differ on whether either the National Consumer Council report or the Bill is the correct way to proceed and that is a legitimate area of difference between us. For that reason, I am sceptical about the proposed approach for consumer guarantees. I doubt whether the Bill will provide the benefits that its advocates and supporters have put before us. It is easy to be attracted to it because it sounds good. Reference has already been made to the MORI poll in which people were,

in essence, asked, "Do you approve of motherhood and apple pie, if not of guarantees?" Surprise, surprise—a lot of people said, "Yes, we do."

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Has the Minister no heart?

Mr. Forth: For the benefit of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), I think that I implied, if not said, that I rather approve of motherhood.

The thought occurred to me that if we are to determine policy based on opinion poll surveys, and Opposition Members are saying, that there is such enormous support for consumer guarantees, they would presumably agree that we should reintroduce capital punishment on exactly the same basis. If I can produce a MORI opinion poll that demonstrates overwhelming support for the reintroduction of capital punishment, to be logical and consistent, Opposition Members should say that we should legislate accordingly. I do not see any takers.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend the Minister referred to opinion polls. Obviously, in opinion polls, someone must answer yes or no. They often say yes, but they do not feel particularly strongly about the issue. How many people have written to my hon. Friend the Minister asking him to support the Bill? That would give an indication of positive support for it.

Mr. Forth: I do not have an exact number for my hon. Friend.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Oh!

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman should not get too excited. Let him contain himself. If I have time, I will give my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, (Mr. Marshall) some details of those who have said that they have reservations about the measure. Many claims have been made about it. My hon. Friend put his finger on an important point. It is easy to ask, "Do you think that better guarantees are a good idea?" Most people will say yes. The best way to ask the question is, "Do you believe that measures of this kind will be desirable, given the effects that they may have on increased prices, for example? The next question should be, "Would you be prepared to balance possible benefits of the extension of guarantees against a probable increase in prices?"

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The Minister's discourse is extremely interesting, but it is quite time-wasting. Will he refer to the intrinsic matters of the Bill rather than the merits or otherwise of public opinion polls?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) must not tempt me. He drifted into the Chamber a few minutes ago, is obviously anxious to get away, and has tried to suggest that I should skip quickly over the arguments on this important measure.

Mr. Rogers: Discuss the arguments.

Mr. Forth: I ask the hon. Gentleman to stop interrupting from a sedentary position. I am anxious to get on to the arguments.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned questions that may not be covered in a simple opinion poll. One matter which is germane to our discussion is that, under the United Kingdom approach, only parties to a contract may enforce it. If, under the Bill, a consumer is allowed to enforce a contract against a manufacturer with whom he may not have a direct contractual relationship, it could lead to complex disputes involving, perhaps, finance houses, retailers, manufacturers and consumers. That problem is not addressed in simple opinion polls.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I had hoped to refer to that matter in a moment, but my hon. Friend has already done it for me, and much more elegantly.

Mr. Alan Williams: The Minister is mounting a substantial part of his case upon a fictitious opinion poll that asked whether people are in favour of guarantees. He is now enjoying himself deriding that opinion poll, but that is not what was asked. What he has been saying until now is irrelevant. The NCC report referred to questions about the need for information on reliability and durability of certain products. The term "life expectancy" was used. There were questions about assessment of the way in which that information is currently provided. That is very different from the simplistic opinion poll that the Minister has just demolished. Perhaps he will now address the Bill.

Mr. Forth: I am anxious to continue with that—perhaps now I will be given the chance.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): When I used to be a civil servant and a private secretary to a Minister, it was usual for Ministers, when they commented on documents, opinion poll surveys and information provided by the National Consumer Council or the Consumers Association, to read the information and then to give informed comment to the House instead of filibustering at the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman observes that in my hand I have the MORI opinion poll referred to by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams). It has been at my side throughout the debate. I have refreshed my memory of its contents at times during the debate and feel entitled to comment on it. If the hon. Gentleman would like a copy, I should be happy to let him have one after the debate, whenever that may be. I am being hampered in making progress by Opposition Members who seem determined to slow the pace of the debate. I cannot understand why they should do so, but no doubt the reason will emerge at some stage.

I shall now deal with the points of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, to which I have not yet been able to respond. His comments went to the heart of the matter. One danger of the Bill is that it might interfere with the delicate relationship between consumers, manufacturers, retailers and the providers of finance—a point made ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) who, due to indisposition, has offered his apologies for leaving the debate. He made some telling points to which I shall return if I am given the opportunity, about the relationship between the financial institutions—through hire purchase and leasing—and consumers. That point is crucial. My hon. Friend suggested that it may be a fundamental flaw in the Bill, and I am inclined to agree. That may not be resolved adequately in Committee. I am worried at the glib assertions that if only we give the Bill a Second Reading, we can resolve everything in Committee. That is not the correct way to proceed in this case.

[Mr. Forth]

The core of the matter—in addition to what I have just said—is the long-term right to reject. That has been considered carefully by the Law Commissions and, after much serious consideration, they set it aside. The consumer guarantee within the Bill, including a compulsory provision for the remedy of refund or replacement at the election of the buyer, would create a long-term right of rejection that would apply even if the defect that triggered the remedy was only a minor one. The attempts to meet the inherent problems in this long-term refund or replacement remedy give rise to many of the complexities in the Bill and the burdens to which I referred before this debate, which a number of hon. Members have queried today.

I remind all hon. Members that the Law Commissions gave the matter careful consideration but rejected the long-term right of rejection in the context of sale of goods legislation. They argued that such a right would create major commercial uncertainties and would be unfair to sellers. Consumers who bought a defective product would, in effect, get free use of the goods until the defect appeared.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) mentioned that point, although it was not picked up by anyone else. One of the possible effects of a Bill of this type, paradoxically, would be the possibility of consumers abusing the Act, if it became law, frivolously for mischievously to seek replacement of goods. That raises the important point——

Mr. Alan Williams: I have never heard anything so preposterous in my life. The Minister, whose post is a substitute for the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection which we had under the Labour Administration, is not at all worried about consumers. Consumers are thought to be the evil people in the market place and it is the poor innocent producers who need protection. The hon. Gentleman should go out into the real world.

Mr. Forth: That is pretty rich, coming from a member of the party that argued—and may, for all I know, still argue—for public ownership, nationalised industries and inherent monopolies. Of course, a Labour Government had to set up a Department to counteract the effects of the very monopolies that they had created. This Government do not have that sort of problem. We have the market place and competition, which will do the job extremely well.

The point that seems to have escaped all Labour Members is that we must seek a balance. No one wants to alter unduly the delicate balance in the law between consumers and suppliers and the intermediaries in the market place. One of the great risks is that this measure may do just that.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend said that there are members of the public who are determined to take advantage if they are given a chance. I would have been able to say that in my speech because I was involved in running a retail business before becoming a Member. As the Opposition are keen to waste so much time, I guess that I will be unable to make my speech. I should reassure my hon. Friend that some members of the public will take advantage of every opportunity. I know that for the simple reason that, over 17 years, I have had to help my wife serve such people—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Noise from sedentary positions does not help our proceedings. I hope that there will be less of it.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) has reinforced, from his knowledge and experience, a point that has been made before. All hon. Members would do well to pay attention to this fact. We have heard from our legal experts and we have just heard from an hon. Member who has direct experience in the market place in the retail sector. His views, should therefore, be heard carefully. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne has the time to make a brief contribution. I shall try to ensure that that happens if I can press on.

The Law Commissions considered the long-term right of rejection against sellers. I believe that the arguments are even more persuasive in the context of the buyer-manufacturer relationship. Provision for compulsory refund and replacement remedies would be grossly unfair to manufacturers because they would be obliged to refund the purchase price in full—not just the cost price to the manufacturer, but the price that the consumer paid when buying the goods from a retailer, who in this case is a third party over whose pricing policy the manufacturer has no control.

If the goods are bought under a finance agreement, the situation becomes even more unclear and potentially more unfair. The guarantor may be obliged at the customer's election to refund not just the full purchase price but any further sums outstanding on the credit agreement. The House should bear in mind that the guarantor is not necessarily party to that agreement and can exercise no control over the terms agreed. The guarantor who issued a consumer guarantee would, in effect, come close to writing a blank cheque in favour of the consumer. That is in itself reason enough for us to have serious reservations about the Bill.

Mr. Maclennan: The Minister makes it sound as though the manufacturer is obliged by the Bill to do something. The Bill makes no such provision. It allows manufacturers to decide whether to subscribe to a scheme. It is similar to the John Lewis Partnership saying that if a customer finds a cheaper product, it will reduce the price of its product accordingly. No one forces John Lewis to do that; it does it to boost its position in the market place. This reinforces the free market, of which the Minister pretends to be in favour.

Mr. Forth: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman's last comment. My support for the free market is certainly not pretence—it is wholehearted and real. I am simply trying to remain somewhat consistent.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) has put his finger on an interesting point; it is entirely up to those operating in the market place—whether retailers or manufacturers—voluntarily to introduce what measures they believe will make their products more attractive to the consumer.

What worries me is that if we overburden the guarantee with complexities and costs, as I believe we are doing in the Bill, we could end up dissuading manufacturers and

retailers from providing the guaranteed cover that everyone must believe is a good idea. That is one of the great drawbacks of the Bill.

Another problem is the dilemma created by a full refund for used goods. It is proposed that, under some circumstances, the right to full refunds or replacement could expire and may instead be subject to an allowance for use. The formula proposed for determining when that right expires is not particularly straightforward and differs for different products. I mentioned earlier the Law Commissions' reports, which highlighted some of the pitfalls of this approach. It is also likely to lead to uncertainty for consumers and may leave the consumer vulnerable in some circumstances.

I shall be as quick as I can because I realise that the passage of time may create some problems later.

A number of contributors have asked me what comments I have received about the legislation. I have received many. I will quote some of them so that the House can get a flavour, and know what the experts on the subject have said.

The Confederation of British Industry has described the proposals as "unnecessary and unworkable". The Finance Houses Association asked some serious questions about refund and replacement in the context of financed purchases—my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) spoke expertly on that subject during the early part of the debate. The Law Society said that it does not agree with the proposals set out in the consultation paper, and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, quoted by one of my hon. Friends as being in favour of the measure, on reflection said that the Bill revealed a misunderstanding about how the motor industry operates.

During a visit to the United States last year I had extensive discussions with those involved in the American legislation and I found the extent to which the law has sought to intervene in the relationship between consumers and suppliers rather alarming. I have always thought it odd that so many hon. Members, in particular Opposition Members, should seek to import extensive elements of United States law. I yield to few in my admiration of the United States, but I have always thought that an attempt to introduce their rather litigious approach would hardly benefit British consumers—although it might benefit our lawyers. That is another major source of my reservations about the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: Has my hon. Friend received any representation from the European Commission? To what extent do the proposals in the Bill, given that they are burdensome on importers and manufacturers, run contrary to article 30 of the treaty of Rome? This is a serious problem that could snaffle the Bill before it becomes law.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I was going to come to that later, but I shall try to deal with it now. There is at least a danger that the type of measure contained in the Bill could get us into some difficulties with the European Commission and the European Community. We must bear that factor in mind. My hon. Friend and I may not be enthusiastic about that aspect of our legislation, but it is nevertheless a fact. We have to bear the requirements of the European Community in mind.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister has answered a rather silly remark by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). How will the Bill be affected by European legislation or vice versa?

Mr. Sedgemore *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have interventions during interventions.

Mr. Forth: Perhaps if I say a few words, that will allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene. Does he wish to intervene now? He shakes his head. I am glad because we want to make progress. I have found that more difficult than I anticipated, but the House is always capable of surprising us. May I give just a few more examples?

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: No, I must resist giving way to my hon. Friend on this occasion.

Mr. Leigh: It bears directly on this point.

Mr. Forth: If my hon. Friend insists, I shall give way to him.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend may not have heard the sedentary intervention by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) about voluntary arrangements. We are talking about compulsory labelling.

Hon. Members: No, we are not.

Mr. Forth: We should avoid getting bogged down dealing with matters that would take up an excessive amount of time, even in Standing Committee, were the Bill to receive a Second Reading.

The exchanges illustrate my earlier point: that the Standing Committee proceedings on a measure such as this—a long and complex measure for which Standing Committees on private Member's Bills are not entirely suited—would lead to even greater problems that might be very difficult to resolve. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle for having highlighted the point. Opposition Members have highlighted it, too.

The Consumers Association, no less, said that it would support the proposals, but without any great enthusiasm. The association's approach focuses on the Sale of Goods Act rights for buyers. We hope that those rights will be extended and not confined to buyers. One would have thought that the Consumers Association's support for such a measure would be unrestrained, but it has expressed considerable reservations about it.

Representations have been made to me by many other bodies, including the Norwich and Norfolk chamber of commerce. It says that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages of the proposals. There have been many other representations of that kind, but I shall not weary the House with them. However, I hope that I have given sufficient of the flavour of the representations to suggest that those who are knowledgeable about such matters have serious reservations about the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) dealt with the notorious Bernstein case in detail. Mr. Bernstein's car broke down with an engine seizure after about 140 miles and three weeks on the road. It is worth considering the case a little more closely, for reasons to which I shall come in a moment. The outcome of the case

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was that the engine was repaired without charge. The judge found that Mr. Bernstein was also entitled to damages for the cost of the petrol, five days without a car and something to make up for his spoilt day out—a total of £237·50. That was not what Mr. Bernstein wanted. He wanted to reject the car and get his money back. I have looked carefully at the proposed terms of the consumer guarantee in the Bill, but I think that it is unlikely that it would have left Mr. Bernstein any better off. The proposed consumer guarantee would have entitled Mr. Bernstein to free repair of the engine and to compensation, or to a replacement on loan while his car was under repair. It is interesting that one of the most notorious cases that has so often been quoted in recent years would not, under the terms of the Bill, be much altered and there would not be a great improvement in Mr. Bernstein's compensation.

Mr. Gale: Is not the fundamental difference that under the Bill Mr. Bernstein would not have had to go to court to obtain redress?

Mr. Forth: The provisions of the Bill attempt to make matters much easier, but there are doubts as to whether it would. During his recent Adjournment debate, and again today, my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter), proposed a new body to deal with these matters. He said that the present arrangement was overbureaucratic and that his new body would remedy that defect. It is risky to set up a new bureaucracy to overcome the problems of an existing bureaucracy. My hon. Friend has a strong desire to help consumers, but I doubt whether his proposals would necessarily have that effect.

In view of the time, I must bring my remarks to a premature end although I had much more to say. I believe that the Bill contains many good elements and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West for introducing it. But it also has serious difficulties and flaws. I am not convinced that if the Bill were given a Second Reading it would necessarily emerge from Standing Committee in sufficiently good order for the House to want to support it.

Mr. Alan Williams: That is for the House to decide.

Mr. Forth: As the right hon. Gentleman says, that is for the House to determine and it always has that opportunity. I regret that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West was not more modest or less ambitious in his aims. He has introduced a complicated and ambitious Bill that contains many provisions and, as I and many of my hon. Friends have pointed out, many difficulties. Therefore I hope that the House will consider those matters carefully in deciding how or whether to proceed with the Bill. The National Consumer Council has laboured long and hard on the matter and has produced comprehensive proposals, but I do not know whether it carried out the detailed consultation work that the Department of Trade and Industry always undertakes to establish the feasibility or workability of a Bill.

For all those reasons, I urge hon. Members to give the most careful consideration to the Bill before they decide how they will vote.

1.56 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I first pay tribute to the National Consumer Council for producing the Bill and for the valuable information and proposals that it contains. I pay tribute also to my hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South-West (Mr. Jones), who has done so much work on the Bill and has done so much to gather support for it. It is sponsored by four Labour Members, six Conservative Members and two Alliance Members, and we are extremely pleased about that. There have been many speeches in support of it, including that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), a distinguished former Minister and champion of consumer rights. The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) articulated the views of most hon. Members when he said,

"Rarely has a Bill been more timely."

The Bill is necessary to give the buying public a clear indication that the goods they buy are backed by genuine guarantees. It comes in the wake of current legislation which has failed to offer comprehensive protection to the public. Currently, many warranties cover parts but not labour, or labour but not call-out charges. They cover some parts for three months and other parts for six months and fail to cover key machinery which is subject to normal wear and tear.

The Bill provides for a 12-month statutory money-back guarantee on a wide range of expensive goods. It ensures a refund or replacement for faulty goods which are out of commission for 21 days in the first year and it guarantees the replacement of products which are out of action for four days consecutively or two in the case of cars, so that buyers are not inconvenienced as they are at the moment. Because it is voluntary and not manatory, as the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) stressed, it cannot be accused of placing burdens on business.

The Minister has given us details of his objections, which are mainly ideological. For him, the producer, not the consumer, is king. He outlined his solution, which lies in consumer choice in the market place, but he then moved on with undue haste to talk about the Law Commission.

The Minister was much more loquacious when talking to the *Daily Telegraph* about how consumers can exercise their rights. He said:

"If consumers don't like what they are getting from . . . one shop, they need only change their buying habits."

Perhaps the Minister moves in circles where people can easily change their buying habits—a washing machine a week, a television a month or a car every three months —but for ordinary members of the public the failure of a cooker or washing machine all too often brings misery as they fight but fail to get satisfaction. Last year, there were 14 million such people.

On Monday, in an answer to a parliamentary question, the Minister refused to list the groups that support or oppose the principle of the Bill. I have a list of companies that support it, from which I have drawn some examples —Hotpoint, Argos, the Retail Consortium and Volvo. The best companies offer no-questions-asked guarantees; Marks and Spencer was founded on that principle, yet the Minister calls it unworkable.

The architect of opposition to the Bill is not the Confederation of British Industry or the retail community but the Minister. A former Tory Member of Parliament wrote in *The Times* of the Minister's appointment:

"His appointment as Consumer Protection Minister is some kind of joke."

The Minister has been closely associated with a small but influential group of Conservative Members called "No Turning Back". His message to the consumer is simply, "No handing back."

To articulate his opposition, the Minister feels for his phrase book. It contains only one phrase, but it is his favourite—placing burdens on the business community. In his interview with the *Daily Telegraph* he embellished that phrase by saying that the Bill

"would place an absurd burden on the business community."

The CBI says that it would prefer an amendment to the Sales of Goods Act 1979. The Consumer Association says that it will not oppose the Bill. Consumers and most hon. Members support it, and we have the opportunity to ensure that it is given a Second Reading.

Mr. Ron Davies *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:

The House divided: Ayes 108, Noes nil.

Division No. 52] **[2.2 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Emery, Sir Peter
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Gale, Roger
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gould, Bryan
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Leadbitter, Ted
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Michael, Alun
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Turner, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ron Davies and
Dr. John Marek.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Marshall and
Mr. David Wilshire.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Licensing (Low Alcohol Drinks) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.12 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now Read a Second time.

The Bill is neither as complicated nor as controversial as the Consumer Guarantees Bill. It is with great pleasure, therefore, that I recommend it to the House. I want to describe briefly the proposals in the Bill and I shall refer to the reasons for promoting it. For the first time, the Bill defines for England, Scotland and Wales the same amount of alcohol—0·5 per cent.—that must be in a drink for it to be legally sold in unlicensed premises. That is a reduction from the existing amount of 1·2 per cent. in volume of alcohol.

The Bill also ensures that testing, if it is to be carried out, should be done at the time of consumption or of supply, rather than, as was previously the case, at any time during the manufacture of the drink. Many people are trying to produce low alcohol beers or non-alcoholic beers and wines. Those drinks are produced in the normal way and alcohol is extracted after production. Because such drinks once had an alcoholic content, if they were sold in a non-licensed premises, the seller could be taken to court. According to the Bill, an offence would be committed at the point of supply if the alcoholic content is above 0·5 per cent.

I am delighted to say that the right hon. Member for Morely and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) a former Home Secretary, the deputy leader of the Liberal party and my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), the Father of the House, all support the Bill. Also, because the Bill applies to Scotland, it is supported by a number of Scottish Socialist Members.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): That is a dodgy crowd.

Sir Peter Emery: Well, some of them are friends of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I do not know whether his friends are dodgy, but that is another matter.

I believe that the Bill has Government support. I received a copy of a letter today from Sir Donald Maitland and the Health Education Authority, which states:

"At a meeting this afternoon of representatives of the Health Education Authority, Alcohol Concern, the Brewers Society and the Wine and Spirits Association, we agreed to urge you to do all you can to ensure that Parliamentary time is made available to ensure the passage of Sir Peter Emery's Private Member's Bill on the Sale of Low and No Alcohol in Unlicensed Premises.

I am informing Sir Peter separately of the Group's support for his measure."

That letter was sent yesterday to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and I have permission to refer to it today.

Mr. Skinner: Will such drinks be sold in the Strangers' Bar?

Sir Peter Emery: It is possible that some objections to the Bill might be made by those who would have liked to see the alcoholic level at 0·05 per cent. and not 0·5 per cent. In response to the hon. Member for Bolsover some of those drinks are sold in the Strangers' Bar—although not many perhaps.

There is general agreement among the manufacturers that they are willing to accept the level of 0·5 per cent. As far as I understand, no formal objections have been made to the Bill and the Government have no desire to amend it. Of course, to stop the Bill entering Committee, objections might be raised by hon. Members who have private Member's Bills that they want to see make progress. Otherwise, if my Bill takes some time in Committee, their Bills may be affected.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Why has the hon. Gentleman not proposed 0·05 per cent. for beers while leaving 0·5 per cent. for shandies and wines? Technology is developing at the moment and beers with a very alcohol content such 0·05 per cent. can be produced and have good flavour. Why has the hon. Gentleman not suggested the lower figure for beers while leaving 0·5 per cent. for other drinks? We could then offer the public almost non-alcoholic drinks if that is what they want.

Sir Peter Emery: That is a fair question and I am delighted to answer it. One particular manufacturer has the techniques necessary to produce beer with a 0·05 per cent. alcohol content and it has advocated the same argument as that put by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall).

The manufacturer argued that the supply of such beer is beneficial in certain instances, for example, when someone's blood-alcohol level stands at 79mg. That person is close to the 80mg level and that 1mg increase of alcohol in the bloodstream could be brought about by the purchase of a 0·5 per cent alcoholic beer.

We are not trying to legislate, however, for the person who is nearly over the limit as regards drink-driving. We are trying to ensure that shandy producers—at the moment such drinks have a 0·9 per cent. alcoholic content —reduce the alcohol content to 0·5 per cent. We want to ensure that there is general agreement in the industry in favour of a 0·5 per cent. level.

From medical evidence I gather that there is a residual amount of alcohol in the blood, but we want to ensure that the 0·5 per cent. alcoholic content beer will do next to nothing to increase the blood-alcohol content when ordinary people have had a drink.

Mr. Randall: I do not want to make demands on the hon. Gentleman's time, but when seeking to introduce such legislation, surely we should take all factors into account. A person who has been at the pub all evening and who feels that he is near the limit could purchase a beer with a 0·5 per cent. alcoholic content and discover that he is then over the legal limit. If that person could purchase a drink with an alcoholic content of 0·05 per cent., he could drink it confidently in the knowledge that it would not increase the alcohol in his blood. Surely we should take that into account.

Sir Peter Emery: One would have to know that one had reached the level of 79mg of alcohol in the blood to appreciate that a 0·5 per cent. alcoholic beer could be of harm. I do not know how many people who enjoy a jovial drink know the exact level of alcohol in their blood at a given time. I do not want to encourage people to go over the limit and to drive. Therefore, I do not want to encourage people who are near the limit to continue drinking. Nobody knows how near he is to the alcohol limit which prevents him from driving. I would rather

encourage people not to drink and drive than to drink almost to the legal limit and then to top up their alcoholic intake with low alcohol drinks.

The general feeling is that a beer with an alcoholic content of 0·5 per cent. will affect only those closest to the limit. There is no reason, however, to encourage people to drink to that limit in the belief that they will then get away with drink-driving. My arguments are based on a desire to reach general agreement because any private Member's Bill needs such general agreement, especially if one is 16th in the queue.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The Bill has my wholehearted support. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital to obtain a fixed figure of alcohol content, irrespective of what it might be? Then at least one will know where one stands when one buys drinks. At the moment, one can intend to drink no alcohol, but if one buys the wrong product, one can end up drinking a great deal more than one thinks.

Sir Peter Emery: That is true of anyone who intends to drive. What my hon. Friend says is of great importance where it affects people who may decide to drive.

The Bill attempts to clarify the position and to make sure that those who buy drinks at non-licensed premises can be absolutely certain of the alcohol content of drinks, whether shandy or any other product. It will bring about standardisation for the first time.

I am sorry that the Bill does not apply to Northern Ireland. I considered including the Province, but I gather that the licensing laws in Northern Ireland are so complicated that I should have had to add another three pages to my Bill. I apologise to Northern Irish Members that I have not included them.

Mr. Skinner: What about cider?

Sir Peter Emery: That is above the level and people will enjoy it if they drink it.

Mr. Wilshire: I am aware of the time, but before my hon. Friend moves on from what the Bill excludes, may I ask him whether he gave any thought to excluding high alcohol beverages? The variation in such drinks is equally alarming. A drink that is called strong can be 6, 7, 8 or 9 per cent. The effects of that can be quite devastating, too.

Sir Peter Emery: I had enough trouble dealing with low alcohol drinks. To deal with high alcohol drinks is up to the individual.

Consideration of the issue was based on several premises. The first was the short-term intoxicating effect of alcohol. The eventual blood-alcohol level depends on many factors, but the maximum acceptable level in a young person was taken to be 20mg per 100mg. It was taken to be a reasonable assumption that the majority of young people would not drink more than an average of two pints in one hour, six pints in three hours, or eight pints in four hours. On that basis, the maximum strength of an alcoholic beverage that might be made freely available was taken to be that which would allow a typical young person to consume a reasonable quantity of the drink without exceeding a blood-alcohol level of 20mg, which is a quarter of the level which would put a person over the limit to drive.

Mr. Skinner: I came here thinking that the hon. Gentleman had introduced a Bill to control levels of alcohol. The more that I listen to him, the more that he seems to talk about the breathalyser limit. He makes his Bill sound like a beat-the-breathalyser measure. What is the Bill about? Is it about controlling the level of alcohol or about encouraging people to go close to the breathalyser limit? Once people have reached that level, does the Bill say, "Have a few of these and you will be all right."? That seems a bit dodgy to me.

Sir Peter Emery: I am sorry that I have been so imprecise. The only time that I talked about the breathalyser was in answer to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West. The Bill has nothing to do with the breathalyser level. I wish to make certain that no one suggests that it does. That would be a great mistake because the Bill has nothing to do with encouraging people to reach that level.

I was saying that my Bill does nothing to increase, even to a quarter of the breathalyser level of 80mg per 100mg, the level that can be reached by drinking low alcohol beverages. The aim of the Bill is to standardise the position and to ensure that everyone clearly understands it. For the first time, the Bill makes it clear that the offence is at the point of sale or supply, rather than during production. It is as simple as that.

I believe that the vast majority of the British people and hon. Members support the Bill. I hope that this simple Bill will receive the full support of the House. It is generally believed that young people should be able to go to a grocery store and buy drinks in the knowledge that they are of an alcoholic level that will not affect them. The Bill will ensure, for the first time, that that can be brought about. Therefore, I hope that I shall have the support of all hon. Members in obtaining a Second Reading for my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Private Members' Bills

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Shall I move my Registration of Commercial Lobbying Interests Bill now, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

REFORM OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Queen's consent not signified. I cannot put the Question.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Has the Queen not given her consent, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: She has not been in touch with me.

Mr. Allen: Oh dear, I am sorry.

COALMINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE, ARBITRATION, PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 9 February.

TOXIC AND HAZARDOUS WASTE SUBSTANCES (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): With the permission of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, now Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not been printed, so I cannot put the Question.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 February.

REGISTRATION OF COMMERCIAL LOBBYING INTERESTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. However, as the Bill has not been printed, again I cannot put the Question.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 February.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You said that the Bill has not been printed, but may I assure you that the full copy of the Bill has been handed in for reprinting and that I am only awaiting it? Therefore, it is not a question of the Bill having been deliberately withheld.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am advised that the Bill has not yet been printed, so I cannot put the Question under the Standing Orders.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to draw your attention to what I consider to be a misdemeanour. I refer to an action by the Government Deputy Chief Whip when the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) was moving the Licensing (Low Alcohol Drinks) Bill. The Deputy Chief Whip told the hon. Gentleman to keep talking.

If the hon. Gentleman had sat down, as he wished to do, two or three more Bills could have been moved in the time before half-past two. Only the intervention of the Deputy Chief Whip prevented that. Let's face it, the Government Deputy Chief Whip is not supposed to play a part in private Members' Bills on this day, but he encouraged the hon. Gentleman to keep speaking. We could have had the subsidence Bill through, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), which seeks to control commercial lobbying in the House of Commons. The Government Deputy Chief Whip has caused this trouble and he should be brought to account. This is a Private Members' day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Private conversations between hon. Members are not matters on which I rule.

SECURITY INDUSTRY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 30th January, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)) the Motions in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Income Tax may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon; and, if proceedings thereon have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall, at the expiration of that period, put the Question already proposed from the Chair; and no further such Motions shall then be made.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 1st February the Motions in the name of Sir Geoffrey Howe relating to Private Members' Motions, Motions for Leave to Bring in Bills, &c., New Writs, Public Petitions and Motions for Leave to Bring in Bills, &c. (Budget Day) may be proceeded with until Seven o'clock; and at that hour, if proceedings thereon have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall put successively the Question already proposed from the Chair and the Questions on such of the remaining Motions as may then be made, including the Questions on any amendments thereto which may be selected by Mr. Speaker.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Uniform Business Rate (North-East Kent)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I am grateful for the opportunity of raising a matter that is of special concern to my constituents and to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), who hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during this short debate.

First, I should say how pleased we both are to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), in his place. We are aware that he is imminently expecting an addition to his family and I am certain that there are places that he would much rather be this afternoon than in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South joins me in wishing both him and his wife very well.

I shall refer specifically to the towns of Margate and Herne Bay in north-east Kent, and my hon. Friend for Thanet, South will refer to Ramsgate and Sandwich and other areas of concern in north-east Kent. North-east Kent still has the highest unemployment in the south-east. The special circumstances of that area of England led my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to set up the Thanet working group in 1987. The report by the group led to a series of measures that were instigated by the Government, and they are now beginning to take effect. Those measures include considerable investment in infrastructure, including the commitment of more than £57 million of Government money for the improvement of the Thanet way, the main road into the area, and the development of Kent international airport. We are looking forward to the development of a business park adjacent to Manston airport. All those measures are vital and are having an effect.

Unemployment in the area is falling. It is still 10·3 per cent. overall, and male unemployment is at a wholly unacceptable level of 14·6 per cent. Recovery in the area is fragile. Between October and December 1988 there was a small fall of 37 in the unemployment figures, which was against the trend for that time of the year when seasonable unemployment rises. Sadly, in the same period last year, the figure rose by 214, conforming with the seasonal trend. That is worrying. It would be tragic if the Government's hard work and commitment are to be put at risk.

Against that backdrop, I raise a matter of special concern—the effects of the uniform business rate on small shopkeepers and small hotels and guest houses in north-east Kent. Small shops in the area face an enormous threat from out-of-town trading, and I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South will refer to a specific instance. The high streets are beginning to consist more of estate agents, banks and building societies than traditional traders. No doubt, my hon. Friend will say that all high streets throughout the country face that threat.

Sadly, north-east Kent cannot yet be regarded in economic terms as part of the glorious south-east. The Government suggest an average rateable value of eight times the 1973 figure. In Ashford, which is regarded as the hot spot of the south-east because of the effects of the Channel tunnel, the figure is 8·27 times the 1973 valuation. In Thanet, the valuation has risen by 10 times, and in Canterbury city it has risen by 12 times. The Canterbury city area includes the seaside town of Herne Bay, which is in my constituency, and is not in any way commensurate with Canterbury itself. The Conservative local authority in Canterbury has recently invested considerable sums of money in pedestrianising a shopping precinct, and that work is just beginning to show dividends in terms of growth in business. With great respect to my hon. Friend the Minister, that suggests that now is not the time to impose a greater burden upon small businesses that are just beginning to recover.

The effects of the uniform business rate in Thanet are potentially more alarming. I give the House two instances. The first concerns a family furnishing company in Northdown road, Cliftonville, where the rateable value has increased from £5,000 to £55,000. Five professional assessments suggest that, on a very sunny day, the figure might be more realistically set at £25,000 and that, within the current economic climate, it is more probably £20,000. The second example concerns a business at Westgate on Sea, again in my constituency, which was doing extremely well and was set to expand. Because of that, the proprietor purchased the property next door. The valuation of that empty property has risen by 300 per cent. The owner now intends to demolish the additional property and, as a result, no more new jobs will be created. That is not a hypothetical instance—the decision has been taken.

In north-east Kent rateable values represent about 50 per cent. of profits. That must be set against 40 per cent. or less in most of the rest of the country. In short, less profitable businesses in north-east Kent will subsidise more profitable businesses elsewhere.

Many small hotels and guest houses in my constituency have been striving to invest in new facilities and upgrade their facilities to provide what the modern holidaymaker wants. Inevitably, many of those little companies are family businesses. They consist of husbands and wives and sons and daughters working together to run the small seaside family guest house that many people like and admire. They also enjoy an eight-week summer season, but that is not reflected in the apportionment between the domestic rates—the community charge that will be paid by four people in a family—and the business use of premises for only a few weeks of the year.

Only last week I attended a meeting of the Surrey road hoteliers in Cliftonville and formed the distinct impression that many businesses would prefer to switch to 52-week of the year bed-and-breakfast, board and lodging, social benefit claimant work rather than pursuing the traditional seaside holiday trade. If that happened it would further erode the tourist base and hasten a downward spiral of the tourist trade in the area.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider a different composite hereditament—the shopkeeper who lives in a flat over his shop. I am indebted to the district valuation office, which has been most helpful. It suggested that some thought might be given to the possibility of an imbalance between the charges for the domesic property and those for the shop or business premises below. It would appear that the apportionment in 1973 might have become out of kilter. Those family businesses, where the shopkeeper lives over the shop, provide a community service and we need to encourage them.

I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to answer all my questions today. I wish to make a half a dozen or so points that I hope he will consider. Were the social

[Mr. Roger Gale]

circumstances in north-east Kent taken into consideration —as the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), said they would be—when the Bill was debated a couple of years ago? Will the increases in the area be limited to a Government average, as suggested, of 8 per cent.? Will my hon. Friend review the operation of rating systems as they affect seasonal hotels, and especially guest houses? Will he review the approach to composite hereditaments and consider, in the case of small shops occupied by the shopkeeper and his family, waiving the first community charge as a reflection of the potential imbalance between the commercial and the domestic properties? Will he consider extending the phasing-in period for small businesses, further to mitigate the potential inflationary effect?

In particular, will my hon. Friend consider retirement relief and the extension of the carry-over or transitional period so that small shopkeepers seeking to retire can sell their businesses in the knowledge that the incoming business person will benefit from the same transitional relief? I should be happy if that transitional provision were confined to cases where the existing business is continued in the same form. Will my hon. Friend consider raising the qualification threshold for small businesses from a rateable value of £10,000 to £15,000, which would embrace many more in north-east Kent?

I reiterate my support for the principle of a uniform business rate. Its intent—a fairer national cutting of the business rate cake—is entirely proper. However, I do not believe that any part of that intent is to put small firms, which contribute to the economic recovery of north-east Kent, out of business. I think that my hon. Friend will agree with that.

2.43 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) for his courtesy and co-operation in giving me this opportunity to say a few words about the uniform business rate problems faced by my constituents, especially in the north-east Kent towns of Ramsgate, Broadstairs and Sandwich.

My first general point, and one on which I strongly concur with my hon. Friend, is that, whether we are talking about the level of rates, rents, wages or just about any of the usual economic indicators, the Thanet, South and North constituencies should not be simplistically classifid as part of the prosperous south-east. The Isle of Thanet and its nearby towns and villages comprise an area in which times are still quite hard for many small business men, especially those at the sharp end of commercial life who have to meet a payroll and keep the bank manager happy. Many now feel that the UBR could be the last straw that breaks the camel's back.

I do not want to claim that everything that is said about UBR by some of those who have been shaken by the valuations that they have received is necessarily correct; nor do I believe that there is an atmosphere of doom, gloom and poverty in the business community of north-east Kent—it would be an exaggeration to say that. There are a great many success stories and stories of good news in the area. There are, however, some difficulties with UBR, and it would be helpful to my hon. Friend the Minister if I sketched some of the economic scenery that surrounds the local UBR problem.

I should like to highlight the town of Ramsgate. In some ways, it is much more like a north-east town than a south-east town in economic terms. Ramsgate has the biggest Department of Social Security office in south-east England, with 16,000 claimants on its books. It has the highest concentration in south-east England of pensioners who are dependent only on the state pension for their income. It has an unemployment rate which, even after some welcome falls, still remains stubbornly well above 10 per cent. It has a road, rail and even pavement infrastructure which is crumbling into a state of advanced decay. We have suffered a number of worrying economic disappointments in recent weeks. These include the closure of the last of the nearby east Kent coal mines, 100 redundancies at the Astra fireworks and pyrotechnics factory and, above all, the shutting of the Marks and Spencer branch, the jewel in the crown of Ramsgate shopping centre.

All these factors have an impact on UBR. They affect the health of the local economy and the ability of small traders to pay the increases in their rates bills. Above all, they call into question the accuracy of some of the valuations that were made by the Inland Revenue valuation team in April 1988 as the basis of UBR.

I want to make a critical comment about that valuation date. Under the old legislation, which was last used in April 1973, Inland Revenue valuations were for the date on which rates were paid—in other words, in April 1973, rates were paid on a valuation for April 1973. By appealing or submitting an alternative proposal, one could get a later valuation date. The new legislation has created what is called the antecedent valuation date—a concept which did not exist under the old legislation. It means that, on 1 April 1990 the business man is asked to pay his rates on valuations made on 1 April 1988. This antecedent valuation date may be convenient for some civil servants, but in some cases it is unfair to ratepayers.

Let us consider what has happened in the intervening two years. The macro-economic indicators have gone the wrong way. Interest rates are up from 8 per cent. to 13 per cent. Inflation is up from 5 per cent. to 7·7 per cent. Wage and utility costs are up as well. Similarly, the local micro-economic indicators are going the wrong way. That Marks and Spencer closure in the high street of Ramsgate was a bombshell, because all rents in the shopping area around the Ramsgate central district are decreasing. At least 15 shop properties are empty, and shopping activity in the town is likely to move to the out-of-town shopping centres. How does one explain to a property owner in the middle of Ramsgage that he should be valued for his uniform business rate on 1988 rents and valuations, when everyone knows that in the area affected by that Marks and Spencer closure those valuations will have decreased by 1990? That is a manifest unjustice. My understanding of the legislation is that, even on appeal, the 1988 valuations will stand, and that social and economic factors will not be taken into account by appeals tribunals.

There is perhaps one loophole on which I would seek the guidance of my hon. Friend the Minister. Section 121 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1988 states that, when determining an appeal or alternative proposal, any physical aspect of the locality shall be taken into

account at the date of the appeal or proposal. That section could be important to the shops and businesses around the area affected by the Marks and Spencer closure.

I appeal to my hon. Friend to take an interest in the interpretation of section 121. I have observed that the notes and guidance regulations on appeals have not been issued to the valuation officers, so could my hon. Friend please look sympathetically on the interpretation of section 121? In an area that has been blighted by physical change—it could be the closure of a steel works, but in the case of Ramsgate it is the closure of the biggest department store—I believe that rents, rates and the calculations based upon them should be downgraded by an appeals tribunal.

There are problems outside the area of Ramsgate's central shopping district, and they are highlighted by the anxieties of a small jeweller in Broadstairs high street—D. J. Pearce. His rates are up by 270 per cent. As a realistic business man, he appreciates the Government's phasing-in arrangements and knows that he will have to pay no more than an annual increase of 15 per cent. plus the rate of inflation, which means a pretty painful 23 per cent. Hopefully, it will be less if the rate of inflation eases.

In 1996, Mr. Pearce and others in a similar position will face what the Americans call a "double whammy". He will have to pay an increase in his 1990 valuation, plus the effects of the 1995 revaulation, and that could be a painful blow. Many small business men fear the double whammy —and that raises the question, should we not elongate the phasing-in period? In my view, there should be a seven year phasing-in period for the introduction of the uniform business rate, and I appeal to the Under-Secretary to consider that suggestion.

Finally, I recognise that the root of the problem is that the Labour Government funked a rate revaluation in 1978, which was then overdue, and we are now facing the results of 10 years of neglect. In the long run, the uniform business rate is probably a much fairer method of charging business rates and I think that the Government's transitional arrangements are a helpful cushioning step. The Government deserve some credit for grasping the nettle of revaluation—which is politically unpopular—and implementing it with some sensitivity.

Today I am arguing for greater flexibility in introducing the uniform business rate, particularly in north-east Kent. We need a longer phasing-in period of seven, not five, years, and a more flexible appeals system to allow tribunals to take into account changing circumstances since the valuation date of 1 April 1988. Above all, we must be sympathetic and flexible towards the small business community so that UBR is not seen as the last straw that breaks the back of small business.

2.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): At the outset, may I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), how much I appreciate his kind remarks at the beginning of his speech. I shall certainly pass on his best wishes to my wife. When we knew that this important Adjournment debate was taking place today we agreed that we should make domestic arrangements so that I could be here to participate, and so it has turned out.

I also congratulate my hon. Friends on their welcome endorsement of the principles behind the new business rate and the generous recognition that, if businesses in general are to benefit from the certainty and stability which the new system will provide, increases for some businesses are inevitable.

My hon. Friends both referred to the substantial help that the Government have given to facilitate the economic regeneration of north-east Kent and I am grateful for that. I am sure that there is no intention behind the changes in the rating system to jeopardise that economic regeneration.

It is right that the long-overdue redistribution of the rates burden between business sectors and areas should take place as soon as possible, but I assure my hon. Friends that the total amount which businesses will be expected to pay in 1990-91 will be essentially the same in real terms as that paid in 1989-90 across the country as a whole.

Nevertheless, I can understand my hon. Friends' concern that business ratepayers in north-east Kent should not suffer excessively as a result of the introduction of the new system, and I hope that I can reassure them on this point. There is no question of the new rateable values of properties in north-east Kent having been based, as they fear, on the rental values of property in other more prosperous parts of the country, or even of the county.

The law requires Inland Revenue revaluation officers to assess the rateable value of a property on the basis of the rent at which that property might reasonably be expected to be let from year to year. The valuation officer must look at the rental value of each property in the condition in which he finds it and, of course, at the location in which it is situated. A general principle does not, therefore, apply to the whole of the Canterbury district. Each property within each town in the district has to be examined by the valuation officer. It certainly does not mean that properties in one area can be assessed on rental values elsewhere. If that were to happen, valuation officers would not be doing their job properly, and ratepayers would have good grounds for appeal.

I shall give my hon. Friends one or two examples, which I hope will help to allay their concerns. As they would expect, prime shop rents in Margate and Ramsgate are between one third and one half of those in Canterbury. I can assure them that that is reflected in the rateable value assessments of the properties concerned. I remind my hon. Friends that there will also be gainers from the new system in north-east Kent. In Ramsgate, for example, the Duraplug factory's rate bill is set to fall from around £34,500 in 1989-90 to just under £24,750 before transition. The Argyle centre's rate bill will fall from around £19,750 in 1989-90 to about £12,354 before transition.

My hon. Friends may be glad to have information about average rateable values in the new lists. In Ashford, the average rateable values in the new lists are £12,814. In Canterbury they are £16,583. In Thanet, they are much less than that—only £9,464. I hope that my hon. Friend's will concede that the differences in rental values are reflected in the new lists.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North referred to Ashford as the "hot spot" of the south-east. That was also true in 1973, when the previous Channel tunnel scheme was under construction. Ashford starts from a high base, going back to 1973. Since then, the major employer in that town, British Rail Engineering Limited, has closed. Ashford, therefore, has had its problems during that period.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

My hon. Friends are also particularly concerned about the plight of business ratepayers who, in their words, "live over the shop"—whether they be guest house proprietors or business people living over their shops in the high street. They will be required to pay both business rates and one or more personal community charges in respect of their occupation of the same property, but that is no different from the position of business ratepayers who do not live on the premises. They, too, will pay both rates and community charge. People living over the shop will have the same entitlement to both community charge transitional relief and protection under the business rates transitional arrangements as anyone else who runs a business and whose place of residence is elsewhere.

The valuation of such properties will reflect only the rental value of the business use. No value will be determined in respect of the part that is used as living accommodation. Phasing arrangements will apply to protect ratepayers from large increases. It is worth emphasising that the base point for calculating the transitional arrangements for the business rate will be only that part of the mixed hereditament on which business rates are paid at the moment. The total bill on a mixed hereditament will not be the base point; it will be lower than that. The new base point will be only that element of the rates that is attributable to business use.

Finally, I intend to deal briefly with the cessation of transitional protection when the occupier of a property changes and with the possibility of extending the transitional period. As for the continuation of protection when there is a change of occupier, I am afraid that I can offer my hon. Friends no prospect of any change that they seek. The purpose of the transitional arrangements is to protect existing occupiers. We want to get the transition over as quickly as possible, consistent with that objective, in order to allow the benefits of the new system to come through. The new occupiers do not need protection as they know what the liabilities are when they take on a property, and to allow new occupiers of existing property to continue to receive protection would be unfair to occupiers of property constructed after 1 April 1990 who will not be eligible for transition.

I can offer my hon. Friends better news about the extension of the transitional period. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) referred to Mr. Pearce and his jeweller's shop and what he described as the "double whammy". We have not said that there will be no transitional arrangements beyond 1995.

The Government have powers under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to introduce a further transitional scheme after 1994-95 to ensure that businesses which have not reached their new rate bills then are not faced with a substantial unphased increase, I understand that businesses would find it reassuring if we were to give a commitment now to use those powers and explain how we would use them. It is difficult to judge at this stage what sort of transitional scheme will be needed after the 1995 revaluation, because it is impossible to predict what will happen to rent levels over the next five years. Many businesses facing large rate increases now will find that market rents for the type of property that they occupy will fall relative to rents for other types of property, and that will come through in the 1995 revaluation. So some of the peaks that we are now experiencing may never be reached. That is why we thought it best to delay a decision on a further transitional period until nearer 1995. We are certainly cognisant of the problems of the double whammy and I hope that that will be some consolation to my hon. Friend's constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South made some more detailed points about the system of valuation and appeals. I do not have time to deal with them now, but I shall certainly write to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North covering those points and some of the other matters that I have not had time to deal with today.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 January 1990

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Primary Schools, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by school within the Doncaster local education authority *(a)* the present and *(b)* the forecast figure for pupils in primary schools; and what additional funding he intends to provide for new schools in this area.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No proposals for new schools in Doncaster are currently before my right hon. Friend for decision. I understand, however, that the Doncaster education authority is intending to publish proposals shortly for a new 9-13 age range middle school in the Balby Woodfield area. Priority is given in the allocation of annual capital guidelines for new school places needed as a result of population growth.

The following information was provided by the Doncaster local education authority:

	Number on roll	
	September 1989	*1993-94 forecast*
First Schools		
Adwick Washington	316	317
Carcroft	198	247
Owston Skellow	289	269
Sprotbrough Orchard	106	130
Woodlands	178	231
Balby Central	292	322
Balby Nightingale	371	461
Balby Waverley	255	262
Hexthorpe	226	200
Woodfield	325	360
Askern Littlemoor	209	253
Askern Moss Road	192	157
Norton	194	211
Intake	520	534
Kingfisher	172	198
Park	366	351
Sandringham	207	235
Town Field	216	288
Bentley High Street	156	178
Bentley Kirkby Avenue	161	208
Bentley New Village	217	264
Scawthorpe Castle Hills	160	203
Edlington Hill Top	222	201
Edlington Victoria	203	216
Tickhill	137	171
Warmsworth	104	117
Warmsworth CE	79	65
Bessacarr	190	175
Cantley Hawthorn	147	172
Cantley Sycamore	115	114
Hyde Park	307	352
South Cantley	270	302
Stirling	151	182
West Bessacarr Willow	280	242
Fishlake Endowed	24	36
Hatfield Crooksbroom	207	225
Hatfield Dunsville	169	181
Hatfield Sheep Dip Lane	253	228
Hatfield Travis CE	247	347
Hatfield Woodhouse	89	84
Stainforth Eastgate	109	150
Stainforth Kirton Lane	147	184
Stainforth Westgate	220	290
Sykehouse	10	10
Barnby Dun	116	139
Doncaster St. George's CE	56	60
Kirk Sandall	257	251
Grange Lane	269	346
Tornedale	290	317
Scawsby Rosedale	128	147
Scawsby Saltersgate	218	248
Sprotbrough Richmond Hill	230	295
Greentop	266	220
King Edward	285	413
Moorends	200	197
Moorends west road	186	212
South Common	147	163
Infant Schools		
Armthorpe CE	58	51
Armthorpe Shaw Wood	221	211
Armthorpe Tranmoor Lane	159	151
Conisbrough Rowena	201	185
Denaby Main	128	143
Doncaster Road	96	122
Park Road	168	188
Infant/Junior Schools		
Armthorpe Southfield	178	167
Conisborough Balby Street	180	200
Conisbrough Ivanhoe	256	270
Conisbrough Station Road	258	204
Auckley	169	128
Bawtry Mayflower	189	187
Branton CE	140	149
Finningley CE	93	79
Finningley Hayfield Lane	223	274
Highwoods	225	369
St. John's CE	219	176
Windhill	296	308
Armthorpe Our Lady of Sorrows	154	151
Bentley Our Lady of Sorrows	139	143
Conisbrough St. Albans	224	230
Doncaster our Lady of Mount Carmel	225	273
Doncaster St. Francis Xavier	203	261
Doncaster St. Peter's	275	301
Edlington St. Mary's	195	209
Rossington St. Joseph's	211	259
Stainforth Holy Family	218	248
Woodlands East	154	189
First/Middle Schools		
Brodsworth CE	36	34
Highfields	156	190
Hooton Pagnell CE	54	54
Arksey	180	169
Bentley Toll Bar	126	137
Scawthorpe Sunny Fields	252	240
Braithwell	98	82
Tickhill Estfeld	250	223
Wadworth	138	109
Edenthorpe Hall	251	311
Edenthorpe Popham CE	197	202
St. Michael's CE	228	202
Barnburgh	224	222
Middle Schools (deemed primary)		
Adwick Park	278	316
Carcroft	186	198
Owston Skellow	311	289
Sprotbrough Copley	118	106
Woodlands	165	178
Askern Sutton Road	336	401
Norton	170	194
Bentley High Street	158	156

	Number on roll	
	September 1989	*1993-94 forecast*
Bentley Kirkby Avenue	153	161
Bentley New Village	185	217
Scawthorpe Castle Hills	162	160
Edlington Hill Top	234	222
Edlington Victoria	153	203
Tickhill CE	133	137
Warmsworth	167	183
Barnby Dun	166	116
Doncaster Curlew	43	56
Kirk Sandall	255	257
Holmscarr	218	269
Pheasant Bank	270	290
Scawsby Rosedale	126	128
Scawsby Saltersgate	255	218
Sprotbrough Richmond Hill	195	230
Junior Schools		
Armthorpe Shaw Wood	325	362
Armthorpe Tranmoor	212	213
Conisbrough Morley Place	208	267
Denaby Main	186	184
Doncaster Road	111	138
Montague	194	220
Total	24,524	26,508

Footnote; The total pupil capacity of the schools listed above was 32,271 in September 1989.

School Building (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what level of funding he has made available for the Doncaster local education authority for new school building for the years 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 20 December 1989, (*Official Report*, columns *254-58*, with the correction that "Primary" should be substituted for "Private"). ACGs are made on an annual basis. It is for Doncaster LEA to decide how to use the resources available and to make decisions on expenditure on school buildings in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Human Frontier

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will name the board of trustees and the council of scientists administering the Human Frontier science programme.

Mr. Jackson: The information is as follows:

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Canada

Dr. Henri C. Rothschild,
Director General, Technology Policy Branch, Department of Industry, Science and Technology

Mr. Allan S. Pool,
Director, Science and Technology Division, Department of External Affairs

France

M. Jean de Gliniasty,
Director of Development and Co-operation for Science and Technology, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

M. Claude Amiel,
Director, Division of Biology, Medicine and Health, Ministry of Research and Technology

Federal Republic of Germany

Dr. Helmut Klein,
Head of Projects Management for Biology, Ecology and Energy, Nuclear Research Centre, Julich

Dr. Heinrich Pfeiffer,
General Secretary, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

Italy

Mr. Michele Lener,
Multilateral Units Manager, International Relations Office, Ministry of University and Scientific Research

Professor Alberto Albertini,
President of the Scientific Committee of the National Research Council's Finalised Project on Advanced Biotechnologies

Japan

Ambassador Hiromichi Miyazaki (Chairman),
Committee on Policy Matters, Council for Science and Technology

Dr. Kozo Iizuka,
Special Adviser to the Agency of Industrial Science and Technology, Ministry of International Trade and Industry

United Kingdom

Mr. Robin Ritzema,
Head of International Science Division, Department of Education and Science

Dr. Victoria Harrison,
Head of Policy Planning and Assessment, Agricultural and Food Research Council

United States of America

Dr. Katherine Bick,
Deputy Director for Extramural Research, NIH

Dr. Mary Clutter,
Assistant Director for Biological, Behavioural and Social Sciences, NSF

COUNCIL OF SCIENTISTS

Canada

Dr. Francis S. Rolleston,
Director of Scientific Evaluation Division, Medical Research Council

Dr. James D. Friesen,
Department of Biochemistry, Hospital for Sick Children Research Institute

France

M. Pierre Chambon,
Professor, Louis Pasteur University, Strasbourg, Director of a Joint CNRS-INSERM Laboratory

M. Jean-Pierre Chageux,
Professor, College de France, Director of Research at the Pasteur Institute

Federal Republic of Germany

Dr. Dieter Oesterhelt,
Max-Planck-Institute for Biochemistry

Dr. Ernst-Ludiwg Winnacker,
Institute for Biochemistry, Ludwig-Maximilian University

Italy

Professor Glauco Tocchini-Valentini,
Director of Cellular Biology, Laboratory of CNR, Rome

Professor Giorgio Parisi,
Professor of Theoretical Physics, II University of Rome (Tor Vergata)

Japan
Professor Masao Ito,
Institute of Physical and Chemical Research

Professor Akiyoshi Wada,
Faculty of Science, University of Tokyo

United Kingdom
Sir Walter Bodmer,
Director of Research, Imperial Cancer Research Fund

The Lord Adrian,
Professor of Cell Physiology, University of Cambridge

United States of America
Dr. Joseph E. Rall (Chairman),
Deputy Director of Intramural Research, NIH

Dr. Joseph E. Varner,
Professor of Biochemistry, Washington University in St. Louis

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in issuing guidance concerning the responsibilities of governors of state schools under the Data Protection Act and the purposes for which the governors may hold personal data; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The necessary guidance will be issued as soon as possible.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the way colleges and universities respond to requests from a community charges registration officer concerning students; whether he will allocate additional grants so that these institutions need only disclose information about students resident in a particular charging authority area; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Apart from the question asked by the hon. Member on 26 October 1989 (*Official Report*, col. *536*), my right hon. Friend has received no representations concerning the way colleges and universities respond to requests from community charges registration officers (CCROs) about students. As I said in reply to the earlier question, the information needs of CCROs are a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment.

History and Geography Working Groups

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many copies of the interim report of the geography working group and the history working group were sent to local education authorities for consultation.

Mrs. Rumbold: Each of the 104 local education authorities in England and Wales were sent 10 copies of the history and 10 copies of the geography interim reports at the time they were published. Further copies were offered to authorities and others on application to the Department and many availed themselves of this offer.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many people with inner-city school experience are members of *(a)* the history working group and *(b)* the geography working group in the preparation of the national curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: Two members of the history working group and three members of the geography working group have had experience either of teaching in inner cities or of working closely with school teachers in inner-city areas.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many people with primary teaching experience are members of *(a)* the history working group and *(b)* the geography working group in the preparation of the national curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: Four out of 12 members of the history working group and four out of 12 members of the geography working group have had teaching experience in primary schools or are employed as advisers with responsibilities for primary schools.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many school pupils aged 14 to 16 years are currently studying *(a)* history and *(b)* geography expressed in total numbers and as a percentage of the total numbers of school pupils.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest readily available information —taken from the 1988 secondary school staffing survey —indicated that the following numbers and percentages of pupils were studying history, geography and combined courses which might include history and geography in the third, fourth and fifth secondary years in England:

	Year group		
	3	*4*	*5*
Pupils studying history			
number	490,000	225,000	250,000
as a percentage of all pupils in the year group	90	40	42
Pupils studying geography			
number	490,000	260,000	275,000
as a percentage of all pupils in the year group	90	46	46
Pupils studying combined courses within the arts/ humanities/social science fields			
number	60,000	50,000	45,000
as a percentage of all pupils in the year group	11	9	7

The secondary school staffing survey was carried out in March 1988 based on a representative 10 per cent. sample of maintained secondary schools in England.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which organisations, other than local education authorities, have been sent copies of the interim reports of *(a)* the history working group and *(b)* the geography working group; and how many copies were sent to each organisation.

Mrs. Rumbold: Copies of the interim reports of both the history and the geography working groups were sent to

over 200 organisations. A total of 17,500 history and 26,000 geography reports have been distributed up to 31 December last.

Special Educational Needs

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what account he has taken in considering schemes from local education authorities for local management of schools, of special educational needs provision.

Mrs. Rumbold: In considering schemes for local management of schools submitted by local education authorities, my right hon. Friend has been concerned to ensure that appropriate and effective provision is made for pupils with special educational needs. This follows the requirement in circular 7/78 on local management of schools that LEAs' schemes should reflect the incidence of pupils with special educational needs in their schools.

Financial Delegation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will identify those local education authorities for which he has agreed schemes for financial delegation of colleges where the costs of premature retirement, severance and dismissal are treated as exceptions to the scheme; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will number those local education authorities for which he has agreed schemes for financial delegation of colleges where the costs of premature retirement, severance and dismissal are treated as exceptions to the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Of schemes approved to date, the following local education authorities allow for the costs of premature retirement, severance and dismissal to be treated as an exception to the scheme:

Tameside
Northamptonshire
Cheshire

Governing Bodies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list and identify only those further education and higher education colleges for which he has agreed revised instruments of government where the size of the governing body is in excess of 20 persons.

Mr. Jackson: To date the Secretary of State has approved for the following institutions instruments of government which provide in each case for a governing body in excess of 20 members:

Bradford and Ilkley Community College;
Croydon College;
Newcastle College;
Sandwell College of Further and Higher Education;
Solihull College of Technology;
South Tyneside College;
Suffolk College of Higher and Further Education.

For three further colleges my right hon. Friend has indicated that he would be prepared to approve instruments of government which would provide for a governing body in excess of 20 members.

Bradford City Technology College

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science who appoints trustees of the Bradford city technology college trust; if he will list the names and designations of trustees, the total amount of private sector funds received by the trust, to date, the names of persons or companies who, to date, have contributed and the amount each has contributed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The members of the Dixons city technology college trust are appointed by the principal sponsor or the Secretary of State for Education and Science. The initial members are:

Mr. Stanley Kalms, the chairman of the Dixons Group plc, as the principal sponsor;
Mr. Richard Andrews, the group personnel director of the Dixons Group plc, as the designated nominee for the principal sponsor; and
Mr. Edward Simpson CB, and educational consultant, as the designated nominee of the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

The total amount of private sector funds received to date is just under £1·3 million. This is made up of £1 million from Mr. Haking Wong; £220,000 (the first of five equal instalments under a five-year covenant) from the Dixons Group plc; and other contributions totalling just under £50,000.

Disabled Students

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the disabled students' allowance.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend currently has the operation of the disabled students' allowance under review in the context of the annual review of the awards regulations. He envisages announcing the outcome of this in time for any changes to take effect from 1 September 1990.

St. Dunstan's School

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are his Department's latest proposals for the rebuilding of St. Dunstan's Church of England school in Cheam; what discussions his officials have had with officials from the London borough of Sutton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is not for the DES to make proposals for the rebuilding of a school. In June 1988 the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education published proposals under section 13 of the Education Act 1980 to establish in September 1989 a new Church of England voluntary-aided primary school in substitution for Cheam Church of England junior boys' school and St. Dunstan's Church of England primary school. The explanatory notes published with the proposal said that the new school would be accommodated in the existing premises of Cheam junior boys' school and St. Dunstan's primary school pending the construction of new school buildings. The previous Secretary of State for Education and Science approved those proposals in December 1988 and it is for the promoters and the local education authority to implement them. The Department indicated that the Secretary of State was prepared in principle to pay grant of 85 per cent. on the promoters' share of the cost of building the new school premises.

I understand that the promoters have since had difficulty in obtaining planning permission from the London borough of Sutton. Officials from the Department have attended a number of meetings, at the request of the promoters, at which representatives of both the diocesan board and the borough have been present. The most recent meeting was on 3 January. This has allowed officials to be kept informed of the reasons for the delay in providing the new school building and of the potential cost implications of alterations to the building project which might be required by the planning authorities.

Until the promoters are able to submit to my right hon. Friend a finalised version of their building project for which they have obtained planning permission, he cannot decide whether to give detailed approval to it under the Education Acts or whether to make grant payments on it. The promoters have, however, been warned that the offer of a grant is not unlimited and that if the scheme eventually presented to the Department is much more expensive than that originally envisaged, it may not be possible to fund a full 85 per cent. of it through grant.

CERN

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science from which Department's Votes it is intended to fund CERN.

Mr. Jackson: The United Kingdom subscription to CERN is borne on Class XI, Vote 5, subhead B2 of the Department's Estimates; this subhead covers the international subscriptions of the science and engineering research council.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the United Kingdom's contribution to CERN in 1989-90 and 1990-91; what percentage of the total is attributable to the devaluation of sterling; and what administrative economies have been introduced by the secretariat.

Mr. Jackson: Estimates provision for the United Kingdom's contribution payments to CERN during the United Kingdom financial year 1989-90 is £48·897 million; Estimates for the United Kingdom financial year 1990-91 have yet to be presented to Parliament.

Under the revised contribution system recently introduced by CERN, the annual contribution of individual member states can be affected by a number of year-on-year variables. These include changes in the relative GNP of all member states each of which is re-assessed each year, movements in international exchange rates against the Swiss franc, and the annual rate of inflation in Switzerland, which is the host nation. The total sum payable in any particular year cannot readily be disaggregated to identify those elements attributable to each of these and other factors.

Following the report of the CERN review group, the CERN management has undertaken a continuing programme of implementation for the report's recommendations aimed at securing more efficient and cost-effective management. These include a phased reduction of 500 (some 15 per cent.) in the number of staff employed by the organisation, improved budgetary and financial control arrangements, improved project control systems, and the development of a revised system of personnel management suited to the organisation's future needs.

Haberdashers' Aske's Schools

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide details of the amount, date and recipient of any payments by his Department to support the preparation of plans to establish a city technology college on the site of the Haberdashers' Aske's schools in Deptford.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has an agreement with the Haberdashers' company covering the establishment of the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college. Under this, the Government have agreed to meet reasonable transitional costs, including the payment of a project director's and an educational consultant's salaries. We are currently in discussion with representatives of the Haberdashers' company about the scope and commencement date of the transitional costs and envisage making payments shortly. No expenditure has been incurred by the Department to date.

Trafford Borough Council

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will ask Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools to investigate the circumstances which led to the cancellation by Trafford borough council of its 11-plus examination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Officials have written to Trafford education authority to seek an explanation.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the Student Loans Company Limited has appointed a managing director.

Mr. MacGregor: The Student Loans Company Limited proposes to appoint Mr. Ronald J. Harrison as managing director.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table giving the amounts for England of capital allocations for *(a)* county and voluntary-controlled schools, *(b)* voluntary-aided schools and *(c)* the total of *(a)* for each financial year from and including 1978-79 to 1990-91, expressed in (i) current prices, (ii) constant prices and (iii) an index of (ii) where 1978-79 = 100.

Mr. MacGregor: *[holding answer 13 December 1989]*: Not all the information is available in the form requested. Table A shows figures from 1981-82. Prior to 1981-82, local education authorities did not receive block allocations, but were notified annually, in the context of a rolling programme, of a limit on the value of building starts in the following year. From 1981-82 to 1989-90 allocations for spending on capital works have been made to local education authorities for schools and colleges of further and higher education, in accordance with the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. It has been for each local education authority to decide how to use its allocation, including apportionment as between schools and colleges, and the extent to which it wishes to supplement it through the use of capital receipts and other

sources of revenue. The availability of capital receipts for this purpose has increased substantially over the period. Table B shows the resulting actual outturn gross expenditure by LEAs from 1978-79 in cash, constant and index terms.

Figures for 1990-91 (in Table A) are not strictly comparable with previous years. With the introduction of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Department has issued an annual capital guideline to each local education authority for 1990-91, which is one element in the calculation of each local authority's basic credit approval for 1990-91 announced by the Department of the Environment.

Table A
Total allocations and annual capital guidelines for England in cash and constant terms

	Local authority schools and colleges			*Voluntary aided and special agreement schools*			*Local authority schools and colleges and voluntary aided and special agreement schools*		
	Cash	*Constant 1981-82 prices*	*Index 1981-82 prices*	*Cash*	*Constant 1981-82 prices*	*Index 1981-82 prices*	*Cash*	*Constant 1981-82 prices*	*Index 1981-82 prices*
1981-82	355	355	100	24	24	100	379	379	100
1982-83	338	315	89	22	21	87	360	336	89
1983-84	295	263	74	19	17	71	314	280	74
1984-85	300	255	72	25	21	87	325	276	73
1985-86	315	254	72	31	25	104	346	279	74
1986-87	297	231	65	28	22	92	325	253	67
1987-88	306	227	64	32	23	97	338	250	66
1988-89	387	267	75	43	30	123	430	296	78
1989-90	352	227	64	56	36	149	408	263	69
1990-91	485	298	84	71	44	182	556	342	90

Notes to table A

1. All figures are in £ million.
2. Constant prices are calculated at 1981-82 prices using the GDP deflator. The index for 1981-82 is set at 100.
3. The Department provides grant-aid at a rate of 85 per cent. on governors capital expenditure at voluntary aided and special agreement schools.
4. Capital grant figures for the voluntary aided sector for the year 1981-82 are not separately indentified from a single building grant figure which included repairs and maintenance. The capital figures shown for this year are based on an apportionment of the building grant figure using the average ratio between capital and repairs during 1982-83 and 1985-86.
5. Prior to 1981-82 local authorities did not receive block allocations, but were notified annually in the context of a rolling programme of a limit on the value of building starts in the following year.
6. From 1981-82 to 1989-90 allocations have been made to LEAs for spending on schools and colleges of further and higher education.
7. Figures for 1990-91 are Annual Capital Guidelines and cover other educational services as well as schools and colleges. They are not directly comparable with the allocations given in earlier years.
8. Local authority allocations for 1989-90 and ACGs for 1990-91 exclude institutions which were transferred to the PCFC sector in 1989-90.
9. Figures are rounded.

Table B
Gross capital expenditure for England in cash and constant terms

	Local authority schools and colleges			*Voluntary aided and special agreement schools*			*Local authority schools and colleges and voluntary aided and special agreement schools*		
	Cash	*Constant 1978-79 prices*	*Index 1978-79 prices*	*Cash*	*Constant 1978-79 prices*	*Index 1978-79 prices*	*Cash*	*Constant 1978-79 prices*	*Index 1978-79 prices*
1978-79	338	338	100	19	19	100	358	358	100
1979-80	379	324	96	24	20	106	403	345	96
1980-81	532	385	114	26	19	97	558	403	113
1981-82	385	254	75	28	19	96	413	272	76
1982-83	425	261	77	26	16	83	451	277	78
1983-84	444	261	77	22	13	68	466	274	77
1984-85	473	265	78	29	16	84	502	281	79
1985-86	503	267	79	37	19	100	539	286	80
1986-87	544	279	82	33	17	89	577	296	83
1987-88	556	271	80	37	18	94	593	289	81
1988-89	668	304	90	50	23	119	719	327	91
1989-90	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1990-91	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

1. For Voluntary Aided and Special Agreement schools capital grant figures for 1978-79 to 1981-82 not separately identified from a single building grant figure which included repairs and maintenance. The capital figures shown for this period are based on an apportionment of the building grant figure using the average ration between capital and repairs during 1982-83 and 1985-86.
2. For the Voluntary sector, gross expenditure includes Governing Bodies' 15 per cent. contribution.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Records

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Attorney-General if he will identify, by computerised reference number, the Public Record Office pieces or files which have been released for public inspection in January following extended closure for *(a)* 50 years, *(b)* 75 years and *(c)* 100 years.

The Attorney-General: Nearly 700 items, previously closed for longer than 30 years, became available for public inspection in the Public Record Office at the beginning of January 1990. I am making arrangements for a listing of the references of these items to be made available in the Library in due course and on request to members of the public.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Lord Chancellor will invite his Advisory Council on Public Records to undertake a quality check of those papers due for release in 1990, following extended closure of 50, 75 and 100 years, to ensure that Departments have released as much material as possible.

The Attorney-General: The advisory council is consulted before the Lord Chancellor agrees to any records remaining closed beyond 30 years. The records which became available at the beginning of this year in the Public Record Office, after previous closure for longer than 30 years, were originally closed, under the provisions of s.5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958, as amended in 1967, after consultation with the Advisory Council on Public Records. The records concerned number nearly 700, and it would be impractical for material in this quantity to be checked by the advisory council, but the items referred to are all now open to public inspection in the Public Record Office reading rooms. The role of the advisory council in relation to the operations of s.5(1) of the Act is set out in paragraphs 38 and 39 of the White Paper, "Modern Public Records: The Government response to the Report of the Wilson Committee", Cmnd 8531, March 1982.

"War Without Honour"

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received concerning the legal implications of the book "War Without Honour", by Fred Holroyd.

The Attorney-General: None.

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Attorney-General if he will reconsider the appointment of an inquiry into events at the Kincora boy's home, with specific terms of reference to consider allegations of criminal activities by Crown employees.

The Attorney-General: No.

WALES

Homes for the Elderly

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of people aged *(a)* over 75 years and *(b)* over 85 years in Wales live in (i) nursing homes and (ii) residential homes.

Mr. Grist: As at 31 March 1989, the proportion of the 75 and over age group living in residential homes in Wales was 60·7 per 1,000 relevant population. For the 85 and over age group the proportion was 157·3. Information on the age of patients in nursing homes is not held centrally.

Children's Institutions

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future provision of care at children's institutions in Mid-Glamorgan following recent announcements of changes to the funding and accommodation arrangements at these institutions.

Mr. Grist: We are not aware of any recent announcements on proposed changes to funding and accommodation arrangements of child care institutions in Mid-Glamorgan. The future provision of such establishments is an issue for Mid-Glamorgan county council to address.

Polytechnic of Wales

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the talks held recently between his Department and representatives of Mid-Glamorgan county council on the future management of the Polytechnic of Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Officials from the Department have recently discussed with officers of Mid-Glamorgan county council the detailed provisions to be included in the new instrument of government for the Polytechnic of Wales required by the Education Reform Act 1988. The Act requires a revised instrument of government setting out the constitution of a new governing body to be in effect by 1 April 1990.

Arts Project, Llandudno

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's funding of the proposed North Wales opera house project to be based at Llandudno.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The proposed new arts and leisure centre at Llandudno was the subject of an application by Aberconwy borough council for support in 1990-91 as a project of regional or national importance. It was reluctantly decided that the project could not be accommodated within the package of schemes for assistance because of demands from competing schemes and the fact that it required such a high level of support from public sector resources. It is of course open to the sponsors of the scheme to come forward with revised proposals if they wish to do so.

PRIME MINISTER

Part-time Appointments

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister from whom members of her personal staff paid from public funds seek approval for paid part-time appointments before accepting them.

The Prime Minister: All members of my staff, paid from public funds, are governed in this respect by the general principles of conduct which apply to civil servants. Approval would be sought from the appropriate senior officer, depending on the level of the person concerned and the nature of the appointment.

Ministerial Changes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list by year to date since June 1979 *(a)* the number of ministerial changes in Her Majesty's Government *(b)* the Departments concerned and *(c)* the names of the hon. and right hon. Members concerned.

The Prime Minister: Information on changes of Ministers can be found in the Cabinet Office publication "List of Ministerial Responsibilities", published annually at the end of the summer recess. Copies are available in the Library of the House. Further editions are issued during the year if there are substantial changes in ministerial appointments.

British Rail

Mr. Adley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will obtain a copy of the speech by the chairman of British Rail on 8 January; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have a copy of Sir Robert Reid's speech, and urge all hon. Members to read it. It is an excellent account of the progress made by British Rail during the period that he has been chairman. In that time investment has doubled in real terms to a level which Sir Robert describes as

"about the maximum rate we can physically manage".

British Rails's need for subsidy has halved as the number of passengers has reached the highest level since 1960.

As Sir Robert Reid says, British Rail is now

"in an unprecedented position of strength".

He points to the essential part played in bringing about this change by the Government's action since 1983 in setting the board clear objectives.

General Practitioners

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister to what extent the remuneration and conditions of service being offered to general practitioners in rural areas will improve primary care in those areas in future.

The Prime Minister: All the changes to the GPs' contract will benefit patients in rural areas. Doctors will be encouraged through their terms of service and remuneration system to raise standards and extend services. In particular more care will be available for the very young and elderly patients. There will be greater emphasis on health promotion and the prevention of disease for all patients. New services will include minor surgery and regular check-ups. Overall the family doctor services will be more responsive to the needs of patients.

Top Salaries Review Body

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister what restrictions are placed upon the top salaries review body in respect of the level of its recommendations.

The Prime Minister: The top salaries review body is an independent body. It takes evidence from the Government and other interested parties and makes recommendations which it thinks appropriate. The TSRB's report is considered by the Government who then decide whether to accept or modify its recommendations.

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will list the documents made available by her office to the Hughes inquiry into the Kincora boys' home;

(2) if she will take steps to establish a Cabinet Office inquiry into the allegations of Mr. Colin Wallace and Captain Fred Holroyd, retired, concerning illegal activities by the security forces and other Crown employees in Northern Ireland since 1972;

(3) if she will establish a Cabinet Office inquiry into illegal activities by Crown employees documented in the book "War Without Honour", and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received from January 1989 to the present date concerning the Kincora boys' home.

The Prime Minister: The representations I have received about Kincora have been mainly from the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends.

Captain Fred Holroyd

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she has received a copy of the book "War Without Honour" by Fred Holroyd; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will acquire for the library of 10 Downing street a copy of the book "War Without Honour", by Fred Holroyd.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates were the allegations of Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd relating to events in Northern Ireland last considered.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Wallace and Mr. Holroyd have made a number of allegations in relation to Northern Ireland, some of which have been raised in the House and in correspondence by the hon. Gentleman and others. In the course of dealing with this parliamentary business, Departments have examined relevant matters on numerous occasions.

Article 100A

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the use by the Commission of article 100A of the treaty for the purpose of directives.

The Prime Minister: I do not plan to do so.

Whales

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make representations to the Japanese Prime Minister about the slaughter of minke whales by Japanese whalers in the Antarctic.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* The Japanese Government are well aware of our strong views on this matter, as was evident from my discussions with Prime Minister Kaifu.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many outside accountancy firms are employed by his Department; whether such employment is subject to guidelines; and whether he takes steps before employing an accountancy firm to discover whether that firm has been censured by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors in their inquiries under the Companies Act.

Mr. Cope: Forty-three outside accountancy firms are employed; such firms are invited to tender for the provision of advisory services on the basis of their suitability to provide the relevant advice. In making such appointments inquiries are carried out as necessary and, where appropriate, in the light of advice given by Her Majesty's Treasury on the appointment of consultants.

RUC Reserve

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average length of service of all full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers presently serving in the force.

Mr. Cope: The average length of service of all full-time reserve officers presently serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary is six years.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost to the Exchequer, taking into account all factors including their position in respect of the police pension fund, of employing *(a)* a full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officer and *(b)* a regular Royal Ulster Constabulary officer.

Mr. Cope: The annual cost to the Police Authority of employing a full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve constable or a Royal Ulster Constabulary constable varies according to the age of the officer and his length of service. The estimated annual average cost of employing an 18-year-old constable in the full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve is £18,624 and £18,068 for a constable in the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The corresponding figures for officers with six years' service are £23,592 for the reserve constable and £23,837 for the regular officer. The difference in cost is accounted for by higher employer's national insurance contributions payable in respect of the full-time reserve constable who is not in a contracted-out pension scheme; and the fact that his salary increases at a slower rate than that of a regular constable. These costs represent basic salary, Royal Ulster Constabulary allowance, flat rate rent allowance, average overtime and employer's national insurance contributions and, in the case of the Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officer with six years' service, the gratuity payable on completion of his second contract.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the longest period of service of any full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officer; how many Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers have served for more than 12 years; how many between nine and 12 years; and how many between six and nine years.

Mr. Cope: The longest period of service of any full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officer is 17 years nine months: 256 full-time reserve officers have served for more than 12 years; 947 have service between nine and 12 years; and 685 have served between six and nine years.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers; and if he will express this as a percentage of all Royal Ulster Constabulary constables who normally carry out their duties in uniform.

Mr. Cope: At 31 December 1989 the total number of full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers was 3,018. This represents approximately 28 per cent. of all constables in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Royal Ulster Constabulary full and part-time reserve.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Government have *(a)* to provide access for full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers to the police pension fund and *(b)* to approve the payment of an employers' contribution to a private pension scheme for full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers.

Mr. Cope: None.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Government have to incorporate full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers into the regular force after a specific period of service.

Mr. Cope: None.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what system of negotiation, conciliation or arbitration exists for full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers; and what are the rules under which this system operates.

Mr. Cope: There is no formal system of negotiation, conciliation or arbitration but before the Secretary of State makes regulations about pay and conditions of service for the RUC reserve he consults the Police Authority, the Chief Constable and the Police Association.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers are *(a)* precluded from negotiating their conditions of employment, pay, pension, etc. under the normal terms of industrial relations legislation and *(b)* excluded from the joint police negotiating board of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope: RUC reserve officers, like their fellow officers in the regular force, do not come within the terms of industrial relations legislation. The RUC reserve is not included within the remit of the police negotiating board for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Government have any plans to replace or modify the present short-term contract system of employment for full-time Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers.

Mr. Cope: No.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Government intend to replace or amend the system of negotiation, conciliation or arbitration for Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve officers.

Mr. Cope: No.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Brooke: The Government are committed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and to the principles it embodies. As recorded in paragraph 29 of the report of the review of the working of the conference:

> "If in the future it were to appear that the objectives of the Agreement could be more effectively served by changes in the scope and nature of the working of the Conference, consistent with the basic provisions and spirit of the Agreement, the two Governments would be ready in principle to consider such changes".

Captain Fred Holroyd

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will acquire for the library of the Northern Ireland Office a copy of the book "War Without Honour" by Fred Holroyd.

Mr. Brooke: The Northern Ireland Office already possesses copies of Mr. Holroyd's book.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now allow independent inspection on Privy Councillor terms of the records of his office relating to contacts with Fred Holroyd.

Mr. Brooke: No.

Minister's Car (Theft)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any Government papers were included in the recent theft from the motor car being used by the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: None.

ENERGY

Energy Exploration, Doncaster and Rotherham

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the sites in the Doncaster and Rotherham areas that are due to be drilled by geologists seeking oil and gas.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Proposals to drill for oil and gas are subject to approval by my right hon. Friend. No such proposals have been submitted to him by current holders of petroleum licences in the Doncaster and Rotherham areas.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will name the 30 companies that have been granted Government licences to explore in the Doncaster and Rotherham areas for oil and gas.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There are 19 companies with interests in petroleum licences within a radius of five miles from Doncaster and Rotherham.

These are as follows:

Exploration Licence EXL 050
Fina Petroleum Development Ltd*, Blackland Exploration Ltd, Eaglestone Petroleum Ltd
EXL 100
Clyde Expro plc*, Phillips Petroleum Co UK Ltd
EXL 138
Sovereign Oil & Gas plc*, Coalite Group plc, LASMO (TNS) Ltd, Union Texas Petroleum Ltd
EXL 182
Teredo Petroleum plc*, East Midland Oil & Gas Ltd, Croft Exploration Ltd
EXL 183
Pentex Oil Ltd*
Production Licence PL 161
Kelt UK Ltd*, Candecca Resources plc, Elf Oil & Gas (UK) Ltd, James Finlay plc, Marinex Exploration Ltd, Pict Petroleum plc
* denotes operator

Of these, EXL 182 and EXL 183 were awarded in the third onshore licensing round, announced on 14 December 1989.

Condensate Boilers

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimates he has made of the reduction of carbon dioxide from condensate boilers.

Mr. Peter Morrison: It is very difficult to give a precise figure as performance of gas condensing boilers used in space heating applications varies according to specific circumstances. However the average efficiency of a new non-condensing boiler in the domestic sector can be taken as 70 per cent. and that of a condensing boilef as 85 per cent. leading to a reduction of the CO_2 emitted of 18 per cent.

Renewable Energy

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to re-evaluate the role of *(a)* renewable energy technologies and *(b)* combined heat and power and biomass energy production in the context of environmental damage from fossil fuels.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Energy paper No. 55 laid out proposals for the development of renewable energy technologies and these are reviewed annually. An initial assessment of the contribution to reducing the impact of greenhouse emissions from a range of energy technologies, including CHP and biomass, was included in the United Kingdom study for the inter-governmental panel on climate change. This report "An Evaluation of Energy-Related Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Measures to Ameliorate Them" was lodged in the Library of the House last November and will be published shortly as a

Department of Energy paper. Further re-evaluation may be required as more information on greenhouse emissions becomes available.

Plutonium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action he is taking to assess the current location of all plutonium created in United Kingdom electricity board magnox reactors since the nuclear programme began.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the details of plutonium produced at Britain's civil nuclear power stations which were published by my Department on 5 December 1989. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mining Subsidence

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he has any proposals to change the present arrangements for appeals against decisions by British Coal on claims concerning the effects of mining subsidence brought by individuals and organisations against that company;

(2) if he will set up local arbitration panels to resolve all claims concerning mining subsidence in respect of private dwellings, and up to £50,000, index-linked, in respect of other property.

Mr. Baldry: In line with the recommendations of the Waddilove report, the Government, in the White Paper "The Repair and Compensation System for Coal Mining Subsidence Damage", Cm. 235, undertook to review in November 1990 the procedures for resolving disputes over subsidence damage. In view of the Government's intention to legislate at the earliest practicable opportunity, this review has been brought forward and is presently under way.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the number of mining subsidence claims, by coalfield or British Coal administrative region, currently being processed by British Coal.

Mr. Baldry: Details of British Coal's subsidence claims for 1987-88 are contained in an annual report to the Secretary of State for Energy, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. I hope that the annual report for 1988-89 will be available shortly.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy further to his answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras of 8 January, *Official Report*, column *475*, if he will give the output capacity of each of the gas-fired projects listed together with the likely annual gas consumption in each case.

Mr. Wakeham: The applications from the CEGB for section 2 consent under the Electric Lighting Act 1909 are for gas-fired stations, of the following proposed capacities:

	Megawatt
Killingholme A	1000
Little Barford	700
Killingholme (PowerGen)	700-1000
Rye House	700

The capacities of the stations proposed by independent generators are matters for them.

The projects are at early planning or development stages and gas contracts are in most cases not yet in place.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how many applications for consent to build gas-fired power stations have been received but not yet granted;

(2) whether he has refused any applications for consent to build a gas-fired power station.

Mr. Wakeham: I have received four applications from the CEGB for my consent to construct combined cycle gas turbine power stations. I shall announce my decisions on these applications in due course.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received about the absence of any obligation to supply electricity once electricity supply is privatised.

Mr. Wakeham: The area boards will continue to have an obligation to offer terms for a supply. Every customer will be able to find a supplier and regulations will continue to prescribe the quality and safety of supplies. Licence conditions on all suppliers will ensure current standards of security. I regularly receive correspondence and hold meetings with individuals, trade associations and other interested bodies on all aspects of the workings of our proposals for the privatised electricity market.

Gas Leaks

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are current levels of natural gas leakages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 26 October last.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what research his Department has commissioned or proposes into the incidence of natural gas leakages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department has already published estimates of United Kingdom methane emissions, including those from natural gas leakage. Discussions on further work with interested parties are in hand.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps are being taken to reduce overall levels of carbon dioxide emissions within the natural gas industry in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The natural gas industry itself is responsible for only a small proportion of total carbon dioxide emissions. British Gas puts a substantial engineering and R&D effort into technologies to improve the efficiency with which gas is used, thereby helping to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions of its customers.

Natural Gas

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much natural gas he estimates will be used for the production of electricity in the United Kingdom in 1995 and 2000.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The amount of gas used for the production of electricity in the United Kingdom in 1995 and 2000 will depend on many factors. The attractions of gas to power generators together with the availability of competitive UKCS gas supplies seeking new markets suggest that gas burn in electricity generation will increase in the 1990s.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the average cost of producing natural gas from the United Kingdom continental shelf; and what information he has as to the cost of the most economic method so far recorded of gasifying coal.

Mr. Peter Morrison: To date some £12 billion has been spent in developing our natural gas resources on the continental shelf and some 260 billion therms of gas have been produced. This gives a simple average cost over the past two decades, excluding exploration costs and a return on capital, of some 5·0 pence per therm.

The Watt committee report number 20, published last year with financial support from my Department, provides a comprehensive assessment of the costs of coal gasification. The production costs of the cheapest method are about twice the cost of the coal feedstock used. The average price of coal purchased by large United Kingdom industrial consumers in the third quarter of 1989 was 15 pence per therm.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is prepared to authorise connection with the European gas grid to supplement gas supplies from the United Kingdom continental shelf.

Mr. Peter Morrison: It is for the private sector to bring forward proposals for the financing and construction of a connection with the European gas grid. Known reserves of natural gas in the UKCS are, as presently assessed, capable of meeting the needs of the United Kingdom gas market competitively for the foreseeable future. The Government will give full consideration to any proposal to build a marine pipeline link to the European gas grid on the merits of the case.

Underground Miners

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many men were working underground in mines operated by British Coal in 1978-79 and each succeeding year.

Mr. Wakeham: The numbers of underground wage earners on British Coal's colliery books at the end of the following years were:

Year	*'000*
1978-79	185·1
1979-80	185·8
1980-81	181·0
1981-82	171·9
1982-83	164·4
1983-84	147·5
1984-85	139·2
1985-86	113·7
1986-87	91·1
1987-88	74·6
1988-89	68·7

HOME DEPARTMENT

Traffic Wardens

63. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the main role of traffic wardens.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The main role of traffic wardens is to assist the police in the enforcement of parking regulations.

Fixed Penalties

64. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to alter the fixed penalty level for illegal parking.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on 20 December 1989 at column *275*.

Centrally Funded Information

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish details of centrally funded information prepared by his Department, or by the Central Office of Information on his Department's behalf, supplied to police forces in England and Wales, in each year since 1983; and if he will indicate the languages of publication for this material.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Following is a list of the publications produced by the Home office public relations branch since 1 April 1986 for issue to police forces in England and Wales. Where the publication was produced in other languages, as well as English, this is shown. Details of publications for earlier years and of those which were produced without the assistance of the public relations branch are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Description	*Title*
Crime Prevention	
Burglary/Theft Poster	Watch Out An Open Invitation
Autocrime Posters	Who Forgot Give a Thief an Inch Police Warning Don't Make Your Picnic Police Warning
Vandalism/Juvenile Posters	Suddenly It's Not So Funny Suddenly It Comes Home to You Do You Know Vandalism is Pointless
Bicycle/Motor Cycle Posters	Coded Cycle Lock It or Lose It Lock & Chain

Description	Title
Theft Posters	Thieves Do a Roaring Trade Preventing Office Theft By the Time Game Set & Snatch
Bogus Callers Poster	Someone at the Door
Bomb Warning Poster	Bombs . . . Be Alert
Xmas Theft Posters	An Unlocked Car Keep a Hold on Your Bag
Autocrime Posters (Weatherproof)	You are at Risk There Has Been a Spate Car Thieves Operate Have You Locked Your Car
Home Security Booklet	How to Protect Your Home
Home Security Leaflet	How to Protect Your Home (Magpie)
Home Security Leaflet	As Safe as Houses
Home Security Leaflet	Coded for Keeps
Vandalism Leaflet	Facing up to Vandalism
Armed Robbery Leaflet	Protection Against Armed Robbery
Caravan and Boat Leaflets	Keep Your Caravan Safe Keep Your Boat Crimetight
Autocrime Leaflet	Your Car is at Risk
Bogus Callers Leaflet	Knock Knock
Leaflet for Farmers	The Big Steal Is On
Holiday Advice Leaflet	You Can't Take it With You
Video Theft Leaflet	Video/Theft Alert
Retail Theft Booklet	Profit from Prevention
Crime Leaflet	Crime Prevention Makes Sense (Punjabi, Hindi, Gujerati)
Crime Leaflet	Crime Prevention Makes Sense (Bengali, Urdu)
Booklets for Industry	Design Solutions Autocrime A Guide to the Security Homes
Community Programme	The Community Programme
Violent Crime Leaflet	Violent Crime Police Advice for Women
Practical Ways to Crack Crime	1st Edition 2nd Edition 3rd Edition
Practical Ways to Crack Crime	The Family Guide
Crime Leaflet	Police Advice on Preventing Crime
Neighbourhood Watch/ Homewatch Material	A Guide to Community Action Incident Report Card Window Sticker Burglars Beware Sticker Logo Sticker Door Sticker
Xmas Theft Sticker	Keep a Hold on Your Bag
Cycle Coding/Locking Material	Lock and Chain—Bookmark Coded Cycle—Sticker Have You Locked Your Bike—Lamppost Sticker
4D Special Agent Material	Bookmark Sticker Membership Card
Door Sticker	Stop! Chain the Door
Anti Burglary Sticker	Burglars Beware
Autocrime Sticker	Watch Out
Jigsaws	Police Jigsaw
Pack	Peter Pan
Pack	Protecting Your Home (Magpie)
Booklet	Crime Prevention Publicity Catalogue
Booklet	Crime Prevention News A Quarterly Magazine
Criminal Justice	Working Paper 1986
Criminal Justice	Key Statistics
Crime Booklet	Tackling Crime
Crime Leaflets	Tackling Crime
Miscellaneous	
Shotgun Booklet	Shotguns—A Guide to the Law
Gun Permit Leaflet	Gun Permits for Visitors
Gun Clubs Leaflet	Approval of Gun Clubs
Gun Sense Leaflet	Gun Sense is Good Sense
Firearms Folder	Firearms Buy in Scheme
Witness in Court Leaflets	Witness in Court
Victims of Crime Leaflet	Victims of Crime
Knives Amnesty Poster x 3	Amnesty for Knives
Crossbow Leaflet	Crossbows Act
Interception Leaflet	Interception of Telecommunications
Firearms Leaflet	Firearms—Changes in the Law
Firearms Poster	Amnesty—Firearms
Security Leaflet	Complaints Against Security
Booklet	Police National Computer Unit
Booklet	Scientific Research and Development Branch
Booklet	Civil Protection
Booklet	Protect and Survive
Leaflet	Complaints Against the Police (Welsh, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujerati, Hindi, Chinese)
Leaflet	The Police are Ignorant

Description	*Title*
Booklet	Homes Security Booklet
Leaflet	The Work of the Coroner
Leaflet	The New Fixed Penalty Scheme
Leaflet	The Forensic Science Service
Police Recruitment	
Poster	Undergraduates
Poster	Special Constabulary
Poster	Get Yourself a Real Job
Poster	A Job That Earns Respect
Poster	Serving the Community
Poster	Preserving the Peace
Booklet	Police Career—Graduate
Booklet	Police Officer
Booklet	Special Constabulary
Booklet	The Police Staff College Bramshill
Leaflet	The Police—A Career for Ex-Servicemen and Women
Leaflet	Police Special Reserve
Leaflet	Police Ethnic Recruitment
Leaflet	Police Cadets
Card	Police Recruitment Pay Scale
Card	Police Force Address List
Schools Pack	The Story of our Police

Disclosure of Information

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the disclosure of information from the electoral register without the consent or knowledge of the voter; whether he has any plans to introduce regulations to allow voters to consent to the sale of their name and address; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During 1989 we received two letters from members of the public and one from an hon. Member about disclosure of information from the electoral register without the elector's consent. We have no plans to introduce regulations to require the consent of electors to the sale of their names and addresses. The operation of the electoral registration system requires that all the information in the register should be freely available to the public. The provisions of the Representation of the People Regulations 1986 governing the publication and supply of the register reflect this fact and the conclusion that its use by commercial organisations could not effectively be prevented.

Police Assaults (Wales)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the figures, on a force by force basis, of police officers who suffered violent assaults over the recent Christmas and new year period in Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constables concerned that, during the period from 22 December 1989 up to and including 1 January 1990, the numbers of police officers in Wales who were physically attacked were as follows:

	Number
Gwent	8
Dyfed Powys	5
North Wales	19
South Wales	33

Cigarette Sales

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government propose to take to enforce the law on the prohibition of selling cigarettes to children under the age of 16 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The enforcement of the law is a matter for trading standards officers and the police. However, we are concerned that the prohibition on sales of tobacco to children should be effective and are currently considering what steps might be taken to strengthen the law in this area.

Birmingham Six

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusion he has reached as a result of the meeting he had this week with the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs about the Birmingham Six.

Mr. Waddington: I explained to Mr. Collins when I met him on 8 January that I was giving very careful consideration to further material which had been submitted to me on behalf of the Birmingham Six. I will decide as soon as possible whether that further material justifies any intervention on my part.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet members of the European Parliament Committee set up to consider the soundness of the conviction of the Birmingham Six.

Mr. Waddington: As I said in my reply to a question from my hon. Friend on 30 November 1989, I understand that the Legal Affairs Committee of the European Parliament has not yet decided whether to conduct an inquiry into the case of the Birmingham Six, and if so, what its terms of reference should be. We believe that it would be inappropriate for the European Parliament to inquire into the convictions of the Birmingham Six, which we regard as a matter wholly outside the Parliament's competence.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has now had an opportunity of considering fresh evidence presented to him before Christmas by lawyers representing the Birmingham Six; and if he has reached a conclusion.

Mr. Waddington: I am considering very carefully the further material which has been presented to me by a solicitor on behalf of the Birmingham Six, and will decide as soon as possible whether it justifies any intervention on my part.

Mr. Albert Baker

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is yet able to make a further statement as to the case of Mr. Albert Baker and his request for a transfer to a prison in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Baker was informed in a petition reply dated 24 November 1989 that, because of the risk to his own safety if transferred to Northern Ireland, it had been decided to refuse his latest request.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent petitions have been received from Mr. Albert Baker, Her Majesty's prison Full Sutton, No. 241254.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Baker last petitioned on 12 September 1989, when he wrote about the withdrawal of his special category status in 1973 following his transfer from a prison in Northern Ireland. A reply was sent on 22 November.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates, and for what reasons, Mr. Albert Baker, Her Majesty's prison Full Sutton, No. 241254, was held in a punishment unit.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Baker was removed from normal association under the terms of prison rule 43 when, on reception at Full Sutton prison on 23 November 1989, he refused to wear prison clothing. When he agreed to do so on 2 December, he was placed on ordinary location.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he intends to reply to the correspondence sent to him by the hon. Member for Brent, East and from Mr. Colin Wallace in August 1989 concerning the case of Mr. Colin Wallace; and if he will make a statement as to the reason for the delay in replying.

Mr. John Patten: I hope to be able to reply shortly to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and to Mr. Colin Wallace. It has not been possible to send earlier substantive replies pending completion of our consideration of relevant material contained in Mr. Paul Foot's book, "Who Framed Colin Wallace".

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has concluded his consideration of the conviction of Mr. Colin Wallace for manslaughter in the light of evidence of a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice set out in the book entitled, "Who Framed Colin Wallace", by Paul Foot, referred to in his written reply of 15 May 1989, *Official Report*, column 96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes shortly to complete his consideration of the material contained in Mr. Foot's book.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will institute an inquiry into the conduct of the Sussex police force when investigating the murder charge against Mr. Colin Wallace in the light of allegations of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice made in the book, "Who Framed Colin Wallace", by Mr. Paul Foot and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I will shortly write to the hon. Member.

Replies to Correspondence

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken to reply to correspondence sent from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* the public.

Mr. Waddington: The average time taken in my Department during the fourth quarter of 1989 to reply to letters to Ministers and to the Secretary to the Immigration and Nationality Board, the great majority of which were from hon. Members, was 37 days. Information is not held centrally on the time taken to reply to letters from members of the public.

Prison Diets

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of Her Majesty's prisons in the United Kingdom supply diets in accordance with religious belief on a regular basis; and what preparations are being made by prisons to supply such diets, on request, on a regular basis;

(2) if he will issue instructions to the governors of Her Majesty's prisons to make necessary arrangements to enable prisoners who wish on religious grounds to eat particular diets, to be able to receive such diets on a regular basis; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations he has received over the past year, including from those detained in prison, about difficulties in obtaining halal and kosher food on a regular basis.

Mr. Mellor: Other than the annual census of religious registration in prisons each February, details are not recorded centrally of inmates who belong to religious faiths or of their location. In total about 144,000 meals are served daily to inmates in prison service establishments in England and Wales, of which about 6,500 (5 per cent.) are estimated to be variations from the normal dietary on account of religious belief.

All meals are prepared according to centrally determined dietary scales designed to meet published nutritional standards. Each establishment prepared special meals and also varies its standard menus to take into account recognised food preferences.

The number of meals served each day to certain minority faiths is estimated as follows:

4,700 for Muslims
1,000 for Jews
400 for Sikhs
300 for Hindus
160 for Buddhists

Halal meat may be purchased locally on an occasional basis in recognition of those Muslims who do not wish to eat non-halal meat. Substitutes for bacon and pork are provided and vegetarian margarine is issued. Alternatively, Muslims may apply either for a vegetarian diet or a vegan diet which excludes all animal and dairy products.

A kosher diet is not provided in prison service establishments in England and Wales. The arrangements are that substitutes for bacon and pork are issued in their place and kosher margarine is issued in lieu of the ordinary margarine. Orthodox Jews may apply for a vegan diet if this is considered preferable.

The Home Office is engaged in ongoing discussions with the Muslim and Jewish authorities as part of the continuous review of the facilities which are offered to prisoners belonging to these faiths.

Mr. Rupert Taylor

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis on the disciplinary proceedings taken against the Metropolitan police constable, found by a High Court jury on 5 December 1989, to have planted cannabis on Mr. Rupert Taylor.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. I understand that following the award to Mr. Taylor an investigation into the circumstances of his case is being carried out by an officer from the Thames Valley police under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority. No decision has yet been taken as to whether any officer connected with the case will face disciplinary proceedings.

In order for an officer to be found guilty at a disciplinary hearing the offence must be proved beyond reasonable doubt and not, as in civil proceedings, on the balance of probabilities.

Detective Superintendent John Moore

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands as to when Detective Superintendent John Moore retired; and what his age and length of service were at the time of retirement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

West Midlands Police

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands as to where and in what capacity *(a)* Detective Superintendent Alan Watson, *(b)* Detective Sergeant Michael French, *(c)* Detective Constable John Brand, *(d)* Detective Constable Thomas Sutcliffe, *(e)* Police Constable George Cole, *(f)* Detective Sergeant David Millichamp, *(g)* Detective Constable Terence Woodwiss, *(h)* Detective Constable Douglas Bell, *(i)* Detective Sergeant Richard Bryant, *(j)* Detective Constable Colin Morris, *(k)* Detective Constable Frederick Jennings, and *(l)* Police Constable William Coltey are still serving.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Detective Superintendent David Palmer-Hall

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if during his service with the Metropolitan police, Detective Superintendent David Palmer-Hall was seconded for work with the Jordanian Government.

Mr. Waddington: No.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Metropolitan police as to how long and in what capacities Mr. David Palmer-Hall was employed by the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Mr. Palmer-Hall joined the Metropolitan police in 1950 and retired in 1980. He served in Special Branch from 1952 until his retirement.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from the chief constables of Surrey and Hampshire on the progress of their investigations into the disappearance over 24 hours of former Detective Superintendent David Palmer-Hall.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable of Surrey, whose force was in charge of the inquiry into the disappearance, that the police have completed their investigation and it has not revealed any criminal activity relating to former Detective Superintendent Palmer-Hall's brief absence from home.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what employment Mr. David Palmer-Hall has had with Her Majesty's Government since 1982.

Mr. Waddington: There is no record that Mr. Palmer-Hall was employed by the Home Office during the relevant period. My Department does not maintain records of employment in other Departments.

Sikh Priests

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement setting out his policy in respect of priests of the Sikh religion applying to enter the United Kingdom for the purposes of carrying out religious duties for a specific period; and whether the policy has been discussed with the Government of India.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The provisions in the immigration rules (HC. 388) for the admission of ministers of religion apply to all religions.

Civil Emergency Centres

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he has taken of developments in East-West relations in reviewing his policy on the building of civil emergency centres by county and district councils.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* The Government keep under review their civil defence planning assumptions in the light of the possible threat of hostilities. Such assumptions must take into account military capabilities as well as likely intentions and the climate of relations between East and West. In the present rapidly changing situation it would be premature and irresponsible to reduce our basic preparedness for ensuring the protection of the population and the continuity of government in war.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many outstanding applications from local authorities over television concessionary

licences are currently being considered by the National Television Licensing Records Office in Bristol and how many of these were submitted *(a)* six months ago and over, and *(b)* three months ago and over;

(2) what is the average time the National Television Licensing Records Office in Bristol aims to deal with applications from local authorities for concessionary television licences on behalf of their residents.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* Of the 33,000 schemes submitted since the regulations were changed in 1988 25,000 have been dealt with, a further 4,000 will shortly receive their licences and 4,000 remain unresolved pending further information which has been requested from the local authorities concerned. Statistics of waiting times are not readily available, but many original applications took a long time because of their number and the need for further detailed inquiries. NTVLRO now aims to resolve new applications within three weeks of receiving all the necessary information from the local authority concerned.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many representations have been received from local authorities in the past 18 months regarding difficulties over concessionary television licences being granted to those living in old-age pension accommodation;

(2) if he, or any Minister in his Department, will receive a deputation from the Walsall metropolitan borough council over the difficulties it is having in obtaining television concessionary licences for residents living in old-age pension designated accommodation.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* Between the change in the regulations in May 1988 and the end of December 1989 we received 83 letters from local authorities, 68 forwarded by hon. Members, about the concessionary television licence scheme. Ministers also received two delegations from local authorities.

I would be happy to consider any letter from, or on behalf of Walsall metropolitan borough council, setting out why a meeting would be useful.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the annual cost of granting the concessionary television licence available to sheltered housing residents to every pensioner in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* Reduction of the annual licence fee for all pensioner households to the £5 concessionary rate would cause a revenue loss estimated at £365 million a year. To make up the shortfall the fee for all other colour licence payers would have to increase from £66 to £98.

Vehicle Smoke Tests

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police prosecutions, under the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations, of vehicles producing excessive smoke, have taken place in each of the last five years.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* The available information is given in the table for 1985 and 1986. The emission of smoke proceedings were brought under the Motor Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations 1978.

Proceedings at Magistrates courts in England and Wales.

	1985	*1986*
Emission of smoke etc. causing danger	286	338
Other emission of smoke offences	389	309

Sources: Offences relating to motor vehicles England and Wales 1985, 1986 Supplementary tables. Published by the Home Office.

Since 1987, the statistics collected no longer separately identify offences of emission of smoke. Since October 1986, vehicles defect offences can also be dealt with by the use of fixed penalties, but emission of smoke offences are not shown separately in these statistics.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Official Duties

48. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list his official duties for 15 January.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: This morning I had meetings with the Prime Minister and other colleagues, and with Duchy of Lancaster officials. This afternoon I shall spend time attending to Duchy business.

Bolton

49. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next intends to visit Bolton.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I last visited Bolton in November 1988. I have no plans to visit again in the immediate future, but I am always willing to come and support my hon. Friend.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Order Paper

58. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what measures he is considering to reduce the amount of material printed on the Order Paper.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: A significant reduction in the average size of the daily Vote bundle has already been achieved as a result of the new arrangements introduced last April for printing early-day motions. That is expected to result in at least 4,000 fewer pages being printed each year, and in savings in production costs of at least £300,000 a year. I have now also initiated a general examination of the form of the Vote bundle, including the Order Paper, and if my hon. Friend has any specific suggestions for reducing further the amount of material printed, I hope that he will not hesitate to put them to the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

Prime Minister's Press Secretary

59. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will establish facilities in the House for the Prime Minister's press secretary.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no plans to do so.

Public Accounts Committee

60. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any plans to relieve overcrowding in the Committee Room Corridor prior to and during sittings of the Public Accounts Committee.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am aware of the great interest that both the press and the public have shown in sittings of the Public Accounts Committee. I have asked the authorities of the House to ensure that those waiting for admittance to the Committee do not impede access along the Committee Corridor.

Souvenir Kiosk

61. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what were the takings at the House of Commons kiosk in *(a)* the four weeks to Christmas 1989 and *(b)* the year to 31 December; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Kiosk takings for the four-week period to Christmas 1989 were £207,647 and the figure for the 12-month period to Christmas was £645,325. Both amounts include VAT.

Parking (Disabled)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make more car parking facilities available in the precincts of the House for those who are disabled including staff employed by right hon. and hon. Members.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I advised the hon. Member on 26 October, column *524*, the parking arrangements for disabled drivers were confirmed by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee in January 1988. At that time it was found that the spaces available were sufficient to meet the requirement, but if the hon. Member will let me have details of any specific difficulties being experienced, I shall invite the Sub-Committee to consider them.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

11. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to make any changes in the level of financial support given to the provision of British Rail local services.

Mr. Portillo: The Government show their firm commitment to maintaining essential local services by paying substantial subsidies to British Rail, amounting to some £500 million in the current financial year. By 1993 Network SouthEast should no longer require revenue subsidy, but we shall still be paying well over £300 million per year in today's prices to subsidise provincial rail services.

16. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Rail; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Parkinson: I plan to meet the chairman of British Rail on 17 January when we will discuss a variety of railway matters.

33. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss matters of safety.

Mr. Portillo: We expect to receive next month the chairman's first report on the implementation of Sir Anthony Hidden's recommendations following the Clapham junction accident. My right hon. Friend hopes to discuss this report with the chairman soon afterwards.

Channel Tunnel

12. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on plans for the high-speed railway line to the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Parkinson: British Rail is now negotiating a detailed agreement with its joint venture partners and developing its plans for the Channel tunnel rail link. It aims to introduce a Bill for the new line later this year.

19. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to improve transport links between Yorkshire and the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: Improvements to the M1, A1(M) and A1 will upgrade links to the Channel tunnel from Yorkshire and the north-east via the M25 and M20. British Rail published its proposals on 14 December, and a copy has been sent to all hon. Members.

29. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has met the chairman of British Rail to discuss plans for international rail services through the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend has discussed a wide range of issues at his meetings with the chairman of British Rail. These have included the board's plans for international rail services through the Channel tunnel.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on plans for the high-speed rail link to the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail is now negotiating a detailed agreement with its joint venture partners and developing its plans for the Channel tunnel rail link. It aims to introduce a Bill for the new line later this year.

Rural Transport

13. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about rural transport.

Mr. Portillo: I have received very few recent representations about rural transport services. Bus mileage in country areas has increased since bus deregulation. The investment in British Rail's provincial sector is such that we shall shortly be in the position where four fifths of the rolling stock has been renewed.

14. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the present state of rural transport.

Mr. Portillo: Bus mileage outside London and the metropolitan areas has increased by some 21 per cent. since bus deregulation, with some 83 per cent. run commercially. The investment in British Rail's provincial sector is such that we shall shortly be in the position where four fifths of the rolling stock has been renewed.

Urban Transport

15. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department is taking to assist inner urban areas.

Mr. Parkinson: Our measures to assist inner urban areas include financing local road schemes through transport supplementary grant; constructing trunk roads where appropriate; providing grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 for public transport; and consolidating the regeneration of London's docklands with the approval of the Jubilee line extension.

Urban Traffic

17. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about traffic congestion in urban areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I receive regular representations on the problem of congestion in urban areas, particularly in London where it is most acute. I have recently published a discussion document "Traffic in London" inviting comments on my proposed initiatives for tackling congestion in London. The proposals aim to improve the quality and capacity of the capital's transport network to benefit public and private transport users, residents and businesses.

Electronic Road Pricing

18. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been undertaken by his Department as to the feasibility of introducing electronic road pricing in the United Kingdom's major cities.

Mr. Parkinson: My Department monitors a wide range of measures for dealing with traffic congestion, including road pricing, and has undertaken some preliminary background work into the possible implications of introducing electronic road pricing in London.

35. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has arranged any surveys of public attitudes towards road pricing; and whether he has any plans to do so.

Mr. Atkins: No.

Bridge Operation

20. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's one-man bridge operation at night project.

Mr. McLoughlin: The first phase of the project has been completed and a second phase is being considered.

Coastguard Service

21. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek additional means to improve the efficiency of the coastguards and other search and rescue services along the north Devon coast and the Bristol channel.

Mr. McLoughlin: Following the closure of the coastguard centre at Hartland in December 1988, a number of measures have been taken in order to ensure that there is adequate provision of resources for maritime search and rescue in the area. The facilities available to Her Majesty's coastguard as the co-ordinating authority are equal to those in other areas of the United Kingdom coastline. The enhanced watch levels at Swansea have been maintained since the closure of the Hartland centre. Swansea now has a greater staff level than some centres which handle a larger number of incidents per annum.

London Regional Transport

22. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the chairman of London Regional Transport; and if he will discuss matters of safety.

Mr. Parkinson: I frequently meet the chairman of London Regional Transport and discuss various matters including safety.

32. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of London Regional Transport; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of London Regional Transport on 21 December. A range of issues was discussed.

London Buses

23. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on plans for the deregulation of buses in London.

Mr. Portillo: We are committed to the deregulation of bus services in London in the 1990s.

Marchioness

24. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement regarding progress of the inquiry into the collision involving the Marchioness and Bow Belle dredger on the River Thames.

Mr. McLoughlin: The inquiry into the collision involving the Marchioness and the Bow Belle has reached an advanced stage. It is expected that the inspector leading the inquiry will be in a position to submit his findings to the chief inspector of marine accidents very soon. The report of the chief inspector will then be published at the earliest practicable date.

Tyneside

25. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to visit Tyneside.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend visited Tyneside on 24 November 1989. I last visited it on 26 October 1989. We have no plans for further visits in the near future.

Motorway Delays

26. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how his Department measures the finiancial cost of delays on motorways; and what is the figure for the latest year.

Mr. Atkins: There is no way of making accurate estimates of the overall cost of delays on motorways. The Department does, however, use computer programs to assess the cost of traffic delays on particular stretches of motorway under specific conditions.

Underground Services (South-East London)

27. **Mr. Cartwright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning future plans for new underground railways serving south-east London.

Mr. Portillo: The Jubilee extension to docklands will improve accessibility to Southwark and Bermondsey. London Regional Transport is also considering further the case for extensions of the East London line and the docklands light railway to parts of south-east London.

Thames Riverbus

28. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the reduction in the Riverbus service on the Thames and on the levels of Government subsidy offered for this service.

Mr. Portillo: The Government have made a grant of £500,000 available to the consortium responsible for the riverbus service. The revisions to the service, which come into operation today, are intended, in the light of operating experience, to tailor the service more closely to demand. I am pleased that the plans are for a fast, frequent and reliable riverbus service on the River Thames.

Railway Stations

30. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a special grant to enable British Rail to staff rail stations that are currently unstaffed.

Mr. Portillo: No. Decisions on the staffing of individual stations are management matters for the board in the light of the overall objectives set by the Government and local requirements. Decisions on staffing levels at stations in the metropolitan counties are a matter for the local passenger transport executives. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has written to the hon. Member on this matter.

Traffic (London)

31. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any proposals to relieve traffic congestion in London.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to the House on 14 December 1989.

39. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on consultation to date following publication of the London assessment studies proposals in December 1989.

Mr. Atkins: Full public consultation is currently under way. The deadline for comments is 28 February 1990.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has sent copies of the London road assessment studies to the leaders of local community road action groups, as promised by him when he met the London Labour group of hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Copies of the consultants' reports have been supplied free of charge, to all representative local organisations which so far have been identified by hon. Members as being based within their constituencies.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on sending an official from his Department to meetings called by a borough council or a local community roads action group to explain his road option preferences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has informed each borough council that officials are able to attend one local authority-controlled meeting in their area and has asked them to nominate the venue. That programme is now being firmed up with the local authorities concerned.

Transport Supplementary Grant

34. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many local authority road schemes will be started next year with a transport supplementary grant.

Mr. Atkins: Local highways authorities have indicated that construction work on 74 major road schemes (each costing £1 million or more) which have been accepted for transport supplementary grant support will start in the financial year 1990-91.

A1

36. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the road safety benefits which could arise from dualling of the A1 throughout its length.

Mr. Atkins: Current traffic flows on the single carriageway sections of the A1 do not justify dualling throughout.

Road safety benefits are part of the criteria taken into account in the cost benefit analysis when decisions are made on which schemes to undertake. The safety and accident situation on the A1 in Northumberland, as with all trunk roads, is monitored continuously and checked.

M1 (Junction 21)

37. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the disruption at junction 21 of the M1.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave on 28 November 1989 at column *186*. The Department has since received two further representations.

East London Assessment Study

38. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what responses he has received to the east London assessment study stage 2 consultants' report.

Mr. Atkins: Comments are being received from a variety of sources, including right hon. and hon. Members, local authorities, interested groups, national organisations, and members of the public.

European Community Model Driving Licences

40. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the new-style European Community model driving licences will be introduced in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: The new-style European Community model driving licence will be issued from early April 1990 to drivers with a full ordinary driving entitlement due to come into force on or after 1 June 1990.

Existing driving licences will remain valid after that date—there will be no need for drivers to exchange them for the new-style licences.

Learner Drivers

41. **Mr. Samberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning changing the law governing the supervision of learner drivers.

Mr. Atkins: Over 200 representations have been received. These were taken into account in formulating the proposals contained in the consultation document to which I referred in my answer to a question from my hon. Friend on 20 December (*Official Report*, Volume 164, column *278*).

Road and Bridge Maintenance

42. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much spending on roads and bridge maintenance will increase in each of the next three years.

Mr. Atkins: For national roads, planned expenditure on the maintenance of roads and bridges for the current year and for each of the next three years is as follows:

	Capital maintenance £ million	*Current maintenance £ million*
1989-90	[1]337	[1]99
1990-91	412	120
1991-92	444	127
1992-93	448	135

[1] Forecast outturn.

The Government no longer make plans for local expenditure on highway maintenance. However, the standard spending assessment for local highway maintenance for 1990-91 will be £1,578 million, compared with the needs assessment of £1,478 million used in the 1989-90 rate support grant settlement.

Investment

43. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much will be invested in road and rail over the next three years.

Mr. Portillo: The figures requested are as follows:

£ billion

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*Total*
National roads[1] [2]	1·7	1·8	1·8	5·3
Rail[1] [3]	1·6	2·1	2·3	6·0

[1] Local authorities also invest in road and rail, including expenditure on structural maintenance of local roads which falls within authorities' current expenditure budgets. The level of investment undertaken is a matter for the authorities concerned. For 1990-91 estimates of probable investment in local roads and non-BR rail systems are over £950 million and over £60 million respectively.
[2] Including structural maintenance.
[3] British Rail and London Regional Transport. Future investment by London Regional Transport has not yet been allocated between rail and non-rail expenditure (which is currently running at £50 million per annum).

Priority Routes

44. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions he proposes to apply to his proposed red routes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The basis of our proposal is that there should be no stopping on the red routes during peak periods. Stopping, loading and unloading may be permitted at certain times at some strictly limited and clearly marked places where the flow of traffic would not be impeded. Consideration will be given to legitimate interests of frontages, and to the case for exemptions, which will need to be minimised. Final decisions will be taken in the light of consultation and a pilot scheme starting in summer 1990.

45. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road miles will be involved in the priority route network announced in December.

Mr. Atkins: The network proposed in the "Traffic in London" discussion document covers approximately 300 miles of roads.

Airports

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the percentage growth in passengers in the two years 1988 and 1989 in each United Kingdom airport handling more than 3 million passengers.

Mr. McLoughlin: The following is the information:

Millions of terminal passengers

	1987	*1988*	*Percentage increase*
Heathrow	34·743	37·510	8·0
Gatwick	19·381	20·744	7·0
Manchester	8·609	9·504	10·4
Glasgow	3·365	3·634	8·0

Millions of terminal passengers

	1988 (January-October)	*1989[1] (January-October)*	*Percentage increase*
Heathrow	31·763	33·472	5·4
Gatwick	18·452	18·763	1·7
Manchester	8·527	9·127	7·0
Glasgow	3·166	3·369	6·4

[1] Full year figures not yet available. 1988 period adjusted for comparison.
Source: Civil Aviation Authority.

Hydrography

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the payments made to the hydrographers' department for charts for the last five years by his Department: and if he will list the number of charts ordered by his Department for the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Vehicle Inspectorate Agency

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the vehicle inspectorate agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Atkins: When the Vehicle Inspectorate became an executive agency on 1 August 1988 it was set a key performance target to improve the cost efficiency of its

main activities by 3·7 per cent. over a two-year period from 1 April 1989. Full details of the inspectorate's 1989-90 financial performance and service targets are given in its business plan, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The targets for 1990-91 will be included in the next business plan, which should be available shortly. A copy of that plan will also be lodged with the Library.

London Assessment Studies

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many invitations to speak at public meetings on the London assessment studies have been received by his Department; and how many he has *(a)* accepted and *(b)* refused.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has informed each borough council that officials are able to attend one local authority-controlled meeting in their area and has asked them to nominate the venue. This programme is now being firmed up with the local authorities concerned. Groups asking for officials to attend other meetings are being referred to the local authorities concerned.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to which voluntary organisations his Department has sent free copies of the appropriate London assessment studies.

Mr. Atkins: Copies of the consultants' stage 2 reports have been supplied free of charge, to all representative local organisations that have been identified by Members as being based within their constituencies. Further requests for free copies submitted in that way will be actioned as they are received.

"The Road User and the Law"

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to implement the recommendations of the Government's White Paper "The Road User and the Law"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Responsible road user behaviour is fostered by effective and fair traffic laws. We are currently consulting on detailed aspects of the White Paper proposals with a view to introducing legislation as soon as time is available.

BBC Travel Information

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the British Broadcasting Corporation regarding the setting up and introduction of a national travel information service; what action he intends to take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I plan to visit the BBC travel unit next month. My predecessor and officials from the Department have had several discussions with the BBC and with others involved in the provision of travel information about ways of improving the co-ordination and dissemination of information. Our aim is to facilitate more economical and efficient road travel by improving the quality of information available to drivers both while planning journeys and while on the road.

Satellite Communications

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what storm warnings, distress warnings, urgency messages or other broadcasts on satellite communication in the Indian INMARSAT coverage area were received before, during and after Typhoon Gay in the Gulf of Thailand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The promulgation of storm warnings is by coast radio stations. INMARSAT satellities are at present not used for such broadcasts. If INMARSAT was used for distress and urgency messages, they would not have been monitored by the United Kingdom Rescue Co-ordinating Centre.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies are being undertaken into the incidence of satellite communication failure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The question of communication failure is an operational matter for INMARSAT.

Oil Discharges (Liberian Ships)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response has been received from the authorities in Liberia to three cases of possible illegal discharges of oil from Liberian ships in 1986 and 1988.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Liberian authorities have submitted a copy of their interim investigative report on one incident but the final outcome is not yet known. In the other two cases, we are advised that investigations have not yet been completed.

Greater Manchester Relief Road

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for public consultation for the Worsley section of the schematic route of the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road to be undertaken in advance of consultants having finalised any route options.

Mr. Atkins: We expect to consult the public next year. We shall need to indicate broad options. Detailed design would only follow the formal announcement of a preferred route.

Driver Licensing

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received over the EEC directive on driver licensing harmonisation from people providing community transport in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Twenty-eight bodies interested in community transport responded to the consultation paper on the future strategy on minibuses published in August 1989. Since then representations on minibuses have also been received from 62 hon. Members some of which were concerned with the implications for community transport. The views expressed will be taken into account in the negotiations in the Council of the second directive on the driving licence.

Rumble Strips

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy with respect to laying down of rumble strips on trunk roads to curb excessive traffic speed; and what advice he gives to local authorities.

Mr. Atkins: The Department seeks to facilitate the safe and free flow of traffic on trunk roads. At places with a history of accidents caused by excessive speeds, rumble strips can be an effective measure, used either on their own or in combination with other measures. In or near built-up areas, the increased traffic noise which rumble strips generate has to be taken into account in devising appropriate measures.

Similar considerations apply to local authority roads. Advice to local authorities is published in "Roads and Traffic in Urban Areas" (HMSO) and DTp circular Roads 17/78, together with departmental standard TD 6/79, dealing with transverse yellow bar markings at roundabouts.

Chester Road, Manchester

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what specific issues concerning traffic management on the A56 Chester road, Manchester between Longford bridge and Great Stone road have been raised with his Department by Trafford borough council; and what was the response.

Mr. Atkins: The council's agents asked for our agreement to modify the timings at the pelican crossing here, and to set back the stop lines, instal overhead signal poles and increase the zig zag markings. We have already agreed to all those measures: formal authoritisations will be issued in the next few days. We have not agreed to the council's suggestion that the light source at this and other such crossings should be changed.

Yellow Lines

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any proposals to remove yellow parking lines in London.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for providing yellow lines rests with the local authorities on local roads and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on trunk roads. In "Traffic in London", published on 14 December 1989, the Government propose new marking and signing arrangements for a priority route network for London, which will comprise trunk roads and certain major local roads. We also propose that the local authorities in London review the provision of yellow lines on their other local roads in accordance with guidelines to be set by my right hon. Friend and the results of a study by the Department of Transport into more positive systems for designating kerbspace.

Channel Tunnel Safety Authority

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority will publish its first annual report.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority has today published its first annual report, covering the period 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989, and has arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Vehicle Smoke Checks

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of *(a)* buses and *(b)* heavy goods vehicles, tested by his Department's Vehicles Inspectorate failed the visual smoke check (i) in the annual test and (ii) in roadside checks in the 1988-89 period; and what is his estimate of the total number of vehicles producing excessive smoke in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 12 January 1990]*: In 1988-89 1·42 per cent. of PSVs and 1·057 per cent. of HGVs failed the visual smoke check in the annual test. Information concerning vehicles found emitting excessive smoke at roadside spot checks is not available. A random survey of heavy goods vehicles carried out in May 1988 showed 3·6 per cent. were emitting excess smoke. If that were reflected in the vehicle fleet as a whole, approximately 20,000 heavy goods vehicles might be producing excessive smoke in Great Britain. The Department has no figures for Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles were *(a)* banned and *(b)* received vehicle rectification notices as a result of visual smoke checks in the 1988-89 period.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* Following is the information:

(a) Information is not available to identify the number of vehicles banned for smoke defects.

(b) The vehicle defect rectification scheme is administered by the police. The Department has no data on this.

Cyclists

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has in regard to the number of people who cycle to work in London and as to what proportion of the total number of commuters this constitutes.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 11 January 1990]:* The 1981 Greater London transportation survey of London residents indicated that some 155,000 work journeys were made by pedal cycle. That represented about 3 per cent. of all work journeys by London residents; estimates from the Department's 1985-86 national travel survey suggest that there has been little change in that proportion.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Industry (Competitiveness)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library the results of any studies his Department has conducted into the competitiveness of British manufacturing industry as against other OECD countries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In 1989 my Department commissioned a study by the PA Consulting Group entitled "Manufacturing into the late 90's". A copy is available in the Library.

Sub-Post Offices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list by location for the counties of Yorkshire and Humberside, any proposed closure of small rural sub-post offices due to take place during the coming year.

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for the Post Office, but I understand that it has no plans to close any rural post offices. Post Office Counters Ltd. is committed to maintaining the rural network and only when it is impossible to find a sub-postmaster, even working reduced hours, does a rural office close.

Companies House

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the Companies House agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Redwood: Targets for Companies House covering the two-year period to 1990-91 were announced by the Secretary of State in March 1989. These are:

(i) A 10 per cent. reduction in the proportion of companies which have not filed all the accounts and annual returns required by the Companies Act, so that by June 1991 the compliance rate will be increased to 83 per cent.;

(ii) A 20 per cent. reduction in the time taken to process documents, so that by April 1991 documents are on average available to the public within 18 working days of being delivered to Companies House;

(iii) A 12 per cent. increase in output per member of staff;

(iv) A 7 per cent. decrease in unit costs in real terms.

Companies House's targets are currently being reviewed in the context of the agency's 1990 corporate plan.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the National Weights and Measures Laboratory agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Forth: In May 1989, Lord Young, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, approved the corporate plan of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory executive agency. This plan, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House, contains specific targets for the current year. Targets for the longer term will be approved by the Secretary of State in subsequent corporate plans.

Warren Spring Laboratory

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the Warren Spring Laboratory agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will be announcing the performance measure targets for the Warren Spring Laboratory agency before the beginning of the next financial year.

Government Chemist

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the laboratory of the Government chemist for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I expect to announce targets for the laboratory of the Government chemist before the beginning of the next financial year.

Maluku Islands

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about United Kingdom trade links with the Maluku Islands, Indonesia.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has no knowledge of any specific United Kingdom trade links with the Maluku Islands, Indonesia. United Kingdom firms usually tend to adopt a comprehensive marketing policy towards Indonesia, largely through agents in Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to monitor employers' compliance with the requirement in section 235 of the Companies Act 1985 that firms with more than 250 employees must include a statement in their annual report and accounts, outlining their policy on the employment of disabled people.

Mr. Redwood: Responsibility for the content of accounts and directors' reports rests with the directors, with auditors required to state whether the accounts meet the statutory requirements. Companies House staff carry out certain checks on annual accounts, but do not arrange for the contents to be scrutinised in detail except in response to specific complaints.

Rain Forests

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what requests he has received from ASEAN countries for an agreement of trade in rain forest timber, along the lines of that negotiated with New Zealand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: No such requests have been received.

Smoke Detectors

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to introduce safety regulations covering smoke detectors containing radioactive Americum 241.

Mr. Forth: These products will be subject to the proposed Radioactive Products (Safety) Regulations which I propose to take in March 1990. They will come into force in September 1990. These products are at present subject to the general safety requirement of the Consumer Protection Act 1987.

West Germany (Trade)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in manufactured goods with West Germany.

Mr. Redwood: In the first 11 months of 1989 imports of manufactures from the Federal Republic of Germany exceeded United Kingdom exports to that country by £9 billion.

Merger Controls

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the adoption of the European Community merger control regulation.

Mr. Redwood: I welcome the adoption of this regulation which followed major progress over past months on a number of issues during which the United Kingdom played a constructive role throughout. The adoption of this regulation provides a welcome clarification of powers, giving business greater certainty about which jurisdiction will be exercised and how it will be exercised.

As from 21 September 1990 mergers with a Community dimension involving large companies—broadly those mergers with a combined worldwide turnover of more than 5 billion ecu (around £3·7 billion) and with a Community turnover in excess of 500 million ecu (around £370 million)—will be subject to examination by the European Commission. We expect this to include about a dozen United Kingdom mergers per year. Mergers which primarily concern one member state in that more than two thirds of the turnover of each company concerned is in one and the same member state remain subject to national control.

The United Kingdom was successful in ensuring that the criteria for the assessment of mergers are strongly competition based. Mergers which create or enhance a dominant position and significantly impede competition must be prohibited. Technical and economic progress can be taken into account so long as they do not pose a barrier to competition.

The United Kingdom's objective that there should be a clear separation of the roles of the Commission and member state authorities has also been substantially achieved. Normally the Commission will have exclusive competence over those mergers with a Community dimension as described above. The United Kingdom was successful in limiting the scope for member states to intervene on competition grounds in such mergers. A member state may intervene only where it demonstrates to the Commission that a dominant position significantly impeding competition exists in a distinct market in its territory and the Commission is satisfied that the market cannot be adequately protected under the regulation.

A tight line has been drawn round the grounds other than competition on which a member state can intervene in mergers. Only public security, prudential controls and media diversity are recognised as legitimate national interests allowing intervention.

Outside the thresholds mentioned above, the Commission can intervene under the regulation only at the specific request of a member state and then only to remedy competition defects in that member state. The merger regulation disapplies regulation 17, thereby restricting the Commission's powers to intervene under treaty articles 85 and 86. This should reduce the uncertainty which currently exists and which is an unwelcome hazard to business.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Internal Market Council held on 21 and 22 December 1989.

Mr. Redwood: The Council made important progress on almost all items on a long agenda. Agreement was reached on the EC merger control regulation, to deal with mergers with a Community dimension. Political agreements were also reached on the second life insurance services directive, three directives on rights of residence for non-economically advice persons, and on testing and certification. Common positions were agreed on measures concerning package travel, active implantable medical devices, nutritional labelling of foodstuffs and permitted residues of veterinary medicinal products.

The Council agreed to consider further the Commission's analysis of barriers to takeovers once the Commission's programme of specific recommendations is published at the end of March. A helpful statement on implementation of single market measures was also agreed.

The proposed directive on public purchasing (excluded sectors) was discussed. Although agreement was not reached, useful progress was made. It may be possible to agree the directive during the Irish Presidency.

The Council also discussed the proposed European company statute, transEuropean infrastructure, the "social economy" (the co-operative, mutual and non-profit making sector), legal protection of computer programmes, irradiation of foodstuffs and mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

Knitwear and Textiles

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give further details of the collaborative ventures to which the Minister for Industry referred on 12 December, *Official Report*, column 984, in which the Government are prepared to play a part to assist the knitwear and textile industries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Support is available to the knitwear and textile industries for pre-competitive collaborative research under the four main schemes covered by the research and technology initiative.

The schemes are:

LINK, which encourages firms to collaborate with universities and polytechnics in pre-competitive research

EUREKA, which encourages firms to enter collaborative ventures with firms in other European countries

Advanced technology programme (ATP), which assists companies to collaborate in selected fields of new technology

General industrial collaborative programmes, which provide support for projects at research and technology organisations and for other collaborative projects not covered under the above headings

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total sum allotted in each of the next three financial years referred to by the Minister for

Industry on 12 December, *Official Report*, column 984, as available for collaborative ventures between the Government and the knitwear and textile industries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No specific sum is allocated to collaborative research ventures by the garment and the knitwear and the textile industries. Proposals put forward, either by companies in these industries or by the research and technology organisations serving them, are judged on their merits and given appropriate support under the terms of the research and technology initiative.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of British merchant shipbuilding capacity.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *598*.

Albania

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on United Kingdom trade with Albania.

Mr. Redwood: Over the last three years United Kingdom trade with Albania has totalled between £2·5 million and £4 million a year. My Department gives advice to British companies interested in the market, but the assistance we can give is limited by the absence of diplomatic relations and the scarcity of market information. The London chamber of commerce organised a trade mission to Albania in 1988 and hopes to develop closer links with the Albanian chamber.

Romania

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on United Kingdom trade with Romania.

Mr. Redwood: Her Majesty's Government of course warmly endorse the political changes which have recently taken place in Romania. We hope and expect that these changes will lead to a strengthening of our relations, particularly in trade. Between 1982 and 1989 (up to and including October) our exports to Romania declined from £115 million to £30 million. Significant improvements to this figure will depend, inter alia, on the availability of hard currency, but we note and welcome Romania's intention to aim for a better-balanced trade with the United Kingdom. We share that intention and will do our best to help. We are also investigating ways of facilitating United Kingdom investment in the economies of eastern Europe, including Romania.

Immediate Romanian requirements include food, fertilisers, pesticides, animal foodstuffs, seeds, agricultural equipment and some consumer goods. There is also likely to be a demand for photocopiers, typewriters, TV studio equipment and film material. My Department is in touch with potential British suppliers. In the longer term we would hope for improvement in the aviation sector where the Romanians are building civil aircraft under licence from British firms.

China

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on United Kingdom trade with the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Redwood: Normal commercial business relations with China continue, although the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Community have suspended bilateral ministerial and high-level exchanges, trade in arms and concessional finance for new projects, following events in Peking in June last year.

In the first 11 months of 1989 the value of United Kingdom exports to China was £363 million.

Foreign Shareholdings

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what occasions he or his predecessors have used their powers under the Industry Act 1975 to restrict the size of foreign shareholdings in British companies.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* The powers under section 13 of the Industry Act 1975 have never been used.

Industrial Decline

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what factors account for the decline in output of the textile, footwear, metal goods, motor vehicle and mechancial engineering industries since 1979; and in which other countries there has been a comparable decline.

Mr. Redwood: The period 1979-88 has witnessed rapid structural change both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Some industries have experienced a rise in output while in others output has fallen. The changes reflect the shifting pattern of demand, the changing nature of international competition, and the ability of individual countries to respond to these developments. Such structural change is an integral part of the process by which economies develop and grow.

The pattern of structural change has not been very different in the United Kingdom from that in other major industrial countries. Thus, according to published OECD data, output of textiles, footwear and metal products all fell in at least several of the major seven OECD countries over the period 1979-88 and in no case did the United Kingdom suffer the greatest reduction. The OECD includes mechanical engineering in the wider category of non-electrical machinery, United Kingdom output of which rose at a rate broadly comparable with that of the other major European countries. Only in motor vehicles was United Kingdom output growth over the period 1979-88 significantly below that of all the other major OECD countries. However, the decline in United Kingdom motor vehicles output was reversed in the mid-1980s and prospects for further recovery are excellent.

Accounting Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how, and in consultation with what bodies, he formulates the accounting policy for the corporate sector;

(2) if he will list the non-Government bodies, committees or institutes which are permitted to make the accounting policy for the corporate sector in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: Company accounts are regulated in Great Britain by provisions in the Companies Act 1985 (to be amended by the Companies Act 1989), which reflect both European Community obligations and certain domestic considerations. Significant proposed changes to this legislative framework are usually the subject of wide consultation. In addition, accounting standards are promulgated by the members of the consultative committee of accountancy bodies, on the basis of proposals developed by its accounting standards committee. The professional accountancy bodies also issue technical guidance to their members.

Barlow Clowes

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any disciplinary action has been taken within his Department against officials involved in handling any aspect of the Barlow Clowes case.

Mr. Ridley: The question of any disciplinary action against individual civil servants is one for my Permanent Secretary. The House was informed last year that the then Permanent Secretary had considered whether the facts set out in Sir Godfray Le Quesne's report would give rise to a case for disciplinary action, and had decided that they did not. The matter was reviewed in the light of the PCA's report and my Permanent Secretary decided that there was no case for disciplinary action, a decision with which I concur.

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any of his Department's officials or former officials have been told that they may be asked to give evidence in any legal proceedings initiated by the Department against third parties in respect of Barlow Clowes.

Mr. Ridley: No, because it is not yet clear which officials or former officials, if any, will be required to give evidence in any actions which are brought.

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any of the officials consulted by Sir Godfray Le Quesne, QC for his report into Barlow Clowes have been promoted or have retired prematurely since the time they were responsible for the Barlow Clowes case.

Mr. Ridley: Three officials have been promoted and one has taken early retirement.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

China

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the number of former members of the Shanghai municipal council still alive who have lodged claims under the Foreign Compensation (People's Republic of China) Order; and how many of these claims result from loss suffered through detention in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

Mr. Sainsbury: Twenty-four living former employees of the Shanghai municipal council have lodged claims with the foreign compensation commission under the Foreign Compensation (People's Republic of China) Order 1987 in respect of either pay or pensions. The United Kingdom/China claims agreement under which the order was issued does not extend to claims arising from detention in Japanese prisoner-of-war or civilian internment camps.

Know-How Fund

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will extend the know-how fund to include Czechoslovakia;

(2) if he will extend the know-how fund to include Romania.

Mr. Waldegrave: The extension of the know-how fund for Poland and Hungary to other reforming eastern European countries is under consideration.

Human Rights

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, and to what extent, the human rights situation in a foreign country is taken into account in evaluating licences for the export of military or police equipment to that country.

Mr. Sainsbury: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who will reply as soon as possible.

Eastern Europe

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the allocation of Government aid to research and combat the causes and effects of environmental pollution in the newly emerging democracies of eastern Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are fully committed to improving the environment in the whole of Europe. We believe that environmental problems are best tackled through international co-operation, and we are working within the EC to establish how best we can help in eastern Europe. The European Communities' £210 million assistance budget for 1990 to Poland and Hungary includes the environment as a priority area. The G24 countries, which are co-ordinating their assistance for eastern Europe, are also looking at ways to help in this area.

Dolphins

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations are being made to the Governments of Japan, Peru and Sri Lanka to reduce their annual kill of dolphins, porpoises and other cetaceans.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Japanese Government have told us that they are concerned to conserve the Dall's porpoise, the main species caught in Japan. They estimate that new regulations introduced at the beginning of 1989 will have reduced the annual catch by more than 20 per cent. and from this year the regulations will be further strengthened and consideration given to a further reduction in the numbers caught. We have asked the Governments of Peru and Sri Lanka for further information and I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research is being done or has been commissioned by his Department in respect of initiatives to be taken at the fourth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: As a depositary power of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the United Kingdom is naturally keen to work for the success of the review conference. To this end, a considerable amount of research has been undertaken by the Department into matters covered by the treaty, and there have been a number of discussions with the other depositary powers, and with other parties to the treaty.

NATO

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 8 January, *Official Report*, column *511*, what factors account for the discrepancy between the official North Atlantic Treaty Organisation figure for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation combat-capable aircraft of 6,700 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation total of 6,600 provided in his answer.

Mr. Waldegrave: The 6,600 figure is a misprint. The correct figure is 6,700.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 8 January, *Official Report*, column *511*, whether he will list those versions and variants of types of combat aircraft listed in footnote 1, page 27 of "Conventional Forces in Europe: The Facts" that are in addition to those aircraft included in footnotes 1, 4 and 5.

Mr. Waldegrave: A list of the types of combat aircraft included in the NATO CFE proposal of 13 July is being placed in the Library of the House.

All the types of aircraft included in the publication "Conventional Arms Control: The Facts" are covered in the footnotes on page 27.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will list the types of aircraft that have been added to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation total of combat-capable trainers in addition to those included in footnote 5, page 27 of "Conventional Forces in Europe: The Facts".

Mr. Waldegrave: A list of the types of combat aircraft included in the NATO CFE proposal of 13 July is being placed in the Library of the House.

All the types of aircraft included in the publication "Conventional Arms Control: The Facts" are covered in the footnotes on page 27.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the current North Atlantic Treaty Organisation arms control proposals for reductions in the number of combat aircraft include any sub-ceilings according to *(a)* member country and *(b)* type of combat aircraft.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Nimrod is a version or variant of one of the aircraft types listed in footnote 1, page 27 of "Conventional Forces in Europe: The Facts".

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Nimrod is included in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation total of combat-capable aircraft.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes.

Missile Technology Control Regime

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has concerning the policy of *(a)* the Soviet Union and *(b)* the People's Republic of China towards the missile technology control regime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are not aware of any policy statements by the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China on the missile technology control regime. However, we believe that all potential supplier countries are increasingly concerned by the problem of missile proliferation. We have called on all states to tighten their policies in this area, and have said that we would welcome their adherence to the missile technology control regime guidelines in the interest of international peace and security.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the imposition of sanctions upon countries and companies that transgress the terms and conditions of the missile technology control regime.

Mr. Waldegrave: Export controls in the United Kingdom are designed to ensure that companies do not act in contravention of our international commitments, including those under the missile technology control regime. Appropriate legal action is taken against any company which is found to infringe these controls. It is not our policy to seek to impose sanctions on any other countries or foreign companies which might be thought to have transgressed the terms and conditions of the regime. Controls under the regime remain the national responsibility of each participating country.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the terms of the missile technology control regime have constrained any United Kingdom companies from exporting certain technologies or components.

Mr. Waldegrave: A number of export licence applications have been refused by the Department of Trade and Industry as a result of our commitments under the missile technology control regime.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government Departments are involved in ensuring the implementation of the terms of the missile technology control regime.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for the issuing of export licences

under the Export of Goods (Control) Order, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments as appropriate.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what means of control are exercised by his Department upon United Kingdom companies in reference to the implementation of the terms of the missile technology control regime.

Mr. Waldegrave: Such control is exercised by means of export licences under the Export of Goods (Control) Order, which are determined by the Department of Trade and Industry. Export licence applications for equipment and technology to which the missile technology control regime applies are referred to this Department by the Department of Trade and Industry before a decision is taken on whether to issue a licence.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government policy towards the retention, by any other country, of a minimum offensive chemical weapon capability in the aftermath of a chemical weapon convention being concluded.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's assessment as to the implications for the chemical weapon convention talks of the United States' policy to retain a limited stockpile of chemical weapons after a chemical weapon convention has been signed.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is envisaged in the negotiations in Geneva for a chemical weapons convention that there will be a transition period following the entry into force of the treaty. During this period any chemical weapons stocks possessed by states parties will be destroyed. President Bush's proposal at the United Nations General Assembly for retention of a small stockpile until all CW-capable states are party to the convention is not inconsistent with this.

Middle East

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's assessment as to the implications for regional security of the deployment of *(a)* ballistic missiles and *(b)* anti-tactical ballistic missiles in the middle east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: As a founder member of the missile technology control regime, we are naturally concerned about the proliferation of ballistic missiles in regions of tension. We also question the wisdom of deploying anti-tactical ballistic missiles in response to such proliferation.

Iraq

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's assessment as to whether Iraq has developed the capability to deliver an inter-continental ballistic missile; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Iraqi Government announced on 7 December that they had launched a rocket capable of carrying satellites into space. Reports have also suggested that Iraq is developing a military missile with a range of 2,000 km. There is no further information that I can give to the hon. Gentleman. However, we are concerned about the destabilising effect that such a programme, if it exists, could have on the middle east region.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's latest assessment as to Iraq's anti-tactical ballistic missile capability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Iraq has claimed to be developing an anti-tactical ballistic missile. We have no reason to doubt this claim.

Romania

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will propose to his European Community counterparts the lifting of regulations on the export of powdered milk and rice and other food aid to Romania on humanitarian grounds as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Since the revolution in Romania, the European Community has responded speedily to requests for emergency food and medical aid. On 29 December the Commission announced and began deliveries of emergency food aid. So far £4·6 million has been allocated by the Commission for food and medical aid. The Commission is urgently considering a request by the Romanian Government for a large quantity of food aid and is expected to make a proposal after Vice-President Andriessen has visited Bucharest. There are no regulations which prevent the export of powdered milk, rice and other food supplies to Romania.

Ukraine

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made representations to the USSR about contravention of human rights pursuant to the Helsinki and Vienna accords in the Soviet Republic of Ukraine.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have regularly and frequently pressed the Soviet Union to comply fully with its CSCE obligations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised our continuing concerns about human rights in the Soviet Union with Mr. Shevardnadze when he was in London on 19 December. A senior official, Mr. David Ratford, visited the Soviet Union from 8 to 11 January for a full exchange with the Soviet authorities on all aspects of human rights issues.

Kai Tak Refugee Camp

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conditions in which the 50 Vietnamese held in the special camp outside Kai Tak refugee camp are held; how long they have been held in these conditions; and what plans there are for their future.

Mr. Maude: The 52 Vietnamese held in the camp at Kai Tak are people who had left Vietnam to settle in China,

but who had subsequently entered Hong Kong illegally. Such people are normally returned to China; but in the case of this group, who are ethnic Vietnamese, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is exceptionally arranging for them to be resettled overseas. The conditions under which they are held is similar to those of other Vietnamese illegal immigrants from China. The group of 52 have been in Hong Kong for over three years.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Refugees

51. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what funds the Church Commissioners devote to helping *(a)* refugees and *(b)* other immigrants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: None, because the Commissioners' funds are not by law available for those purposes. Their primary duty is the support of the full-time parochial ministry of the Church of England and the bulk of their income is used for that purpose.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages Council Inspectors

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to increase the number of wages councils inspectors.

Mr. Nicholls: None.

Local Offices, Doncaster and Mexborough

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many claimants signed on each week of 1989 at *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough unemployment benefit offices; what delays there were in interviewing them; what requests have been received for additional staff; and what has been his response.

Mr. Eggar: Information about the number of claimants who signed on at these offices each week during 1989 is not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current establishment at each grade at the unemployment benefit offices at *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough; how many deal directly with interviewing of new claimants; and what representations he has received concerning the lack of staff to deal with claimants.

Mr. Nicholls: A graded breakdown of the staff employed at Doncaster and Mexborough unemployment benefit offices is given in table 1.

New claimants are normally interviewed by an executive officer (new client adviser). In each of the Doncaster unemployment benefit offices four executive officers are directly involved with interviewing and counselling new claimants. In Mexborough unemployment benefit office three executive officers interview and counsel new clients.

Additionally in each office two clerical staff provide support services for the new client advisers, which includes making appointments for unemployed people to make their claims.

No formal representations have been made to local management about staffing levels in these offices.

Table 1

Graded breakdown of staff employed at Doncaster and Mexborough unemployment benefit offices—January 1990

	Doncaster A	*Doncaster B*	*Doncaster C*	*Mexborough*
Permanent				
HEO	1	1	1	1
EO	9	8	7	—
AO	25	25	26	17
AA	4	5	4	3
Messenger	—	1	—	—
Casual				
Casual AO	—	—	—	1
Casual AA	—	2	1	—
Total	39	42	39	26

Notes:
HEO = Higher Executive Officer.
EO = Executive Officer.
AO = Administrative Officer.
AA = Administrative Assistant.

Local Offices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the jobcentres and *(b)* unemployment benefit offices that are (i) to be closed and (ii) transferred to agencies.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) on 1 December 1989 (*Official Report*, col. *461-62*). It is the intention that the employment service (ES) should be launched as an executive agency in April 1990. It will establish a new network of offices, bringing together the full range of employment service activities in single locations wherever possible.

Plans are being developed for this new network and when decisions have been taken the hon. Member for the constituency concerned will be informed.

Job Interview Guarantee Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made on the job interview guarantee scheme; how many claimants and employers have become involved; how many claimants and employers have participated in the work trials on offer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The job interview guarantee was formally launched in 20 pilot areas in November 1989. The latest available information is that 1,088 individuals and 258 employers have participated in the initiative. So far, two employers have signed agreements to participate in work trials, although many employers have indicated their interest in taking part, and two individuals are currently participating in them.

The progress of the pilots has been encouraging. So far, 473 people have been placed in jobs. Almost 60 per cent. of participants in job preparation courses have found employment.

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether there are any restrictions on where trainees in employment training can take their holiday entitlement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no restrictions on where trainees in employment training can take their holiday entitlement.

Ex-Trainees

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Training Agency has taken any action to recover payments made to ex-trainees who have, for whatever reason, failed to sign on at the end of their training and have continued to receive their benefit and training premium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Training Agency has in appropriate cases taken steps to recover payments of ET training allowances paid to people no longer entitled to them.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *271*, in what ways a preventive inspection visit is different from a basic inspection visit.

Mr. Nicholls: The term "preventive" is synonymous with "basic" in describing inspection visits made to assess employers' compliance with the requirements of health and safety legislation and to provide advice about the various ways in which employers can monitor, maintain and improve health and safety standards.

Industrial Training

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the most recent available extracts of the average expenditure per employee on industrial training by each nation of the European Community, split by major industry group and by source of funds.

Mr. Nicholls: The table shows employers' expenditure on training for 1984, and is derived from the Eurostat publication "Labour Costs 1984, Volume 1 Principal Results", a copy of which is in the Library. These estimates are of limited value since they exclude the major costs of training, in particular wages and salaries of instructors and all but full-time trainees.

Average Expenditure by employers on vocational training

ECU per employee per year

	Production and construction	*Wholesale and retail distribution*	*Credit institutions*	*Insurance (excl. social insurance)*
Denmark	390	630	840	540
Germany	390	490	850	540
France	330	240	580	380
United Kingdom	260	110	140	170
Ireland	220	210	100	60
Portugal	90	60	70	170
Luxembourg	90	110	120	30
Netherlands	90	20	150	100
Belgium	80	80	340	380
Italy	60	70	70	60

Employment Provision (Disabled)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to announce the conclusions of the ministerial review of employment provision for disabled people.

Mr. Eggar: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 13 November (*Official Report*, column *58*). The review is at an advanced stage. The consultative document which will follow the review will be published as soon as possible.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department's current review of services for people with disabilities will consider the need for legislation to outlaw unjustifiable discrimination on the grounds of disability.

Mr. Eggar: Successive Governments have judged that education and persuasion of employers is the most effective approach to improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The role of legislation is being considered in the review of services to people with disabilities which this Department is currently undertaking.

A consultative document covering the conclusions of the review will be published soon.

Employees' Rights

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for compliance with the European social charter of fundamental rights of employees in respect of the aspects covered by his Department.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it quite clear at the European Council meeting in December in Strasbourg that the Government could not endorse the proposed charter of fundamental social rights of workers. The question of compliance does not, therefore, arise.

Action for Jobs

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the total expenditure on the Action for Jobs campaign in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 was attributed to printed material in each year; how much was attributed to television advertising in each year; and how much was attributed to other expenditure in each year.

Mr. Eggar: Expenditure on Action for Jobs television advertising in 1985-86 was nil; in 1986-87, £9·3 million; and 1987-88, £3 million. Expenditure on producing, printing and distributing the Action for Jobs booklet in 1985-86 was nil; in 1986-87, £1·2 million; and in 1987-88, £0·5 million. Other expenditure relating to the Action for Jobs campaign in 1985-86 was £40,000; in 1986-87, £3·4 million; and in 1987-88, £4·5 million.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current rate of employment in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the rest of the European Economic Community and *(c)* the countries covered by the European Free Trade Association.

Mr. Nicholls: The latest available information is shown in the table:

Employment in the European Community and the European Free Trade Association

Thousands

	a. Civilian employment	*b. Civilian workforce Labour force*[3]	*Employment rate (a/b) per cent.*
EUROPEAN COMMUNITY 1987			
United Kingdom	24,747	27,739	89
Belgium	3,660	4,126	89
Denmark	2,609	2,765	94
France	20,988	23,519	89
Germany	25,456	27,864	91
Greece[1]	3,598	3,884	93
Ireland	1,074	1,306	82
Italy	20,584	23,416	88
Luxembourg[2]	164	167	99
Netherlands	5,251	5,830	90
Portugal	4,226	4,452	95
Spain	11,383	14,332	79
EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION 1987			
Austria[1]	3,300	3,430	96
Finland	2,413	2,544	95
Iceland	129	129	100
Norway	2,090	2,135	98
Sweden[1]	4,337	4,421	98
Switzerland[1]	3,273	3,297	99

[1] Figures are total employment and total labour force as no civilian employment and civilian labour force figures are available.
[2] Figures shown are for 1986 which are the latest available.
[3] Figures are civilian labour force except for United Kingdom which are civilian workforce.
Source: Labour Force Statistics 1967-1987 (OECD) except United Kingdom (ED)

Health and Safety Inspectorate

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors are currently employed by the health and safety inspectorate; and how many were employed in the same month of 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 January 1990, 624·5 factory inspectors were in post in the Health and Safety Executive. On 1 January 1979 the total was 709·5.

Private Licensed Coal Mines

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the private licensed coal mines known to the mines and quarries inspectorate, giving the numbers employed below ground in each case.

Mr. Nicholls: Following is a list of private licensed mines held by Her Majesty's inspectorate. Figures for persons employed at individual mines are not readily available.

County and mines	*Country code*
Fife	
Lassodie No. 2 mine	
Strathclyde	
Viaduct 'A' LM	
Cumbria	
Mainband mine	
Central	
Rashiehill mine	2
Fife	
Harviestoun mine	4
Lassodie mine	4
Saline mine	4
Lothian	
Blinkbonny mine	7
Strathclyde	
Backshot mine	10
Craigman mine	10
Glenview mine	10
Polnessan LM	10
Viaduct 'B' LM	10
Clwyd	
Coed Talon M2	21
Tan Llan M2	21
Lodge Drift LM	21
Dyfed	
Brynglas mine	22
Blaengrennig No. 2 mine	22
Bodyst Uchaf mine	22

County and mines	Country code
Bwlch mine	22
Dynant Fach No. 1 mine	22
Dynant Fach No. 2 mine	22
Graigddu No. 2 mine	22
Royal Oak	22
Tan-y-Garn mine	22
Waunhir No. 2 mine	22
Ystrad Anthracite mine	22
Penywaun No. 2 mine	22
Oak mine	22
Gwent	
Blaencuffin mine	23
Cwm Glo mine	23
Little Cwm	23
Nant Merddog	23
Old Unemployed	23
Pantygasseg	23
Pantygasseg No. 3	23
Rithan	23
Tai Level Lo mine	23
Upper-Rha-Bryn-Oer mine	23
Winstone mine	23
Blaentillery No. 2 mine	23
Blaentwina Drift mine	23
Mid Glamorgan	
Caeglas level mine	25
Fforch-y-Garran mine	25
Ffynonau Duon No. 2 M	25
Ffynonau Duon No. 2 S	25
Ffynonau Duon No. 3 M	25
Ffynonau Duon No. 4 M	25
Garnwern mine	25
Glo Mynydd mine	25
High Street	25
Nantglas Newydd	25
Scranton mine	25
Mid Glamorgan	
Wern Tarw No. 2 mine	25
Tyn Wern mine	25
Craig-y-Pant mine	25
West Glamorgan	
Pentwyn No. 3	28
Nant-y-Cafn	28
Lyn	28
Abbey mine	28
Blaenmerrig mine	28
Blaenpergwm mine	28
Brawds Level mine	28
Bryndulais No. 2 mine	28
Bryn-y-Garn mine	28
Byrnant Varteg mine	28
Crugau mine	28
Crugau No. 2 mine	28
Darrell mine	28
Elwyn mine	28
Evanjill mine	28
Evans No. 4 mine	28
Forest No. 3 mine	28
Glanderi mine	28
Gleison mine	28
Glen mine	28
Graig-y-Llyn mine	28
Gwynfryn No. 2 mine	28
Heol Hen mine	28
Hirfynydd mine	28
Ivyrock No. 2	28
Llechart No. 2	28
Meudwy	28
Nanthir	28
New Penrhiw	28
Parc Level	28
Rhaeadr No. 2 mine	28
Rheola	28
Sarn Helen	28
Tyn-y-Graig	28
Venallt mine	28
Nant-y-Glo mine	28
Carn Cornel No. 2 mine	28
Danygraig No. 3 mine	28
Ivy Rock No. 3 mine	28
March Hywel No. 2 mine	28
Nant-y-Mynydd No.2	28
Ponty mine	28
New Parc mine	28
Nantmely No. 2 mine	28
Penhydd Newydd mine	28
Cumbria	
Ladysmith M3	39
Clrghyl Drift mine	39
Blenknsopp Castle M	39
Wrytree Farm Drift M	39
Barhaugh mine	39
Ayle East Drift mine	39
Blagill mine	39
Derbyshire	
Amber Valley mine	40
Derbyshire	
Doe Lea mine	40
Moorside mine	40
Strathfield mine	40
Durham	
Lonnen drift mine	43
Greenland drift mine	43
Drovers drift mine	43
Middridge drift mine	43
Newfield No. 2 drift	43
Smithy Dene mine	43
Woodside drift mine	43
Barras Hill mine	43
Greenland drift mine	43
Woody Close drift mine	43
Eldon drift mine	43
Osmond Croft mine	43
Eldon drift mine	43
Gloucestershire	
Addis Hill mine	46
Cannop drift mine	46
Cannop engine mine	46
Danby Lodge No. 2 mine	46
Favourite mine	46
Hayners Bailey mine	46
Hopewell in Wimberry	46
Morses level	46
New Road (Forest) level	46
Quidchurch No. 5	46
Reddings level No. 2	46
Stapledge No. 1	46
Stapledge No. 2	46
Wallsend mine	46
Addis Hill mine No. 2	46
Beech drift mine	46
Old Park No. 2 mine	46
United Mining Parkhill	46
Hamblin Gale mine	46
Quidchurch No. 7 mine	46
Lancashire	
Grime Bridge M7	55
Dyneley M7	55
Merrills Vale M7	55
Royd Wood M7	55
Thieveley M	55
Merseyside	
Castle M7	58
Quaker House M7	58

County and mines	Country code
Northumberland	
Falstone mine	61
Shadfen Park drift mine	61
Tows Bank drift mine	61
Falstone No. 2 mine	61
Whittle mine	61
Staffordshire	
Above Park M10	68
Acres Nook M10	68
Apedale 1 to 4	68
Apedale 5 to 6	68
Bank Top No. 2 M10	68
Draycott Cross M10	68
Haying Wood No. 2 M10	68
Little Sheriff M10	68
New High Carr No. 3 mine	68
Parklands No. 5 M10	68
Podmore Hall M10	68
Apedale 7 to 8	68
Hulme mine	68

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the prosecutions mounted by the mines and quarries inspectorate against the owners of private mines in 1978-79 and each year since, giving the outcome in each case.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is as follows:

	Outcome	Fine (£)
1979 Ystrad Mine, Dyfed	Guilty	2,800
1980 Danygraid Mine, West Glamorgan	Guilty	7,400
1982 Nant Medlyn Mine, West Glamorgan	Guilty	1,500
1985 Darran Mine, West Glamorgan	Guilty	9,200
1987 Lassodie Mine, Fife	Guilty	1,500
1987 Saline Mine, Fife	Guilty	300
1988 Hall of Auchincross Mine, Ayrshire	Guilty	650
1989 Wrytree Drift Mine, Northumberland	Guilty	5,400
1989 Robin Rock Mine, Northumberland	Guilty	3,000

SCOTLAND

Shotts Prison

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had about his plans for Shotts prison.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In October 1988 we published a discussion paper, "Assessment and Control", on the management of violent and disruptive prisoners, which included proposals for a new facility at Shotts prison. Responses were received from 34 organisations and individuals. My right hon. and learned Friend and I are still considering the responses received and last month I met a delegation from the Shotts local community to hear their views.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of inmates presently in Shotts prison; and if he will make a statement on the numbers planned for the next 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At the end of December 1989, there were 455 places available at Shotts prison and 442 prisoners. A further 12 places will become available in a new unit to be opened in April 1990. Plans for a new maximum security complex, providing a further 60 places, were discussed in the consultation paper "Assessment and Control", published in October 1988. My right hon. and learned Friend and I are still considering the responses to the discussion paper,and no decision has yet been reached on further developments at Shotts.

Native Pinewood

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is his most recent estimate of the area of genuinely native pinewood in Scotland that is owned by the Forestry Commission; and how this has changed since the definitive survey by Steven and Carlisle, published in 1959;

(2) what is his most recent estimate of the area of genuinely native pinewood in Scotland; how this has changed since the definitive survey by Steven and Carlisle, published in 1959; and what were the principal causes of these changes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are some 12,500 hectares of native pinewood in Scotland, of which the Forestry Commission manages about 2,500 hectares. It is not possible to say how this has changed since 1959 as the survey by Steven and Carlisle was not undertaken in a way which enabled areas to be measured.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the Forestry Commission expects to complete its first register of native pinewoods;

(2) what plans the Forestry Commission has to monitor the extent and nature of changes to the native pinewoods in Scotland following the announcement of the new grants arrangements; and what plans it has to monitor the progress of this part of the woodland grant scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Forestry Commission's register of native pinewoods will be an open one to which qualifying pinewoods will be added as further evidence becomes available. The commission anticipates that the main areas of native pinewoods will be registered in the next six months.

Entries on the register will be reviewed periodically which will enable the extent and nature of any changes to be determined. The commission collects detailed information on all proposals made under the woodland grant scheme, and this includes any applications for grants for native pinewoods.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans the Forestry Commission has to restore and regenerate native pinewoods in its ownership; whether the commission has set an area target and timescale for this work; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Forestry Commission will follow its recently published "Guidelines for the Management of Native Pinewoods" in managing its own native pinewoods. Management is a continuous process and the commission has not therefore considered it appropriate to commit itself to target areas or timescales.

Forestry Commission

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of every piece of land and buildings, owned by the Forestry Commission in Scotland, which has been sold in the last 10 years; and if he will give such details by district location.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 6 November 1989 at columns *486-87* and on 3 February 1989 at column *415*, to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on 5 December 1984 at columns *139-50* and to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 25 July 1984 at columns *665-83*. These gave lists of all the forest areas sold between 27 July 1981, the date the Forestry Act 1981 came into force, and 31 March 1989.

A list of all the other areas of land and buildings sold by the Forestry Commission over the last 10 years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Blind Persons' Privilege Tickets

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in securing the continuation of blind persons' privilege tickets from those companies which will succeed the Scottish Bus Group following privatisation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This matter is currently under consideration but I hope that it will be possible to reach a conclusion shortly.

Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the numbers and percentages of unemployed persons removed from unemployment registers as a result of changes that took effect in August 1989 in the redundant mineworkers payments scheme, by region.

Mr. Lang: The latest estimates, which are subject to revision as later data become available, suggest that the unemployment figures for Scotland have been reduced by some 1,200 as a result of mineworkers taking advantage of changes in the redundant mineworkers payments scheme. This is equivalent to 0·5 per cent. of those unemployed in Scotland at August 1989.

Figures for local authority regions within Scotland are not available.

Local Government Finance

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what information he has on the cost of the collection of debts arising out of the non-payment of rates in the 12-month period prior to the introduction of the community charge;

(2) what are the *(a)* current and *(b)* projected costs for the collection of poll tax debts.

Mr. Rifkind: Although local authorities make returns to my Department of the administrative cost of collecting the community charge and previously made similar returns in respect of rates, the returns do not show separately the cost of collecting debts.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether all local authorities in Scotland have offered the facility of single payment by one member of the household on their community charge payment forms; and what the response to this facility has been.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In order to increase the accountability of local authorities to their electorates, the community charge legislation requires every person who is liable to pay the personal community charge to be sent a demand notice. Where more than one person in a household receives a demand notice it is a matter for members of that household to decide whether each individual should pay his or her own bill or whether to adopt some other arrangement.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance his Department has issued to Scottish local authorities on use of the debt recovery mechanisms outlined in the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 and the application of the provisions of the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 in relation to the recovery of poll tax payments from those who have defaulted on such payments; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* None. It is for local authorities to consider the most effective method of recovering debt, including community charge arrears.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds for mentally ill patients have been taken out of service over the last 10 years, showing the closed beds by health board area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not centrally available in the form requested. Figures given in the table show the change over the last 10 years in the available staffed beds in psychiatric specialties in Scotland:

Health board	*Average available staffed beds*	
	1979	*1989*
Argyll and Clyde	1,505	1,266
Ayrshire and Arran	781	807
Borders	325	272
Dumfries and Galloway	881	579
Fife	880	942
Forth Valley	925	850
Grampian	1,580	1,543
Greater Glasgow	4,146	3,314
Highland	876	562
Lanarkshire	1,754	1,404
Lothian	2,176	2,090
Orkney	1	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	1,694	1,342
Western Isles	8	3
Scotland	17,531	14,973

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all new day care facilities and other residential projects for the mentally ill currently being planned by health boards or social work departments in the coming year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information, set out by health board location, is as follows:

Day care facilities	*Residential accommodation*
Ayrshire and Arran	
Garnock Day Hospital, Irvine	Core and Cluster Development, Irvine Group Tenancy House, Ayr
Argyll and Clyde	Joint development between Health Board, Local Authority and Church of Scotland in Elderslie Cluster Accomodation, Paisley
Borders	
Firholm Day Unit, Peebles Day Unit, Hawick	
Dumfries and Galloway	
Day Care Unit, Dumfries	Domus Unit, Stranraer
Fife	
Day Care Unit, Glenrothes Day Care Unit, Cowdenbeath	
Forth Valley	
Day Unit, Clackmannan County Hospital	Various locations in Falkirk. Joint venture with Health Board, Local Authority and Voluntary Organisations
Grampian	Joint development between Health Board, Local Authority and Voluntary Agencies. Location still to be determined
Greater Glasgow	
Day Care Centre at the Scottish Association for Mental Health, Training Centre, Glasgow	Queen's Cross and Belleisle Street, Glasgow—Joint ventures with Voluntary Organisations East End and Drumchapel, Woodside "E" and Priesthill, Glasgow —Core and Cluster projects in association with Voluntary Organisations Anniesland and Allerton, Glasgow—Joint developments with Voluntary Organisation
Highland	
Day Centre, Bruce Gardens, Inverness Day Centre, Royal Northern Infirmary, Inverness Travelling Day Centre—use of mini-bus to visit different locations outside Inverness Day Centre, Inverness—joint venture with Alzheimer's Scotland Timbury Unit Day Centre, County Hospital, Invergordon	
Lanarkshire	
Day Hospital, Motherwell	Blantyre—Joint venture with Health Board and Voluntary Organisations
Day Centre, Motherwell. Joint venture with Health Board and Alzheimer's Scotland	Halfway House, Carluke
Lothian	
Day Care Unit, Herdmanflat, Haddington	Uphall, West Lothian. Joint venture with Health Board, Local Authority and Voluntary Organisation
Day Care Hospital with respite care facilities at Restalrig, Edinburgh. Joint venture with Health Board and Local Authority	Various locations in Edinburgh. Joint venture with Health Board and Local Authority
Day Hospital, Newbattle, Midlothian	Myreside, Edinburgh. Joint venture with Health Board and Church of Scotland
Mental Health Centre, Midlothian. Joint venture with Health Board and Local Authority	
Tayside	Dudhope House, Dundee

Sight Tests

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the change in the number of sight tests carried out in Scotland after the introduction of charges for the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The results of a survey on the total number of sight tests in the first quarter of 1990 compared with earlier periods should be available after Easter.

RENAVAL Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the areas which meet the criteria qualifying them for European regional development fund assistance under the terms of the RENAVAL programme; what applications he has submitted for any of these areas; which have been successful; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Bids to establish eligibility for Strathclyde and Fife under RENAVAL were submitted to the European Commission in May 1989. We still await a response. Providing a favourable decision is reached,

detailed programmes of measures will be drawn up by Government in consultation with the relevant local authorities and other public agencies.

Correspondence

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow can expect to receive a substantive reply to his letter of 30 November 1989, which was addressed to the Minister for Home Affairs and the Environment, concerning Mr. A. Renaud, 2 Shaw place, Greenock.

Mr. Rifkind: I replied to the hon. Member on 11 January.

Environment

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what specific research projects and studies regarding *(a)* environmental pollution, *(b)* climate changes and their effect on (i) the health of the people and (ii) wildlife in Scotland his Department is funding or sponsoring.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 December 1989]:* The main sources of funds for research in the broad areas of environmental pollution and climate change are United Kingdom Departments and research councils. Scottish Departments, however, have funded a range of projects in the areas in which the hon. Gentleman has expressed an interest and these reflect their own policy and programme responsibilities.

Research funded by the Scottish Development Department deals with issues particular to Scotland and is designed to be complementary to that sponsored through United Kingdom Departments. Annex A shows projects related to environmental pollution currently being funded by SDD.

The broad objectives of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland are to ensure that the work undertaken makes a significant contribution to and, where appropriate, leads the agricultural R and D effort in the United Kingdom, while including work of special relevance to the soils, crops and livestock of northern Britain. Some of this research is concerned with aspects of environmental pollution—for example, how soil processes affect nutrient availability particularly as regards element cycling and flows; the effect of pollutants from the atmosphere entering the soil-plant-animal system; and how soil water is affected by fertilisers and pesticides. Annex B lists currently funded agricultural and related research concerned with environmental pollution.

Research on fisheries and the aquatic environment is undertaken by DAFS as part of a Great Britain programme co-ordinated with the main stocks of fish and shellfish in Scottish waters, and also investigates the impact of natural and manmade changes on those stocks and on the environment which supports them.

The marine research programme involves study of the hydrography, chemistry and biological productivity of the sea, and includes examination of the effects of pollution from disposal in the sea of materials such as oil compounds, dredge spoils, industrial waste, materials from marine fish farms, and sewage. DAFS also commissions work on seals and fish-eating birds.

On the freshwater side, where the DAFS interest is primarily in salmonid fish, research is commissioned into the impact of environmental stresses generated by surface water acidification, coniferous afforestation, fish farming, and land use change upon both freshwater fisheries and the freshwater environment.

The Scottish Home and Health Department, through its chief scientific office, aims to identify, encourage, promote and support good quality research relevant to the improvement of health and the National Health Service in Scotland. One project related to environmental pollution is currently funded by SHHD—"A study of neuropsychological function in children exposed to low levels of lead in the environment".

At present, Scottish Departments are not funding work directly related to climate changes and their effect on (i) the health of the people and (ii) wildlife in Scotland where given the global nature of such changes lead responsibility rests with other United Kingdom Departments.

Annex A

The Scottish Development Department is currently funding the following research projects in the environmental pollution arena.

Trace Element Toxicity in the River Don
Acidification of Inland Waters
Environmental Effects of Fish Farming
Monitoring of Phosphorus, Chlorophyll and Water Clarity on Loch Leven
Effect of Afforestation on Catchment Yields
Radionuclide Transfer in Heather-Dominant Ecosystems

Annex B

DAFS—Relevant Agricultural Research

Predictive models of losses of nitrogen from the soil-plant system.

The retention or movement of heavy metals in polluted soils and their availability to herbage.

Effect of organic matter content of soil on the cycling of radio-caesium and its availability to various upland plant species.

Factors affecting the uptake of radio-caesium by sheep.

Lead deposition from the atmosphere on Scottish soils.

Polychlorinated biphenyl congeners in hill and upland environments.

Proton budgets for hill and upland soils under sown grass pasture and grazed indigenous vegetation.

The extent of acidification and pollution of Scottish soils in hill, upland and marginal areas in recent decades.

The role of individual soil properties on the relationship between soil acidity and aluminium.

The ameliorating effects of selective liming on acidified catchments.

Movement of nitrates and pesticides in soil and water and gaseous soil emissions.

The effects of afforestation of blanket peat on water quality.

The hydrological and hydrochemical consequences of various forestry practices.

The effects of hill farm management systems on soil hydrology and hydrochemistry.

Reduction of the potential for silage effluent pollution.

The chemical and biological properties of animal wastes.

Environmentally acceptable animal waste management systems.

Systems to minimise the pollution of the environment by agricultural inputs and wastes.

The detoxification and use of organic wastes.

The evaluation of algal culture on settled effluent from aerobic treatment of pig slurry.

Biomass composition and nutrient cycling in algal ponds.

The physiological regulation of microalgal growth in multi-pass fermenter systems.

The potential for integration of farm waste treatment and aquaculture.

The improvement of energetic efficiency of aerobic treatment of farm waste.

The potential of nematodes and selected micro-organisms as indicators of pollution.

Inputs and outputs at a series of long-term environmental monitoring sites.
Elimination or reduction of silage effluent.

Extracts of Convictions

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he proposes to take to make mandatory the availability of extracts of convictions in the Scottish courts, including the district courts, at reasonable cost to members of the public and their advisers who can demonstrate a legitimate interest therein.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 January 1990]:* Extracts of conviction are already available to those with a legitimate interest in them. Problems which have arisen in respect of records stored on computer are at present under consideration.

Random Breath Tests

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now introduce a system of random breath tests for drivers in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* Earlier last year the Government embarked on a public consultation exercise on whether police breath testing powers should be extended. A considerable number of representations was received proposing a variety of measures including support for the introduction of random breath testing. The Government are still considering the important issues which would be involved in giving the police increased powers in this area.

Warrant Sales

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many warrant sales were carried out on behalf of regional councils against those defaulting on domestic rate payments in each year since 1979 until the most recent year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* This information is not available.

HEALTH

Hypothermia

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of cases where hypothermia was mentioned on the death certificate for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and how many of each annual total were people aged *(a)* 65 years and over *(b)* 80 years and over.

Mr. Freeman: The number of deaths with mention of hypothermia on the death certificate for persons of (a) all ages (b) 65 years and over, (c) 80 years and over, in England and Wales, 1979—1988 were:

Year	*All ages*	*65 years and over*	*80 years and over*
1979	863	688	374
1980	896	497	237
1981	685	574	326
1982	664	541	319
1983	538	450	261
1984	555	462	257
1985	829	708	417
1986	837	698	439
1987	559	448	276
1988	440	354	205

Fostering, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by age the number of children currently in foster care in the Doncaster area; and what the figures were *(a)* 10 years ago and *(b)* five years ago.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The most recent data available relates to 31 March 1988; 1981 is the earliest that such data is available. The number of children in the care of Doncaster district council, boarded with foster parents is given in the table showing those children boarded out in the Doncaster district area and in other areas. Information is not available about the numbers of children in the care of other local authorities who are boarded out in the Doncaster area.

	Boarded out by Doncaster					
	31 March 1981		*31 March 1983*		*31 March 1988*	
Age band	*Own area*	*Other areas*	*Own area*	*Other areas*	*Own area*	*Other areas*
Under 1	7	0	5	0	6	0
1 to 4	49	2	46	2	36	1
5 to 9	48	6	57	4	45	0
10 to 15	79	18	77	13	68	2
16 and over	12	2	26	5	17	0
All children	195	28	211	24	172	3

Resource Management Initiative

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the six pilot sites of the Government's resource management initiative scheme; and if he will list for all sites the number of times they have been updated and the dates.

Mr. Freeman: The six acute hospital pilot sites for the resource management initiative (RMI) are:

Arrowe Park Hospital (Wirral)
Freeman Hospital (Newcastle)
Guy's Hospital (Lewisham and North Southwark)
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary (Huddersfield)
Pilgrim Hospital, Boston (South Lincolnshire)
Royal Hampshire County Hospital (Winchester)

During the early part of 1988 Clatterbridge hospital (Wirral), originally a pilot site, withdrew from the RMI but work resumed as a result of a merger with Arrowe Park hospital in the summer of 1989. The Pilgrim hospital, Boston, was adopted as a pilot site in April 1988. On 20 March 1989 I announced the extension of resource management and the names of 50 hospitals to prepare for it in this financial year. On 14 December 1989 I announced the names of 20 hospitals, from the list of 50, which will implement the main resource management process in 1989-90.

Psycho-geriatric Provision, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the numbers of psycho-geriatric and geriatric beds in each hospital within the Doncaster area health authority on 1 January 1980, 1 January 1985, 1 January 1989 and at 1 January 1990.

Mr. Freeman: The available information is given in the table:

Average daily number of available beds, Geriatric and Psycho-geriatric specialties
National Health Service hospitals, Doncaster district health authority

Hospital	*Year ending:* *31 December 1979*	*31 December 1984*	*31 March 1989*
Geriatric			
Doncaster Royal Infirmary	20·5	21·6	20·0
Fullerton Hospital	0·0	34·0	34·0
Tickhill Road Hospital	171·0	178·2	121·8
Conisborough Hospital	101·0	99·0	96·2
Montagu Hospital[2]	25·1	25·4	21·0
TOTAL	317·6	358·2	293·0
Psycho-geriatric[1]			
Tickhill Road Hospital	44·5	88·3	98·1
Loversall Hospital	30·0	0·0	0·0
TOTAL	74·5	88·3	98·1

[1] In 1979 beds for psycho-geriatric patients were not always separately identifiable from those designated mental illness.
[2] Transferred from Rotherham district in the 1982 reorganisation.
Sources: 1979, 1984: SH3 return (geriatric, psycho-geriatric specialties); 1989: KH03 returns (ward classifications: general patients—elderly, mental illness-elderly).

Food Hygiene (Military Aircraft)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what food hygiene regulations apply to military aircraft operated by *(a)* the Royal Air Force and *(b)* foreign air forces operating out of the United Kingdom that are equipped for carrying passengers.

Mr. Freeman: None. The Food Safety Bill proposes the removal of immunity from food safety law from most Crown premises from 1 April 1992. Ground-based military catering establishments (but not the aircraft themselves) will then be within the scope of the food hygiene regulations.

The Bill also seeks powers to enable Ministers to make an order extending the definition of premises to include aircraft of any specific description for the purposes specified in the order. The Government have no plans at present to make such an order in respect of military aircraft.

Social Factor Questions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure confidentiality, after general practitioners have asked social factor questions of new patients from April 1990, when they are passed on to the local family practitioner committee.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Many general practitioners, in accordance with their training, already seek and record information about their patients concerning social and lifestyle factors relevant to their health, for example housing circumstances, diet, exercise, use of tobacco and consumption of alcohol.

General practitioners will be obliged to record from April 1990 the history and findings arising from a health check-up to ensure that a full medical record is maintained. However there is no requirement that specific information about social factors should be passed on to family practitioner committees.

General practitioners have always been obliged to return patients' records to the family practitioner committee so that they can be forwarded to a new doctor. Both general practitioners and family practitioner committees have a duty to maintain confidentiality and there is no suggestion that the arrangements to be introduced from April 1990 will result in a greater likelihood of breaches of confidentiality.

1991 Census

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the various issues of the Census Newsletter, in respect of the 1991 census of Great Britain, are freely available to members of the public; and where they can be obtained.

Mr. Freeman: Yes. Copies of the Census Newsletter can be obtained from Census Division (Room 823), Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, St. Catherine's house, 10 Kingsway, London WC2B 6JP or Customer Services, General Register Office, Ladywell house, Ladywell road, Edinburgh EH12 7TF.

Migrants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inquiries have been received by his Department regarding migrants and the Child Migrants Trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has received 22 inquiries since 1987 about child migrants and the Child Migrants Trust.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial contribution his Department is making to the costs incurred by Nottinghamshire county council in seconding Margaret Humphries from her normal duties to work connected with migrants and the Child Migrants Trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department is making no financial contribution.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department first received the request for grant funding from the Child Migrants Trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department received an initial inquiry from the Child Migrants Trust about financial assistance on 16 June 1988. A formal grant application was received on 26 January 1989.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department first requested additional information on the grant funding of the Child Migrants Trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Officials from the Department requested additional information from representatives of the Child Migrants Trust at a meeting to discuss the grant application on 29 August 1989. This information was received by the Department on Thursday 11 January 1990.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Aspinwall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has received about the amounts spent by the tobacco industry as part of its campaign to encourage retailers to support the law prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to children under 16 years; and if he will give the amounts spent for the years 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Freeman: Information on this campaign is contained in the first and second reports of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship.

These reports, copies of which are held in the Library, show that approximately £1 million was spent in each of the years, 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Details of expenditure in 1988-89 are not yet available but will be included in the committee's third report.

West Midlands RHA

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority to discuss the budget for the forthcoming year.

Mr. Freeman: No.

Sir James Ackers

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will dismiss Sir James Ackers from his position as chair of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Freeman: No.

Income Support Exemptions

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance to local authorities that people on income support or an equivalent level of income should be exempt from charges for services such as home help.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no plans to do so. Anyone who feels unable to afford local authority charges for domiciliary care can make representations to the authority which may reduce the charge to the amount it considers reasonable for him or her to pay.

Community Care

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that standards of community care are of a national minimum quality.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The need to secure and safeguard the necessary quality of community care is integral to the proposals set out in the White Paper "Caring for People". A wide range of measures will be taken. Some are provided for in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. In particular we are seeking powers to require local authorities to draw up and publish plans for community care services, and to assess the needs of people requiring social care.

In drawing up contracts for service provision from independent suppliers, local authorities will need to specify the quality and standards expected. Authorities will also be required to set up independent inspection units charged with inspecting and reporting on local authority residential care homes, as well as registering and inspecting independent residential care homes.

The Department proposes to issue guidance on the establishment of these units and the assessment of quality of provision.

These arrangements will be monitored by the Department's social services inspectorate whose advisory and supervisory functions will be strengthened.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to promote and encourage independent advocacy schemes for disabled people.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has approved a grant under section 64 of the Health and Public Services Act 1968 in 1989-90 towards the administrative costs of national citizen advocacy, which aims to promote the development of high quality citizen advocacy for mentally handicapped people in the United Kingdom. We are also contributing towards the cost of a project run by "one to one", an organisation which recruits and trains volunteers to act as friends, enablers and advocates of mentally handicapped people. We have no plans for formal independent advocacy schemes for other groups of disabled people.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will take steps to ensure that local authorities are authorised to make payments to disabled people for the purchase of care or personal assistance services.

Mr. Freeman: Local authorities are not authorised to make such payments and we have no plans further to do

so. Nevertheless the White Paper "Caring for People" proposes that local authorities should set up systems for assessing the care needs of disabled people and arranging packages of care to meet them. Disabled people and their carers should be fully involved in this process.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has just published a Command Paper, "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" containing proposals for improvements in the structure of social security help for disabled people. These improvements, which will increase social security spending in 1993-94 by some £300 million as announced last week, reflect the Government's aim of ensuring a better life for Britain's disabled people.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department is funding any independent case management schemes for disabled people.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 20 December at column *339*.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he now intends to implement section 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter on 19 December 1989 at column *170*.

NHS Staff

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health authorities have now decided to take local action to fund increases for NHS clerical and administrative staff who were previously paid above the maximum of their former grade and who have assimilated to the minimum of their new grade;

(2) how many health authorities must now decide to take local action to fund increases for NHS clerical and administrative staff who were formerly paid on the maximum point of their salary scale and who have assimilated to the penultimate point of their new salary scale;

(3) if he will now consider issuing a variation order to the regrading structure national agreement relating to NHS clerical and administrative staff;

(4) what representations he has received from local health authorities regarding the need to issue a variation order to the regrading structure national agreement relating to NHS clerical administrative staff.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Such information is not held centrally. We have received no representations from health authorities about the need to issue orders varying the agreement reached last year in the administrative and clerical staffs Whitley council and have no plans to do so.

Sight Tests

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the change in the number of sight tests carried out after the introduction of charges for the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Figures on the number of NHS sight tests carried out between 1 April and 30 September 1989 will shortly be available. The results of a survey on the total number of sight tests in the first quarter of 1990 compared with earlier periods should be available after Easter.

Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the years 1987 and 1988 the estimated percentage of women delivering in *(a)* England and *(b)* England and Wales whose deliveries were (i) spontaneous, including abnormal presentation of head and breech spontaneous, (ii) instrumental, including forceps vacuum and breech extractions, (iii) caesarean section and (iv) other and unspecified means.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available for the years requested nor for England and Wales. The information for the latest year available, 1985, is given in the following table:

Deliveries
Percentage of deliveries by method of delivery: 1985
England

Mode of delivery	*Percentage of all deliveries*
Spontaneous delivery (including breech spontaneous and abnormal presentation of head)	78·8
Instrumental delivery (including forceps, vacuum and breech extraction)	10·7
Caesarean section	10·5
Other and unspecified means	0·1

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.
Source: Hospital In-Patient Enquiry 1985.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the years 1987 and 1988 the estimated percentages of women delivering in *(a)* England and *(b)* England and Wales (i) whose labours were induced, (ii) whose labours were of spontaneous onset and (iii) who had elective caesarean sections.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available for the years requested nor for England and Wales. The information for the latest year available, 1985, is given in the following table:

Deliveries
Percentage of deliveries by method of delivery: 1985
England

Mode of delivery	*Percentage of all deliveries*
Induced labour	17·5
Spontaneous onset	65·5
Elective caesarean section	4·9
Accelerated labour	12·1

Source: Hospital In-Patient Enquiry 1985.

NHS Working Party

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state *(a)* the members of the working party on National Health Service costing and their expertise, *(b)* the terms of reference of this working party, *(c)* when the working party expects to report and *(d)* whether he will place its conclusions in the Library.

Mr. Freeman: The working party is made up of a number of health authority directors of finance and departmental officers, including accountants and an economist.

Its remit is:

(i) to assist the NHS Management Executive in developing the principles for costing and pricing hospital services; and

(ii) to provide guidance to the NHS on the application of these principles.

The NHSME will shortly issue a discussion draft on the cost allocation principles for contract pricing. More detailed guidance will follow later in the year.

When the guidance exists in final form it will be placed in the Library.

Working for Patients

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance *(a)* for computerisation and information technology and *(b)* otherwise, he proposes to offer to general practitioners of medicine to carry out additional duties arising from the implementation of his White Paper, "Working for Patients"; and, in each case, what is his estimate of the cost of such assistance.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) on 28 November 1989 at columns *228-231*. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation, in recognition of the additional work which practices will need to undertake in 1990-91 to prepare for fund-holding, costs incurred on these tasks will be reimbursed up to a maximum of £16,000. Practices which join the fund-holding scheme will be eligible for an annual management allowance of up to £32,000. The cost will depend on the number of fund-holders.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional capital and revenue provision he has made in 1989-90 and succeeding years in the budget of the Prescription Pricing Authority for England; and what proportion of this is accounted for by the additional work for the authority arising from the White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mr. Freeman: The revenue allocation for the Prescription Pricing Authority for 1989-90 is £2·64 million higher than for 1988-89. The capital allocation is £0·9 million lower. Allocations for future years, including sums for work which the Prescription Pricing Authority is undertaking in respect of White Paper initiatives, have not yet been finalised.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he and his predecessors have taken since 1984 to identify alleged false prescriptions or overprescriptions; and what action has been taken as a result.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Arrangements exist for the Prescription Pricing Authority to forward to family practitioner committees, for their consideration, investigation and appropriate action, prescriptions where some irregularity is suspected. No central record is kept of the action taken by family practitioner committees in these cases, or in others which may come to their attention. Since 1984 doctors of the Department's regional medical service have visited over 2,800 practices whose prescribing costs overall were significantly above the local average. This has led to an estimated saving of around £15,000 per practice in a full year in 1989-90.

Census

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend procedures relating to the disclosure of information from the next census to take into account access to (i) the electoral register, (ii) the extract of the poll tax register and (iii) anonymous poll tax data; whether access to any of these could undermine the confidentiality of the census; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: As in past censuses, no information on identified individual people or households will be passed to anyone other than employees of the registrars general. Thus current procedures already prevent such information being passed to electoral registration officers or community charge registration officers. Furthermore, stringent measures already exist to guard against possible indirect disclosure of information on individual people or households through the published statistics and no incidents of such disclosure have been reported from the 1981 census. It is planned to strengthen these measures further for the 1991 census by doubling the minimum thresholds, below which no statistics, other than a simple total of people and households will be released for any area, to 16 households and 50 people.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reassure individuals who complete the census that they will not be identified from the information subsequently disclosed by his Department; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Reassurance on confidentiality will be given on the front page of the census forms in the message addressed to heads of households and others responsible for completing the forms. It will also be reinforced in publicity material issued before the census.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will describe the uses of census data that specifically require the collection of the date of birth rather than the age of a person; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The question on date of birth is asked primarily because it has been found to give more accurate statistics than can be obtained by a question simply on age. As the census is taken in April the information on date of birth is used to produce the mid-year population estimates by age as at 30 June. Also, four dates of birth have been used to select the OPCS longitudinal study sample from the 1971 and 1981 censuses. OPCS plans to include in this study the appropriate sample of records from the 1991 census.

Birmingham Health Resources

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assurances have been given to the West Midlands regional health authority about the availability of the resources which will be required to implement the latest proposals entitled "Building a Healthy Birmingham."

Mr. Freeman: The overall level of resources available for the Health Service is determined each year in the public expenditure round. All RHAs are then told what resources they will be allocated in the next financial year. No Secretary of State could give any RHA assurances beyond this period because this is dependent upon the outcome of subsequent expenditure surveys.

999 Calls

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average response time for the 999 calls for December 1989 in each of the health authorities covering south Yorkshire.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Details for activation and response times are not held centrally for December 1989. I suggest the hon. Member contacts the chairman of Trent regional health authority for the information he seeks.

Eye Tests

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out on the impact on the number of people seeking eye tests of the introduction of a charge.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have recently commissioned a survey of the volume of sight tests. The survey will collect information on the numbers carried out during the first quarter of 1990 and the results compared with demand in earlier periods.

The findings should be available after Easter when we would expect to provide a summary for the Library.

Mentally Ill

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement on the provision of community care for the mentally ill.

Mr. Freeman: In addition to the initiatives referred to in "Caring for People" (Cm 849), we have recently announced the establishment of a National Health Service loans fund, which we hope will enable the early provision of community facilities for people with a mental illness or handicap.

Hospital Capital Spending

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on future hospital capital spending.

Mr. Freeman: Exchequer provision for health authority capital spending for the next three years was announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. Government spending on capital in the NHS will amount to some £1,086 million next year, a real terms increase of 12·4 per cent. over 1989-90. In addition health authorities will continue to benefit from receipts from land and property sales.

The Government attach the highest priority to improving and modernising health buildings and throughout England over 500 schemes each costing over £1 million with a total value of over £5 billion are at various stages of planning, design and construction.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost of printing stationery changes involved in changing the name of family practitioner committees in the first year of implementation.

Mr. Freeman: It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the cost of this proposal. The amount involved is likely to be very small as FPCs will be able to run down existing stocks in advance of the change and, where appropriate, use existing stocks until they are exhausted.

Perinatal Deaths

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department proposes to take to reduce the perinatal death rate in those health authority areas where that death rate is higher than the national average.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the Government reply to the First Report from the Social Services Committee, Session 1988-89 on Perinatal, Neonatal and Infant Mortality (CM 741), a copy of which is available in the Library.

Air Ambulances

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for how long he has committed Government resources to the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has committed resources for three years from January 1989.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government are contributing to the financing of *(a)* the Cornwall First Air Ambulance and *(b)* the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is contributing from central funds £673,000 (revenue) and £1,349,000 (capital) to the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions *(a)* the London Air Ambulance and *(b)* the Cornwall First Air Ambulance have been called out.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally by the Department.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision there is for carrying journalists or photographers on *(a)* the London Air Ambulance and *(b)* the Cornwall First Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: There is no provision for carrying journalists or photographers on either of these services.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he, or one of his Ministers, has met representatives from *(a)* the Cornwall First Air Ambulance and *(b)* the London Air Ambulance, or has plans to do so.

Mr. Freeman: I have met representatives of the Cornwall First Air Ambulance Service operating company. I have no plans at present to meet other representatives.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he, or one of his Ministers, has visited or plans to visit *(a)* London Air Ambulance and *(b)* the Cornwall First Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: Neither I nor my colleagues have visited either of these services and there are currently no arrangements to do so.

Personal Stereos

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any evidence to suggest that the use of personal stereos causes a hearing loss; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We are aware of the recent report by the National Deaf Children's Society which warns that personal stereos may be causing damage to the hearing of children and young people. However, we have not yet seen a copy of this report. There is evidence that prolonged exposure to loud noise may constitute a risk to hearing.

Unregistered Homes

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people currently live in unregistered homes, with fewer than four occupants.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not collected centrally.

Registered Homes Tribunals

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many tribunal cases there have been where it has come to light that the proprietor of a registered home has previous criminal convictions which would have made him unsuitable or ineligible to run a home.

Mr. Freeman: As at 31 December 1989 there have been six tribunal decisions confirming an authority's decision either to cancel or to refuse an application for registration because the appellant is not considered to be a fit person to be running a home in the light of a previous criminal conviction.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he gives to the decisions of the registered homes tribunals and whether he has accepted any of their recommendations.

Mr. Freeman: The registered homes tribunals are independent statutory bodies. They are mainly concerned with appeals against the decisions of district health authorities and local authorities which are the registering authorities for nursing homes and most independent residential care homes respectively.

The Secretary of State is the registering authority only for voluntary children's homes and no appeal against his decisions has been made to the registered homes tribunal.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the decisions of the registered homes tribunal are circulated.

Mr. Freeman: Distribution of decisions of the registered homes tribunal includes the following:

Directors of Social Services Local Authorities England
General Managers District Health Authorities England
Association of County Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
British Federation of Care Home Proprietors
Council on Tribunals
MIND (National Association for Mental Health)
National Care Homes Association
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Social Care Association
Welsh Office
Libraries of the Houses of Parliament

Residential Care

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he has for 1984-85 and for the latest available year of the average annual cost per client in residential care for the elderly in *(a)* Somerset, *(b)* Devon, *(c)* Dorset and *(d)* Wiltshire.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 18 December 1989]:* The annual gross cost per client/place (excluding capital charges) for the elderly accommodated in the residential care homes operated by each of the local authorities in question is:

	1984-85 £	*1989-90* £
Somerset	5,138	7,564
Devon	4,837	7,263
Dorset	5,477	6,460
Wiltshire	4,662	6,724

The figures for 1989-90 are estimates only and are the costs per place filled, whereas the 1984-85 figures are the actual cost per resident.

The figures are taken from the "Personal Social Services Statistics" publications of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he has, for 1984-85 and for the latest available year, of the average annual cost per client in residential care for children in *(a)* Somerset, *(b)* Devon, *(c)* Dorset and *(d)* Wiltshire.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 18 December 1989]:* The annual gross cost per client/place (excluding capital charges) for children accommodated in community homes operated by each of the local authorities in question is:

	1984-85 £	*1989-90* £
Somerset	14,862	22,323
Devon	14,990	21,387
Dorset	15,557	15,654
Wiltshire	13,667	17,477

The figures for 1989-90 are estimates only and are the costs per place filled, whereas the 1984-85 figures are the actual costs per resident child.

This and other information on the unit costs of children in residential care can be found in the "Personal Social Services Statistics" publications of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, copies of which are available in the Library.

Health Targets

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has adopted targets for the reduction in consumption of *(a)* saturated fats, *(b)* sugar, *(c)* sodium chloride and *(d)* alcohol; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 21 December 1989]:* The Chief Medical Officer's Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) has considered the consumption of saturated fatty acids and sodium chloride in relation to cardiovascular disease and dietary sugars in relation to general health and made the following recommendations which we have accepted:

(a) saturated fatty acids—the maximum intake for saturated plus trans fatty acids should be 15 per cent. of total food energy. (COMA Report "Diet and Cardiovascular Disease")

(b) sugars—as sugars are the most important dietary factor in the cause of dental caries everyone should reduce the amount and frequency with which they take sugars. COMA did not, however, recommend a specific target. (COMA Report "Dietary Sugars and Human Disease")

(c) sodium chloride—as the dietary intake of salt is needlessly high there should be no further increase in consumption and ways of decreasing current levels should be sought. COMA did not, however, recommend a specific target. (COMA Report "Diet and Cardiovascular Disease")

The COMA panel on recommended daily amounts is currently considering setting benchmark figures for intakes by the population of saturated fatty acids, sugars and salt.

As far as alcohol is concerned we have accepted the views of three medical Royal Colleges that 21 units of alcohol per week for men and 14 units per week for women are sensible limits for the consumption of alcohol.

We are committed to ensuring that the best possible information about sensible eating and drinking is made available so that individuals can make informed choices.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) on 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *677-79*, he will extend the information provided about rates of cancer of the breast and cervix, and in similar form, for women aged 55 to 59 years, 60 to 64 years, 65 to 69 years and 70 plus years in the Northern and Yorkshire health regions and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 8 January 1990]:* The information is shown in the following tables:

Newly diagnosed cases of cancer, rates (per 100,000 population) for female breast[1] and the cervix uteri[2] by age group for Northern regional health authority, Yorkshire regional health authority and United Kingdom, 1980-84

TABLE 1
Malignant neoplasm of female breast

Year and age group	Northern RHA	Yorkshire RHA	United Kingdom
1980			
55-59	154·53	179·02	169·40
60-64	169·97	184·29	178·86
65-69	189·92	211·35	199·94
70+	200·96	211·15	229·43
1981			
55-59	150·31	177·90	161·78
60-64	155·90	176·95	169·94
65-69	161·71	180·18	198·30
70+	193·70	221·28	231·54
1982			
55-59	171·76	175·51	168·52
60-64	167·92	198·63	188·24
65-69	162·79	191·07	200·32
70+	178·76	217·68	231·39
1983			
55-59	138·56	171·57	168·01
60-64	156·15	185·43	177·16
65-69	163·89	194·23	200·11
70+	198·25	232·22	235·77
1984			
55-59	162·49	176·41	167·42
60-64	192·38	171·53	182·96
65-69	213·23	206·57	197·79
70+	198·68	225·25	235·04

TABLE 2
Malignant neoplasm of the cervix uteri

Year and age group	Northern RHA	Yorkshire RHA	United Kingdom
1980			
55-59	45·28	48·82	35·31
60-64	37·25	43·98	35·55
65-69	35·17	27·39	30·36
70+	30·92	34·06	24·67

Year and age group	Northern RHA	Yorkshire RHA	United Kingdom
1981			
55-59	28·63	34·64	31·09
60-64	47·88	27·30	33·18
65-69	45·18	37·04	32·67
70+	32·55	22·72	24·21
1982			
55-59	25·29	49·18	29·71
60-64	50·59	44·03	34·21
65-69	47·74	28·04	[illegible]
70+	24·87	31·69	[illegible]
1983			
55-59	34·37	28·43	26·79
60-64	34·13	39·74	32·41
65-69	29·45	32·18	28·49
70+	22·14	27·94	24·14
1984			
55-59	22·90	31·71	24·57
60-64	38·08	45·62	31·79
65-69	21·59	43·43	30·43
70+	27·00	25·66	23·63

Potassium Iodate

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many of the potassium iodate tablets held to counter possible ionising radiation have been held in stock for more than 10, five, two and one years, respectively; and how many are presently in stock altogether;

(2) what is his estimate for the shelf life of potassium iodate tablets.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* Arrangements for the stocking and issue of potassium iodate tablets form part of the contingency plans for both civil and defence nuclear installations. It should be noted that iodine tablets are a counter-measure for any long-term adverse health effects of radio-iodine only.

Contingency planning for civil nuclear accidents is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy (in respect of England and Wales) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, advised by the nuclear installations inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive.

Contingency planning for defence nuclear accidents is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

The Central Electricity Generating Board has advised that it holds half a million tablets of potassium iodate centrally and another half million tablets distributed to the nuclear generating sites, all stock being batched in September 1989.

The Ministry of Defence has advised that it holds 2 million tablets of potassium iodate batched in 1986, and 2 million tablets batched in 1980-82 which have been examined and are still in good contition. Shelf life cannot be accurately predicted but stock quality and requirements are continually being reviewed and revised if necessary.

A further stock of tablets is also held by operators of sites such as British Nuclear Fuels plc and Atomic Energy Authority Technology.

In addition small stocks of potassium iodate and potassium iodide are held for other medical purposes by some manufacturers, pharmacists and hospitals.

Chernobyl

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been made of the amount of radiation recorded in Britain arising from the Chernobyl incident; and what assessment has been made of the implications of the amount of radiation recorded for the future incidence of radiation-induced congenital abnormalities and incidence of radiation-induced cancers over the next 30 years.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* There have been many studies of the occurrence and behaviour in Britain of radionuclides from the Chernobyl reactor accident.

Early measurements of dose rates, radionuclide concentrations in air, deposition, environmental materials and foods were collated by the National Radiological Protection Board. More detailed studies of the deposition on grass and soil have been carried out, and aerial surveys have been conducted in some areas. Extensive monitoring of radionuclides in foods has been carried out in England and Wales and in Scotland, and of radionuclides in surface and coastal waters of the British Isles. Studies of the levels in people have also been made. Numerous other studies have also been reported in the scientific literature.

The radiological impact of the Chernobyl accident has been assessed by OECD for many European countries. Estimates have been made of both the maximum levels of individual exposure and the typical levels of individual exposure for the United Kingdom together with the collective exposure of the entire United Kingdom population. Using the most recent risk estimates the theoretical number of fatal cancers arising in the United Kingdom from Chernobyl is estimated to be about 100 and the corresponding number of non-fatal cancers as 60. The majority of these would be expected to occur within 30 years. These figures can be compared with the annual mortality from cancer in the United Kingdom of around 100,000 to 150,000. The number of heriditary effects arising in the United Kingdom population over all time from the Chernobyl accident is estimated to be a few tens.

A list of major relevant publications is shown in the table:

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4. Sanderson D. C. W. et al. A feasibility study of airborne radiometric survey from United Kingdom fallout. SURRC report 88-03, 1988.
5. Sanderson D. C. W. and Scott E. M. Aerial radiometric survey in west Cumbria, 1988. Final report: project NE1, 1989.
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13. Fry, F. A. et al. Radiocaesium in a group of adults resident in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Radiation Protection—Theory and Practice. 4th SRP Int. Symp. 1989.
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15. Boddy, K. et al. Study of measurements made on a whole-body radioactivity counter installed in the West Cumberland hospital. DoE report No. DOE/RW/89, 045, 1989.
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17. OECD/NEA. The radiological impact of the Chernobyl accident in OECD countries. Paris, OECD, 1987.
18. Morrey, M. et al. A preliminary assessment of the radiological impact of the Chernobyl reactor accident on the population of the European Community. Luxembourg, CEC. Report No. EUR11523, 1987.
19. Simmonds, J. R. Europe calculates the health risk. New Scientist, 23 April 1987.
20. UNSCEAR. Sources, effects and risks of ionising radiation. 1988 report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation to the General Assembly, with annexes New York, United Nations, 1988.
21. Clarke, R. H. Current radiation risk estimates and implications for the health consequences of the Windscale, TMI and Chernobyl accidents. *IN* Medical response to effects of ionising radiation (Gittus, J. and Crosbie, W. A., eds.). Elsevier, p. 102, 1989.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who holds stocks of iodine tablets; and how many tablets are in stock per head of population and per head of population under the age of 18 years.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* Stocks of potassium iodate tablets are held at all CEGB nuclear installations and at some nearby sites, chiefly police stations and hospitals. These are specifically for issue to staff and people living in the vicinity of a nuclear installation should an accident occur in which radioactive iodine is released.

These supplies are in excess of those needed for a reference accident and supplies would be ample for an extended distribution if needed in the event of a more severe accident. In addition stocks held elsewhere could be made available within hours depending on the location of the accident.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Exchequer if inheritance tax liabilities in respect of shares in closely held unquoted trading companies were rolled over until the shares were realised as cash or marketable securities.

Mr. Lilley: Information on which to base an estimate of cost is not available.

Gains

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the estimated cost to the Exchequer if all gains pre-1985 were to be exempted from tax instead of gains pre-1982.

Mr. Lilley: I regret that a reliable estimate could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Rail Investment

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the cost to the Exchequer of British Rail's investment programme of £3·75 billion over the next three years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: British Rail's investment programme of £3·75 billion over the next three years will be financed from its own internally generated cash flow, which does not constitute public expenditure, and from external finance, which does. The Government's public expenditure plans for the next three years provide for a total of £2·2 billion of external finance for British Rail, of which grants account for £1·25 billion.

HMSO

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for Her Majesty's Stationery Office Agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Ryder: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) on 21 December 1989 (*Official Report*, col. *372*) in respect of the financial target of £2·9 million for 1990.

Other performance targets I have agreed for 1990 are as follows:

Value for money	2 per cent. improvement in 1990 on 1989 for purchases of stationery and paper; office machinery and printing and binding.	
Service and Quality	Print orders delivered to time	Vital 100 per cent. Overall 95 per cent.
	Print orders delivered without fault	100 per cent.
	Print production jobs delivered to time	Basic: 100 per cent. Overall: 95 per cent.
	Print production jobs delivered without fault	: 100 per cent.
Stock catalogue items		90 per cent. of customers orders despatched within five days of receipt.
		95 per cent. of all items and 97 per cent. of priority items despatched "first time" from stocks
	Publications—80 per cent. of customer orders and telephone orders from Publications Centre despatched within four days and 90 per cent. within five days of receipt.	

In the longer term these targets should, where appropriate, become progressively more demanding.

Construction Company Earnings

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average annual increase in the net earnings of construction companies between 1974 and 1979; and what has been the average annual increase since 1979.

Mr. Major: Based on figures extracted from published accounts, the average annual increase in net income of large construction companies was 12·5 per cent. between accounting years 1974 and 1979 and 11·6 per cent. between accounting years 1979 and 1988. Net income is defined as gross trading profit plus other revenue income less depreciation. The underlying figures are published in the MA3 series of business monitors "Company Finance".

Inflation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's target for inflation for the last quarter of 1991.

Mr. Ryder: The Government do not set specific targets for the rate of inflation. Tight monetary policy, supported by a firm fiscal position, will ensure that inflation moderates from its current level.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions have taken place between the Treasury and the National Audit Office concerning the Government's proposal to reorganise the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* There have been no discussions between the Treasury and the National Audit Office on these proposals.

ENVIRONMENT

Inland Waterways

62. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the present state of inland waterways.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The British Waterways Board is responsible for most of the inland waterways in Britain. The board is committed to realising the full potential of its waterways as an environmental and leisure resource and, where practicable, for freight transport. The Environment Select Committee, which reported on the board last August, found that the canals appeared to be in a better state overall than for many years previously.

Housing Exhibition

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to housing to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Chope: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 12 to 16 March 1990.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities in England which had compiled their community charges register by 1 December 1989 as required.

Mr. Chope: All 366 charging authorities in England and Wales had compiled a community charges register by 1 December. Details of individual authorities' excellent register returns have been available from the Library of the House since 13 December.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the £10 premium received by

unemployed people who are participating in the employment training scheme is disregarded for community charge purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The training premium paid to those participating in the employment training scheme is disregarded in the calculation of community charge benefit.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether 18-year-olds on the YTS are liable for the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Those people who are on the youth training scheme and aged 18 or over are subject to the community charge. They will be able to apply for community charge benefit to help them with their payments.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the purposes for which a charging authority can use the information disclosed to it by a community charge registration officer for purposes other than those associated with the community charge; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Charging authorities derive their powers and duties from the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and in that capacity they have no functions other than those conferred in that Act.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the disclosure of anonymous poll tax data without the consent or knowledge of the poll tax payer; whether he will summarise the representations and place them in the Library; whether he plans to consult other organisations before introducing any regulation that allows for the disclosure of anonymous poll tax data; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Office of the Data Protection Registrar has written seeking assurances about the disclosure of anonymous community charges register data and asking to be consulted on the regulations. Our intention is to consult other organisations before introducing any regulations allowing community charges registration officers to release non-personal data to third parties.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities on the need to disclose anonymous poll tax data; whether he will place a copy of the representations in the Library; what plans he has to ensure that the regulations that allow disclosure of anonymous poll tax data protect individuals from identification; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: One representation has been received on this subject from a local authority, making a case for allowing officers of the authority other than those involved in community charge registration to derive aggregate information from the register for planning and research purposes and for allowing the transfer of aggregate data to other authorities. The intention is that the regulation governing the release of data by community charges registration officers will enable them to release statistical data; there is no intention to create a power that enables an individual's privacy to be breached.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether all local authorities on their community charge payment form are obliged to offer the facility of single payment by one member of the household, in accordance with former normal practice.

Mr. Chope: In order to increase the accountability of local authorities to their electorate, the community charge legislation requires every person who is liable to pay the personal community charge to be sent a demand notice. Where more than one person in a household receives a demand notice, it is a matter for members of that household to decide whether each individual should pay his or her own bill or whether to adopt some other arrangement.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total revenue which local authorities in Great Britain expect to receive from *(a)* community charge and *(b)* business rates in 1990-91; and what was the income from *(c)* personal rates, and *(d)* business rates in 1989-90 in actual terms and as a percentage of *(a)* and *(b)* respectively.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 January 1990]:* The information in the form requested is not available.

Regional Rivers Advisory Committees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will name the nominating body for all those who so far have been appointed to the regional rivers advisory committees in *(a)* Yorkshire Water and *(b)* Severn Trent Water areas.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am advised by the National Rivers Authority that the information requested as regards the regional rivers advisory committees for its Yorkshire and Severn Trent regions is as follows:

Member	*Nominating Body*
Yorkshire Regional Rivers Advisory Committee	
Mr. J. Whitworth (Chairman)	—
Mr. J. C. Cooke	Country Landowners Association
Mr. R. Pigg	National Farmers Union
Mr. J. Armitage	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Ms S. Marsden	Eye on the Aire
Dr. S. A. Bucknall	Countryside Commission
Dr. P. Knights	Nature Conservancy Council
Mr. P. Andrew	Confederation of British Industry
Mr. M. Wright	Central Electricity Generating Board
Councillor C. D. Swinglehurst	North Yorkshire County Council
Mr. I. White	British Waterways Board
Councillor R. Mitchell	Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Mr. C. Hawkesworth	Sports Council

Member	*Nominating Body*
Mr. G. A. Wilford	York Waterworks Company
Dr. A. J. Shuttleworth	Yorkshire Water Plc
Miss M. Rooker	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Mr. J. N. Thompson	Peak District National Park
Chairman Regional Flood Defence Committee—to be appointed	
Mr. J. A. Fawcett (Chairman Regional Fisheries Advisory Committee)	
Severn Trent Regional Rivers Advisory Committee	
Dr. H. Tebbutt (Chairman)	—
Mr. D. Grigg	National Farmers Union
Lord Guernsey	Country Landowners Association
Mr. F. Walmsley	Countryside Commission
Mr. J. Thompson	Nature Conservancy Council
Mr. C. Nicholson	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Mrs. V. Gillespie MBE	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Mr. B. Scott	Severn Trent Water Plc
Mr. M. White	Confederation of British Industry
Mr. P. J. Mitchell	Confederation of British Industry
Councillor Mrs. P. R. Merritt	Gloucestershire County Council
Councillor Sir Richard Knowles	Birmingham City Council
Councillor D. R. Jones	Montgomeryshire District Council
Councillor P. E. Beeby	Rushcliffe District Council
Mr. D. Pryor	Sports Council
Mr. S. Sim	British Waterways Board
Mr. J. Betteridge	National Federation of Anglers
Mr. C. G. Hawthorne (Chairman Regional Flood Defence Committee)	
Mr. F. Jennings (Chairman Regional Fisheries Advisory Committee)	

Environmental Labelling

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his eco-labelling initiative.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 9 January by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) (*Official Report*, Vol. 164, columns *589-91*).

AIDS

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to carry out research to determine the longevity of HIV AIDS virus carried in untreated sewage into the sea.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Research to date shows that the numbers of HIV AIDS virus particles decrease very rapidly once infected fluids have left the body.

Sewage

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost of compliance with the proposed European Council directive Com(89)518 requiring the cessation of the disposal of sewage into the sea.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department has commissioned a study of the potential environmental benefits to the marine environment that may arise from treatment beyond the preliminary stage of sewage discharged to the sea; and of the costs of such further treatment. The study is expected to be completed shortly.

Bathing Waters

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are any popularly used inland bathing waters in the United Kingdom designated for compliance under the 76/160/European Community bathing water directive.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are no inland waters in the United Kingdom identified as bathing waters under directive 76/160/EEC.

Pesticides

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what monitoring his Department is undertaking of pesticides in streams and water supplies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Water undertakers are responsible for monitoring the levels of pesticides in water supplies in accordance with the requirements of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989. In addition to the continuing role of local authorities in checking the quality of water supplies in their areas, the new drinking water inspectorate is responsible for ensuring that drinking water quality standards are met. The National Rivers Authority also monitors surface waters for those pesticides that are classified as European Community list I dangerous substances.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made an assessment of the environmental impact of pesticide use on agricultural and other land.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The environmental impact of pesticide use is routinely assessed as part of the approval process specified in the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 made under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. The agreement of the Ministers of six Departments is needed before a pesticide can be approved for use, and Ministers are required to consult the

independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides, which considers scientific information on all aspects of pesticide use, including the effect on agricultural and other land.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the Historic Royal Palaces Agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Chris Patten: Detailed performance measures and targets for the Historic Royal Palaces Agency's commercial and non-commercial operations will be set out in its first corporate plan, which will be submitted for my approval in March. The corporate plan will provide the basis for the agency's performance—oriented management regime in its first full year of operation—1990-91—and beyond.

For the remainder of the current financial year the agency has continued with the management arrangements inherited from the Department, with the specific financial target of increasing the agency's surplus on its commercial activities from £2·3 million in 1988-89 to £3·8 million in 1990-91.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures his Department is taking to ensure that there is adequate good quality housing suitable and available for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government's housing policies are aimed at securing decent housing provision for all our citizens, able bodied and disabled alike. Within the Housing Corporation programme, a place has always been found for spending to meet the needs of disabled people, and we have recently announced a doubling of that programme over the next three years. The new home renovation grant system, which will come into operation in April, will include special arrangements to facilitate works to enable disabled people to continue living in their own homes.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken about the recommendations of Sir John Badenoch's committee as to the result of interim conclusions; and what response he has had from water undertakers, local authorities and health authorities in relation to cryptosporidium.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To discharge the remit of the group of experts on cryptosporidium in water supplies to make an interim report by the end of July 1989, Sir John Badenoch wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 25 July setting out the group's preliminary conclusions on measures to safeguard water supplies and on public health aspects of infection with cryptosporidium. The letter, a copy of which was placed in the Library, made it clear that further substantive reports containing conclusions and recommendations on the control of cryptosporidium would be prepared in due course by the group.

My Department sent Sir John's letter to water undertakers in August 1989 and endorsed the main recommendations. Copies of the letter were also sent by the Department of Health to the chief environmental health officers of local authorities and to the district general managers of health authorities and to other interests.

A co-operative research programme has now been put in hand involving Government Departments, water undertakers, the Water Research Centre and the Foundation of Water Research to take forward the expert group's research recommendations.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect chlorination has on cryptosporidium; and what steps are being taken to protect public health from cryptosporidial infections in domestic water supplies.

Mr. Trippier: Cryptosporidium is unaffected by chlorine in the concentrations that can be used to treat drinking water. Sir John Badenoch, chairman of the group of experts on cryptosporidium in water supplies, wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 25 July 1989 setting out the group's preliminary conclusions on measures to safeguard water supplies and on the public health aspects of infection with cryptosporidium. The letter, a copy of which was placed in the Library, made it clear that further substantive reports containing conclusions and recommendations on the control of cryptosporidium would be prepared in due course by the group.

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A co-operative research programme has now been put in hand involving Government Departments, water undertakers, the Water Research Centre and the Foundation of Water Research to take forward the expert group's research recommendations.

Toxic Pollution

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to evaluate the toxic pollution dangers of the use of *(a)* diacid ester hardeners, *(b)* acrylate, *(c)* silicate and aqua-reactive acrylic, *(d)* tanning/formaldehyde and *(e)* resoranol/formaldehyde grouts in tunnel construction in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: The Department of the Environment is not taking any specific action to evaluate the toxic pollution dangers of the materials listed in the question used as grouts in tunnel construction. There are general requirements in the Water Act 1989 to ensure that the use of substances, including chemical grouts, does not cause pollution of surface or ground waters. Substances in contact with water that is supplied for drinking, washing and cooking are subject to specific provisions in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989.

Landfill Sites

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds the Government are allocating to enable waste disposal authorities and other local authorities to locate and rehabilitate former landfill sites which now constitute a real or potential health hazard.

Mr. Trippier: Provision for credit approvals for local authority capital expenditure already reflects estimated expenditure needs to meet statutory responsibilities, including public health requirements to monitor and take action over potential hazards. For 1990-91 onwards, this will include specific provision for the capital cost of remedial works to deal with landfill gas on closed or completed sites. If a former landfill site is derelict, appropriate schemes may be eligible for reclamation under derelict land grant or through the urban programme.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures the Government are taking to ensure that a clear and comprehensive register is kept of types, quantities and locations of materials currently being deposited in landfill sites and falling under the definitions of materials covered by the special waste regulations.

Mr. Trippier: There is an existing requirement under the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980 for landfill operators to keep a register containing details of the types and quantities of special waste received and to record the location of each deposit by reference to the register.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the location of landfill sites known to cause groundwater contamination.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Complete and reliable information on landfill sites known to cause groundwater contamination is not held centrally. Waste disposal authorities and the NRA can advise on instances of groundwater contamination in their areas.

Oxide Emissions

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures the Government are taking to encourage the reduction of sulphurous and nitrous oxide emissions from oil refineries, manufacturing plants and coking plants.

Mr. Trippier: My Department issued a consultation paper on 31 August 1989 explaining in detail our proposals for implementing the EC Large Combustion Plants Directive, which applies to plants that are equal to or greater than 50MW thermal. Such plants are responsible for 85 per cent. of United Kingdom emissions of sulphur dioxide and about 40 per cent. of oxides of nitrogen. A copy of the paper is in the Library of the House.

The Environmental Protection Bill now before the House includes proposals to develop the current control regime operated by HMIP into a system of integrated pollution control. This will require major emitters to use best available techniques not entailing excessive cost (BATNEEC) to minimise releases of all pollutants, including sulphurous and nitrous oxides.

Motor Vehicles (Dumping)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures the Government are taking to combat the illegal dumping of motor vehicles in rural areas.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under sections 3 to 5 of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 local authorities have a duty to remove abandoned motor vehicles from any land in the open air provided that they have placed a notice on each vehicle 15 days previously and that the owner of the land raises no objection. In addition, they have powers to dispose of the vehicles and to recover expenses incurred.

East Sussex County Council

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his standard spending assessment for East Sussex county council has taken account of the recent pay rise of the council's chief executive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The standard spending assessment for East Sussex county council will be calculated in accordance with the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) laid before the House of Commons on 11 January.

Hylands Park

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if a new date has been announced for the postponed public inquiry into the Hylands park, Chelmsford planning application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The public inquiry was postponed at the request of Chelmsford borough council to allow further negotiations to take place on these proposals. A new date will be arranged for the inquiry when those negotiations are completed.

Showmen's Guild

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken by his Department since 30 June 1989 to deal with the problems being experienced by members of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain in the home counties and in particular (i) the Plantation, Redhill, (ii) Salfords, Reigate and (iii) the Turning Wheel, Crawley.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department has been preparing a consultation paper on measures designed to ease the problems experienced by travelling showpeople in obtaining planning permission for sites from which to base their operations. The sites mentioned by the hon. Member have been the subject of enforcement action, including appeals to the Secretary of State, which have been decided. My right hon. Friend has recently received an appeal against a refusal of planning permission for the use of land at the Plantation, Redhill; that will be the subject of a public local inquiry.

Commercial Properties (Revaluation)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the revaluation of commercial properties since the publication of the details of the revaluations.

Mr. Chope: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members and from other sources. A non-domestic revaluation is now essential in order to remove the distortions caused by using values that are 17 years old. Any property tax, such as rates, must be based on up-to-date values if it is to be fair. The revaluation will, of course, reflect the level of market rents.

Moorland

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase access to moorland in the United Kingdom for walkers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The existing network of 140,000 miles of rights of way in England and Wales already provides extensive opportunities for access to all types of countryside. Local authorities also have the power to enter into agreements with landowners where necessary to secure additional access to areas of open country, including moorland.

City Grants

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total value of city grants he expects to award in 1989-90.

Mr. Moynihan: We expect to approve city grants totalling about £60 million by the end of the financial year.

National Parks

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he is giving to increasing the number of national parks.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend has no such specific proposal in mind at present, but is always ready to consider suggestions.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he is having with his counterparts in overseas countries concerning the Montreal protocol and the limitations of chlorofluorocarbon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Revisions to the Montreal protocol have recently been discussed by the European Community Environment Council. The protocol is to be revised at the second meeting of its parties to be held in London in June. The United Kingdom Government will be calling for the complete phasing out of CFCs. We are working for the general adoption of this position and to enlarge the numbers of signatories to the protocol.

Control of Pollution Act

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions occurred under section 3 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 in 1988; and how many were successful.

Mr. Trippier: In 1988 there were 227 prosecutions under section 3, of which 172 were successful.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to legislate for the replacement of toxic waste incineration emissions with closed loop technology.

Mr. Trippier: Emissions to atmosphere from toxic waste incinerators are closely controlled by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. The Environmental Protection Bill currently before the House will strengthen those controls by requiring operators of prescribed processes to use the best available techniques, not entailing excessive costs, to minimise releases of prescribed pollutants.

My Department is promoting awareness of low-waste or clean technology through the environmental protection technology (EPT) scheme. A booklet on clean technology was published in November 1989 describing examples where British industry has successfully introduced new cleaner technology to bring about environmental and economic benefits. My Department will also be hosting in September a three-day seminar on the subject of "Cleaner Production" to promote the exchange and dissemination of information about clean technology at the international level.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to make pollution prevention an integral part of all waste disposal plans.

Mr. Trippier: I am considering the need for such a provision.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to make the submission of a detailed waste minimisation plan a pre-condition for the issue of every waste disposal site licence.

Mr. Trippier: Waste disposal licences generally control activites at the point of waste disposal, not of waste production. Consequently, it would be inappropriate to require waste licence holders to produce waste minimisation plans.

Pollution Prevention

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will give details of studies into pollution prevention conducted by his Department in each of the last five years;

(2) if he will list the amount spent by his Department for each year since 1979 on research into pollution prevention.

Mr. Trippier: The figures for expenditure by the Department of the Environment on research on environmental protection, excluding countryside research, between 1979-80 and 1988-89 are as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	12·6
1980-81	18·3
1981-82	18·3
1982-83	17·5
1983-84	17·2

	£ million
1984-85	16·4
1985-86	20·3
1986-87	21·5
1987-88	23·4
1988-89	22·6

The reports of the studies supported by this expenditure covering the years 1984-88 are listed in the DoE biennial R and D reports, copies of which are held in the Library of the House. The list for 1989 is in preparation and will be published in the next DoE R and D report.

Plastics (Recycling)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the recycling of plastics within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The recycling of plastics is currently being specifically addressed by an expert working group consisting of representatives from Government, local authorities, industry and the voluntary sector with the aim of improving the rate of plastics recycling.

Leakage Control

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *211*, why he has decided not to publish a further edition of the leakage control policy and practice report.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Decisions on whether to prepare and publish reports on such operational matters are for the water industry.

Road Building

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of an increased road-building programme.

Mr. Moynihan: The expanded road programme announced in the White Paper, "Roads for Prosperity", took account of all relevant factors including environmental effects. Individual road projects are subject to environmental appraisal.

Leigh Interests plc

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Leigh Interests regarding the Environmental Protection Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I have received representations from Leigh Interests concerning the responsibility for control of treatment facilities and landfills under parts I and II of the Bill.

Standard Spending Assessment (Thanet)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account has been taken, in deciding the standard spending assessment figure, of the number of retired residents within the Thanet district council area; and what account was taken in deciding the allowance made for visitors under grant-related expenditure allocation.

Mr. Chope: The number of elderly people and the number of elderly people living alone or on income support are included in the component of the standard spending assessment for personal social services for Kent county council. Retired people are included in the estimates of total population used in other SSA components. Details may be found in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) (HC 049) laid before the House on 11 January. Within grant-related expenditure assessment (GREs), 2 per cent. of the control total for the recreation element was distributed on the basis of visitor nights.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the increase in the standard spending assessment for Thanet district council over the 1989-90 grant-related expenditure assessment; and what is the average standard spending assessment increase for the same period for the other Kent districts.

Mr. Chope: The 1990-91 standard spending assessment for Thanet district council has increased by 6·5 per cent. over the comparable adjusted figure for the 1989-90 grant-related expenditure assessment. The mean-average increase in 1990-91 SSA over comparable adjusted 1989-90 GREA for the other Kent district councils is 18·2 per cent.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward measures to reduce emission of carbon dioxide ahead of the second world climate conference in November 1990.

Mr. Trippier: Effective measures to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide must be taken in the international context and such measures will be considered at the second world climate conference. Nevertheless, within the Department of the Environment we have recently announced changes to the building regulations, which will result in significant improvements in energy efficiency and we shall continue to keep all areas of our responsibilities under review. The principal sources of emissions of carbon dioxide are from the energy and transport sectors, and measures to reduce these are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Energy and for Transport.

North Sea

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of radiation from artificial nuclides entering the North sea emanates from *(a)* wastes from the nuclear power industry, *(b)* radioisotope production, *(c)* uses of radioactivity in medicine, *(d)* teaching and research operations, *(e)* fall-out from nuclear weapons testing and *(f)* fall-out from other sources.

Mr. Trippier: The information is not available in the form requested. Estimated inputs of radioactivity to the North sea from nuclear establishments are contained in the report of the "Quality Status of the North Sea" (1987), a copy of which is in the Library. Also, a European Community study known as "Project Marina", assessing

the radiological exposure of the population of the European Community from radioactivity in the north-east Atlantic has been undertaken; a report of which should be published in due course by the Commission of the European Community.

Deer

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the circulation of the Nature Conservancy Council report by V. P. W. Lowe on "Wild and Feral Deer in Great Britain", reference number NCC/NERC contract HF3/05/43.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

This interim report was circulated in 1979 and 1980 among Government Departments, and some other interested organisations, including the British Deer Society and the Institute of Biology.

Wath upon Dearne (Waste)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the conclusion by the United States Environmental Protection Agency that the toxic elements in the waste held at Wath upon Dearne are not hazardous.

Mr. Trippier: As I have already indicated in my letter to the hon. Member, we accept the conclusion of the report by the Environmental Protection Agency that, on the basis of the specific criteria applied under the US Resource, Conservation and Recovery Act, the wastes are non-hazardous. I am considering, as a matter of urgency, what further action can be taken.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the environmental implications of opencast mining operations.

Mr. Moynihan: The environmental implications of opencast mining operations can often be considerable. It is for this reason that while it is necessary to recognise the economic benefits of mineral production it is essential that the impact of proposals on the environment is carefully assessed, and where necessary an environmental impact statement prepared. It is also necessary to ensure that sites are well managed in environmental terms and restored to a high standard. All mining operations should take account of best environmental practice. Recently published guidelines on opencast mineral workings set tough environmental standards.

Gallstone Crushing Equipment

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money is spent annually on ultrasonic gallstone crushing equipment; and where in the south-east these machines are located.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply. Extra-corporeal shock wave lithotripters were used originally for treating kidney stones. With assistance from the Department of Health, Trent regional health authority is carrying out an evaluation of the use of a lithotripter in the treatment of gallstones.

We are aware of one lithotripter located within a National Health Service hospital in the south-east which might be used to treat gallstones. This is at St. Peter's hospital in London. There are also facilities at private sector hospitals.

We have no details of the prices paid for these machines, since these are confidential between the buyers and sellers.

THE ARTS

Wilding Report

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the merger proposed in the Wilding report between the Crafts Council and the Arts Council.

Mr. Luce: I shall make an announcement as soon as I have had an opportunity to consider the responses to the Wilding report.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister for the Arts what recent representations he has received about the Wilding report on funding the arts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I have received about 6,000 responses, of which approximately 4,500 are postcards. I shall be announcing my response to the report as soon as possible.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the regional implications of the Wilding report.

Mr. Luce: I shall announce my response to the Wilding report as soon as possible.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received from the north-west about his proposed reorganisation for regional arts administration.

Mr. Luce: I have received a number of representations from individuals and organisations in the north-west area about the Wilding report.

Industrial Museums

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister for the Arts what financial support his Department gives to working industrial museums.

Mr. Luce: The many working industrial museums around the country play an important part in preserving our industrial heritage.

Funding from the Office of Arts and Libraries for local museums in England is disbursed via the Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) and the network of seven area museum councils and a number of working industrial museums benefit from these funds. Additionally, the Science museum, on behalf of the MGC, administers a grant scheme which has recently expanded in scope to assist with the preservation as well as the purchase of industrial and scientific material. In November 1989 I announced an increase of £1 million over the next three years to the local museums purchase funds, of which this is one.

The MGC is also able to offer professional advice and operates a capital grant scheme to assist with the cost of

housing collections. Area museum councils give grants for restoration and conservation and also offer advice on a wide range of subjects, including interpretation, training and marketing and management.

Library Service

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on public spending plans for the library service.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave him on 11 December 1989 (*Official Report*, column *447*).

CIVIL SERVICE

Agency Status

Mr. Stern: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service whether he has any plans to announce further candidates for agency status.

Mr. Luce: Ten executive agencies have been established so far, and Departments have announced a further 43 activities as candidates for agency status. In addition, a variety of activities are currently being considered internally by Departments as potential candidates for executive agency status, and I expect that a number of these will be formally announced as candidates in due course.

Civil Service College

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service, what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the Civil Service college for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Luce: The Civil Service college executive agency's primary measure of performance will be its ability to cover its costs from income. Other targets for the current and next four years are as follows:

	1988-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Student	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
Student days	77,000	76,000	75,000	75,000	75,000
Course days	4,900	4,700	4,545	4,545	4,545
Ratio of course days to student days	15·7	16·2	16·5	16·5	16·5
Percentage of students at Grade 7 and above	23·8	25·5	27·5	30·0	33·2
Private sector students	420	500	600	870	1,200
Percentage	2·1	2·5	3·0	4·4	6·0
Course evaluation indicators in top two (of six categories per cent.)	76	77	78	79	80

In addition, there are targets for "cost per student day".

For 1990-91 and subsequent years, additional targets will be set in respect of an overall value-for-money indicator, the percentage of students studying for externally validated qualifications, examination pass rates, and the college's incomes from consultancy as a percentage of total incomes.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Funeral Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for funeral payments were granted from the social fund during the last 12 months for which he has figures available; and what was the average amount paid.

Mr. Scott: In the 12 months ending November 1989 a total of 41,247 funeral payments were awarded. The average payment was £522.

Local Offices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by location for south Yorkshire, the Department of Social Security offices that are due to close during the coming year; how many staff will be transferred; and to what locations.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A review of the organisational pattern of all local offices is under way, including those in south Yorkshire. No firm proposals have yet been produced. Full consultation with all interested parties will take place in the normal way at the appropriate time if any changes are proposed.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what account is taken of the wind chill factor in determining the temperature information for cold weather payments.

Mr. Scott: None.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list individually the new description of the areas covered by national climatological message stations, in relation to cold weather payments.

Mr. Scott: The changes to the descriptions of areas linked to the national climatological message stations in the schedule to the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Regulations 1988 (SI 1988/1724) are listed in regulation 3 of the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 1989 (SI 1989/2388).

Income Support

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number of people living within the *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Wath-on-Dearne Department of Social Security areas, are in receipt of income support for the latest available date for which he has figures; and what are the figures for 12 months ago.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is set out in the table:

Local office	Numbers in receipt of Income Support on 30 November 1988	30 November 1989
Doncaster (East)	10,164	10,039
Doncaster (West)	12,951	13,388
Wath-on-Dearne	7,118	7,552

Source: 100 per cent count of cases in action. The figures given include a small number of cases not actually in receipt of benefit.

Resettlement Agency

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the Resettlement Agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Resettlement Agency was initially set the following specific targets, which are subject to annual review:

Efficiency and effectiveness of Units

(a) To achieve a cumulative reduction of a least 1·5 per cent. per annum in the running costs of DSS resettlement units net of accommodation charges over the next three years (ie 1989-90 to 1991-92) without reducing standards. The savings will be made available for redeployment within the Agency budget, in accordance with nil cost package. The chief executive will produce proposals for use of the 1989-90 savings to the July 1989 meeting with Under-Secretaries.

(b) To establish a training strategy for staff, by March 1990.

(c) To present manpower proposals, based on the 1988-89 staff inspection to the September 1989 meeting with Under-Secretaries.

(d) To devise a scheme to assist resettlement units' managers to compare the effectiveness of units on a common basis, with an interim report in March 1990.

Replacement programmes

As provided for in the financial plan, to close:—
1990-91 2 Units
1991-92 4 Units

Efficiency and effectiveness of replacement provision

To commission and mount a research study to monitor the 36-bed direct access hostel opened in January 1989 and run by the London borough of Lewisham as part of the scheme to replace the Camberwell resettlement unit in 1985. The objective will be to examine the service provided both to ensure value for money and that a good standard of care and resettlement results.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department is making of the adequacy of disability benefits to meet daily living costs and extra costs of disability.

Mr. Scott: The findings of the surveys of disability carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) between 1985 and 1988 clearly showed that in general the benefits paid to meet the extra costs of disability, attendance allowance and mobility allowance, are more than sufficient to cover the average extra costs of disability. The initial results of a follow-up to the OPCS surveys in the family expenditure survey confirm these findings. The OPCS surveys provided comparisons between the incomes of disabled people and their counterparts in the general population but did not assess the adequacy of income maintenance benefits paid to disabled people.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether, in the last six months, his Department has issued revised guidelines to doctors assessing fitness for work of people in receipt of disability benefits.

Mr. Scott: No.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to revise restart interviews, availability for work tests, and actively seeking work requirements, as they affect people who receive benefit as a result of their disablement.

Mr. Scott: Payment of most benefits for the disabled does not require disabled people to be available for, or actively seeking, employment. In the case of unemployment benefit and income support on the basis of unemployment, regulations provide for full account to be taken of any limitations imposed by disablement. We have no plans to alter this approach. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has responsibility for the administration of the law governing claims for unemployed people, including the conduct of restart interviews.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, pursuant to his statement on benefits for the disabled of 10 January, the new disablement employment credit will be available to all those who gain low-paid work after claiming a state benefit relating to their disablement; if there will be a child care addition; and if those on the benefit will receive additions for work expenses related to their disablement.

Mr. Scott: The Government propose that the new disability employment credit to be introduced in April 1992 will be available to people receiving the new disability allowance or to those who were receiving invalidity benefit, severe disablement allowance or the income support or housing benefit disability premium before starting work. Claimants will also need to satisfy a doctor that they are only partially capable of work. Precise details of the new benefit are still to be considered.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider extending the scope of the mobility allowance scheme to cover applicants who can show that they would have qualified for the allowance if they had made application before becoming 66 years of age and are now prevented from receiving the allowance only because they were unaware of the cut-off age of 66 years; and if he will estimate the costs involved in any such extension.

Mr. Scott: Although mobility allowance can be claimed during the year in which a person is aged 65, the medical eligibility criteria need to be fulfilled before the person reaches that age. We regard a year as a reasonable period to allow for making a claim, especially as the steady growth in the number of recipients indicates that the existence of the allowance is widely known. I regret that it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the cost of an extension of the upper age limit for claiming.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further plans he now has to increase the availability of mobility allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration he is giving to the introduction of a costs allowance for disabled people not helped by either mobility allowance or attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced on 10 January, at columns *941-52*, that the Government propose to introduce a new disability allowance for people of working age and below which will extend help with the extra costs of disability to people with moderate to severe disabilities who do not at present qualify for mobility allowance or attendance allowance. For people whose disability begins before age 65, the new allowance will subsume the help currently given through attendance allowance and mobility allowance within a common structure and extend help to people with care and mobility needs who do not currently qualify for attendance allowance or mobility allowance.

Disability Income

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department has made of the cost of implementing a comprehensive disability income scheme along the lines proposed by the disability benefits consortium.

Mr. Scott: The comprehensive disability income scheme described by the disability benefits consortium in its paper circulated on 15 December 1989 is not described in sufficient detail for a reliable estimate of its cost to be made.

Statistics

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether his Department has produced advice on the disclosure of statistical data which are derived from information that concerns living individuals, so as to ensure that the disclosure in question does not identify individuals; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This Department has not produced advice on the disclosure of statistical data. The Government statistical service produced and published in 1984 a document which provides strict guidance in this area and the Department closely follows this advice—"The Government Statistical Service Code of Practice on the Handling of Data Obtained from Statistical Enquiries", Cmnd. 9270. A copy is available in the Library. The relevant sections are contained in pages 5 and 6 of the paper.

OPCS Reports

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to which organisations his Department has circulated copies of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys reports for comment.

Mr. Scott: Copies of the OPCS reports dealing with the prevalence of disability and the financial circumstances of disabled people were sent by the Department to the following organisations of and for disabled people:

Access Committee for England
Action for Research into Multiple Sclerosis
Age Concern[1]
Arthritis Care
Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus
British Diabetic Association
British Epilepsy Association
Centre on Environment for the Handicapped
Disability Alliance[2]
Disablement Income Group
Disabled Living Foundation
Help the Aged[1]
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
National Association for Mental Health
National Council for Carers
Parkinson's Disease Association[1]
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
Royal National Institute for the Blind
Royal National Institute for the Deaf
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults
Scottish Council on Disability
Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped
SENSE—National Deaf-Blind and Rubella Association
Spastics Society
Wales Council for the Disabled.

[1] These organisations received only copies of the reports dealing with the circumstances of adults and not those dealing with children.
[2] A federation of over 80 organisations of and for disabled people.

Copies of these reports were also sent to a number of other bodies with an interest in issues concerning disabled people such as Motability and the local authority associations.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations have been made to his Department about the accuracy of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys findings on extra costs incurred by disabled people as a result of their disability.

Mr. Scott: The findings of the surveys of disability carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys were based on a sample of over 10,000 people. Representations have been received from the Disablement Income Group, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, and the Spastics Society. These organisations carried out three separate studies based on 10 or 13 cases, which suggested that the extra costs of disability were higher than the averages found by OPCS.

Ombudsman Reports

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reports his Department has received from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration on matters referred to the commission by hon. Members concerning the administration of his Department in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is provided in the table:

DHSS and DSS cases investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to conclusion, with reports issued

Year	Number
1985	[1]76
1986	[1]86
1987	[1]82
1988	[1]62
1989	[2]60

These cases include only two-three DH cases each year.
Source:
[1] Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Annual Reports 1985-88.
[2] Provisional figure, DSS only.

Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the membership and functions of the joint working group on occupational and personal pensions; when it was set up; if he will place a record of its proceedings in the Library; and whether it has considered the need for advice to members of personal and other money-purchase pension schemes on the age at which they should consider discontinuing their contributions to those schemes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The occupational pensions schemes joint working group was set up and is run by representative bodies in the pensions industry. Its members are the Association of British Insurers, the Association of Consulting Actuaries, the National Association of Pension Funds and the Society of Pensions Consultants. Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security nor departmental officials have any involvement with the group. Inquiries concerning group proceedings should be directed to the group members.

Quite separately, from time to time officials in the Department consult representatives of various organisations concerned with occupational and personal pensions through a consultative group which meets when the need arises. The bodies circulated are the following:

Association of British Insurers
Association of Consulting Actuaries
Association of Pension Lawyers
British Bankers Association
Building Society Association
Friendly Societies Liaison Committee
Government Actuary's Department
Inland Revenue
National Association of Pension Funds
Nationalised Industries Pension Group
Occupational Pensions Board
Securities and Investments Board
Security of Pensions Consultants
Unit Trust Association

Discussions are informal. No minutes are kept.

On the question of advice to pension scheme members, it is for an individual member of an occupational or personal pension scheme to seek advice appropriate to his or her needs.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for the reform of the system of national insurance contributions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A reform of the system of national insurance contributions for employees was introduced last October. We have no current plans for further major reforms. Some minor changes are proposed in the Social Security Bill.

Claimants

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants registered as of no fixed abode there were in England and Scotland in each year from 1979 to 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Social Security Spending

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount spent on social security in the United Kingdom, in actual and at 1989 prices, for each of the years 1978-79 to 1990-91, or for the latest year available; and what was the percentage increase for each year.

Mr. Scott: The information for Great Britain is set out in the table. Information about costs of benefits in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

DSS total expenditure

	Cash (£ million)	*In 1989-90 prices (£ million)*	*Real terms percentage increase over preceding year*
Outturn			
1978-79	16,437	38,677	—
1979-80	19,416	39,119	1·1
1980-81	23,463	39,978	2·2
1981-82	28,582	44,319	10·9
1982-83	32,451	46,930	5·9
1983-84	35,159	48,579	3·5
1984-85	38,119	50,176	3·3
1985-86	41,487	51,826	3·3
1986-87	44,424	53,685	3·6
1987-88	46,265	53,094	−1·1
Estimated outturn			
1988-89	47,595	50,919	−4·1
1989-90	52,600	52,600	3·3
Planned			
1990-91	55,600	52,952	0·7
1991-92	59,900	55,119	4·1
1992-93	63,500	56,729	2·9

DEFENCE

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now place in the Library a copy of the captain's narrative of HMS Conqueror's Falklands deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The narrative concerns classified operational matters.

Military Training

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many episodes of injury attributable to excessive heat or insolation have occurred to members of the forces since 1978 and the last year for which figures are available; how many of these occurred during military exercises and other forms of training; and how many deaths were recorded from such causes in the same period.

Mr. Neubert: The figures requested relating to episodes of injury and death attributable to excessive heat or insolation within the Services area are as follows:

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	Total 1978-88
Injuries only (males and females)												
Tri-Service												
Total	25	42	51	26	34	86	83	73	81	100	62	663
Non accidental	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Accidental:												
Off duty	2	3	8	4	9	9	6	6	11	6	2	66
Exercises	4	16	7	4	4	15	13	12	4	21	12	112
Other training	6	6	23	11	12	44	48	28	46	54	23	301
Other on duty	3	16	12	7	9	18	16	27	20	19	25	172
Not known on/off	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Fatalities only (males and females)												
Tri-Service												
Total	2	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	12
Non accidental	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Accidental:												
Off duty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Exercises	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	7
Other training	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
Other on duty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Not known on/off	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the forces have *(a)* collapsed and *(b)* died while taking part in a mud run in the last five years.

Mr. Neubert: Statistical information specifically relating to injuries on the mud run is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Only one death is recorded in the period 1983-88 which can be attributed to a mud run.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men taking part in the combat fitness test have collapsed and required medical attention; and how many have died, since April 1984.

Mr. Neubert: Statistical information specifically relating to the combat fitness test is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if external medical advice has been sought regarding health dangers from mud runs.

Mr. Neubert: No, but due consideration is given by tri-service medical authorities to any advice or information, from whatever source, which might prove beneficial to the health and safety of service personnel.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions when there has been a collapse of a service man due to heatstroke, disciplinary action has been brought against the senior or junior officers involved.

Mr. Neubert: None over the last 10 years for which records are available.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information was given to the family and the solicitor of Sub-Lieutenant Simon Rowland regarding the circumstances of his collapse; and if he intends to make publicly available any information on this case of heatstroke.

Mr. Neubert: No approach has been made to my Department by a solicitor acting on behalf of Sub-Lieutenant Rowland. My officials have, however, written to Mr. and Mrs. Rowland to say that a full and comprehensive summary of the Board of Inquiry report will be sent to them as soon as it is possible to do so. It is not Ministry of Defence policy to release outside the Department information of a personal or medical nature, other than to the person concerned or to the nominated next of kin.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what medical advice he has received regarding the body temperature likely to be generated on a mud run.

Mr. Neubert: Advice relating to heat injury, its prediction, prevention and treatment is provided by the defence medical services. It does not specifically relate to mud runs.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the disciplinary investigation that was ordered after the collapse from heatstroke of Sub-Lieutenant Simon Rowland.

Mr. Neubert: As a result of the Board of Inquiry held to consider the collapse of Sub-Lieutenant Rowland, the Flag Officer Naval Air Command directed that the Naval Provost Marshall carry out a disciplinary investigation. The report has now been received and is being studied by the Flag Officer Naval Air Command. A decision on any further action will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce automatic courts-martial of training instructors in all cases of death or permanent injury due to heatstroke in training or assessments.

Mr. Neubert: No. In any such case it is the responsibility of the relevant service authority to determine what, if any, disciplinary action should be taken.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department defines episodes of injury attributable to excessive heat or insolation.

Mr. Neubert: The Department defines "episodes of injury attributable to excessive heat or insulation" with reference to two statistical classifications; the "Manual of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases,

Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD)" and the "NATO Armed Forces Supplement to the Manual of the ICD: External Cause of Injury Code, STANAG 2050".

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what cause of death was given by the post mortem in the case of Timothy Lester, a sapper in the Royal Engineers who died in a British military hospital in Hanover, West Germany, on 27 May 1989; and how his death was recorded.

Mr. Neubert: The report of a post mortem examination on Sapper Timothy Lester recorded the cause of death as shown by examination appearing to be:

(a) cerebral oedema
(b) hepato-renal failure
(c) heat-stroke injury

which was recorded on the death certificate.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the case of the lieutenant in REME who died in Hong Kong on 11 July 1980 was included in the figure of 11 deaths from heatstroke given in the letter of 29 June 1988 to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South.

Mr. Neubert: Yes.

Weapons

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Government's policy on the introduction of new weapons into service that are known to be banned under bilateral treaties between NATO and Warsaw pact countries to which Britain is not a signatory.

Mr. Neubert: The United Kingdom does not possess any such weapons, nor have we plans to acquire any.

Service Schools

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the conditions of service and methods of determining pay of locally employed teachers in service schools are being reviewed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Neubert: The pay and conditions of service of all locally entered staff employed by the MOD overseas are kept under regular review.

European Defence

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the considerations which have prompted him to decide that the United Kingdom should participate in the European co-operative long-term initiative for defence;

(2) what benefits will accrue to the United Kingdom from participation in the European co-operative long-term initiative for defence;

(3) what sums of money have been committed to the European co-operative long-term initiative for defence; and what sums are likely to be committed in the next five years.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much money Her Majesty's Government have committed to the European co-operative long-term initiative for defence; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when parliamentary approval was given for funding for the European co-operative long-term initiative for defence; under what Vote subhead it appears; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: EUCLID was launched by the Defence Ministers of the Independent European Programme Group in June 1989 to establish a European defence research and technology programme in a number of key areas for the future. Its aim is to improve the value for money from defence research by making more efficient use of the resources available in Europe. This is turn should facilitate co-operation on resulting projects.

No money has yet been committed by any nation to EUCLID. It is expected that the first detailed collaborative programmes will be agreed in the course of this year. The precise extent of United Kingdom funding will then be determined, and will come from moneys voted for by defence research.

I refer to the replies given to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 24 July 1989 and to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 14 December 1989.

Laser Weapons

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose of the laser weapon fitted to HMS Coventry; what is its applicability as a weapon for all services; whether the manufacturer is British; and if he will make a statement about his policy on the introduction of the laser weapon.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Laser dazzle devices have been developed as an additional, non-lethal means of self-defence for Her Majesty's ships. They are supplied by the British company, Irwin-Desman Limited. The Government's aim in equipping Royal Navy ships with such devices is to safeguard the lives of British service men.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his Department's policy on the use by Royal Navy ships of the laser dazzle sight system during naval exercises;

(2) whether Royal Navy ships have used the laser dazzle sight system during naval exercises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: The laser dazzle device is not used by the Royal Navy during naval exercises.

Weapons (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy as to the use of weapons not officially issued by the Army serving in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Only authorised weapons should be used by the Army in Northern Ireland.

Captain Fred Holroyd

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will acquire for the library of the Ministry of Defence a copy of the book "War Without Honour" by Fred Holroyd.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A copy is already held in the Ministry of Defence library.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to ascertain from Major-General McGhie the precise contents of the statement referred to in the Adjournment debate on 29 November 1989, *Official Report*, column 818.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. Major-General McGhie died in 1985.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations have been received concerning a request for a second medical opinion by a doctor, military or civilian, regarding the case of Captain Fred Holroyd, retired.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any recent representations.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what undertakings have been given to Captain Fred Holroyd (retired) since September 1976 concerning investigation of his allegations relating to events in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any undischarged undertakings.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there have been any developments relating to the case of Captain Fred Holroyd following the Adjournment debate on 29 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns 812-20.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *805*, whether a decision on the procurement of a radar for the European fighter aircraft will be made prior to his meeting with the West German Defence Minister.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. A decision on the choice of radar is a matter for the four participating countries.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the need to maintain sufficient industrial capacity to meet future defence requirements in the procurement plans for the radar for the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: In accordance with our procurement policy, the objective of the procurement strategy for the radar for the European fighter aircraft (EFA) has been to obtain a radar which meets the operational requirements of the partner nations at the best possible value for money. We always take into account the availability of suppliers to meet future requirements when assessing the value for money offered by competing bids.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the inclusion of aircraft in the CFE negotiations has had any effect on the procurement plans for the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: There has been no change in the declared production offtake of 250 aircraft.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there have been any changes to the projected in-service date of the European fighter aircraft in the last two years.

Mr. Alan Clark: Our aim remains to bring EFA into service in the mid-1990s.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects a decision to be taken on which industrial consortium will be allocated the contract to develop the nose radar for the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: I cannot forecast when a decision on the choice of radar might be made; but am anxious for the negotiations to be concluded as soon as possible.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to discuss the development of the European fighter aircraft with the Governments of the other three nations participating in the programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend meets his colleagues in the EFA project at regular intervals in a variety of fora. He expects to meet his German counterpart shortly for discussions on a wide range of issues.

West German Defence Minister

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet his West German counterpart.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend will be meeting Dr. Stoltenberg shortly for discussions on a wide range of issues.

Ambulance Duties

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost per Army man hour of deploying the Army on ambulance duties.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 8 January 1990]:* I am replying on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Only extra costs directly attributable to the ambulance dispute are reported for recovery from other Government Departments. Such extra costs are not directly related to the number of man hours worked. The estimated extra costs up to 30 November 1989 are £0·85 million.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

New Forest (Hunting)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library *(a)* copies of the licences to hunt issued by the Forestry Commission for each of the last four years in respect of the New Forest and *(b)* in respect of each licence a copy of the special list of conditions.

Mr. Curry: The documents requested by the hon. Member have today been placed in the Library of the House.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the north Yorkshire trading standards department concerning bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: None, but my officials met the county trading standards officer for north Yorkshire in his capacity as secretary of the local authorities national animal health panel on 27 October 1989 to discuss various issues concerning BSE and will be meeting him again shortly.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of cows with bovine spongiform encephalopathy that have been identified *(a)* on farms, *(b)* in slaughterhouses, *(c)* in auction markets and *(d)* in other places, by county.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 January 1990]:* The information is not available in the form requested. It should be noted that as a result of the measures which my right hon. Friend announced on 8 November, those bovine tissues most susceptible to harbouring the BSE agent must be removed from human consumption for all animals more than six months old. So even if infected animals, or those suffering from pre-clinical infection, find their way to the slaughterhouse, these vulnerable tissues will be removed from them. The total number of cases of BSE in cattle confirmed in each county/region of Great Britain up to 5 January 1990 is set out in the following table (as these figures relate to *confirmed* cases, they differ from those for *reported* cases):

County/Region	*Cases*
Cleveland	8
Cumbria	140
Durham	26
Humberside	25
Northumberland	40
Tyne and Wear	1
Yorkshire North	272
Yorkshire South	13
Yorkshire West	24
Cheshire	149
Derbyshire	102
Hereford and Worcestershire	173
Lancashire	142
Leicestershire	193
Manchester	4
Merseyside	5
Nottinghamshire	47
Salop	223
Staffordshire	139
West Midlands	8
Warwickshire	83
Bedfordshire	26
Cambridgeshire	29
Essex	34
Hertfordshire	40
Lincolnshire	83
Norfolk	111
Northamptonshire	76
Suffolk	102
Berkshire	81
Buckinghamshire	60
Hampshire	403
Isle of Wight	57
Kent	232
London	2
Oxfordshire	147
Surrey	100
Sussex East	119
Sussex West	240
Avon	145
Cornwall	790
Devon	1,139
Dorset	779
Gloucestershire	336
Somerset	674
Wiltshire	563
Clwyd	75
Dyfed	290
Glamorgan Mid	18
Glamorgan South	39
Glamorgan West	4
Gwent	80
Gwynedd	33
Powys	78
Borders	10
Central	11
Dumfries	42
Fife	10
Grampian	52
Highland	18
Lothian	9
Orkney	3
Shetland	2
Strathclyde	67
Tayside	22
Total	9,048

In the period 21 June 1988 (when BSE became notifiable) to 30 September 1989 (the most recent date for which information is available), 79 confirmed cases occurred at slaughterhouses and 56 at markets. This information is not available on a county basis.

Two confirmed cases have occurred at an import lairage in Dorset and five at artificial insemination centres in Devon, Dyfed, East Sussex, North Yorkshire and Somerset.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been notified in each county for each year up to the end of 1989;

(2) how many cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been notified each year in each county of the United Kingdom up to the end of 1989;

(3) if he will list the number of bovine spongiform encephalopathy cases notified for each year up to the end of 1989.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 January 1990]:* BSE became a notifiable disease in Great Britain on 21 June 1988. The details of suspect cases of BSE notified since then are as follows:

	21 June 1988— 31 December 1988	*1 January 1989— 31 December 1989*
Cleveland	2	11
Cumbria	49	131
Durham	4	26
Humberside	10	32
Northumberland	21	30
Tyne and Wear	0	1
Yorkshire North	77	280
Yorkshire South	6	14
Yorkshire West	11	24
Cheshire	38	152
Derbyshire	28	97
Hereford and Worcester	54	163
Lancashire	59	132
Leicestershire	55	181
Manchester	2	8
Merseyside	2	5
Nottinghamshire	8	51
Salop	53	217
Staffordshire	43	126
West Midlands	2	7
Warwickshire	17	89
Bedfordshire	2	25

	21 June 1988— 31 December 1988	1 January 1989— 31 December 1989
Cambridge	7	28
Essex	2	43
Hertfordshire	11	36
Lincolnshire	34	71
Norfolk	27	101
Northamptonshire	12	80
Suffolk	31	86
Berks	27	62
Bucks	10	71
Hants	116	379
Isle of Wight	13	51
Kent	55	205
London	0	5
Oxon	53	139
Surrey	39	81
Sussex East	26	122
Sussex West	85	213
Avon	21	161
Cornwall	256	642
Devon	292	941
Dorset	184	747
Gloucestershire	113	286
Somerset	171	605
Wiltshire	158	561
England	2,286	7,518
Clwyd	13	90
Dyfed	67	273
Glamorgan Mid	7	12
Glamorgan South	8	40
Glamorgan West	2	7
Gwent	23	69
Gwynedd	10	32
Powys	24	94
Wales	154	617
Borders	1	11
Central	4	13
Dumfries	17	53
Fife	0	14
Grampian	18	59
Highland	3	20
Lothian	6	9
Orkney	2	7
Shetland	0	1
Strathclyde	16	87
Tayside	10	31
Scotland	77	305
Northern Ireland	4	54
Totals	2,521	8,494

[1] Became notifiable 29 November 1988.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last discussed with the National Farmers Union compensation payments on cattle suffering from bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will increase compensation payments to 75 per cent.

Mr. Maclean: I meet representatives of the National Farmers Union frequently to discuss agricultural matters. As regards compensation, we believe that 50 per cent. is fair, given that the animals are terminally ill and worthless for all practical purposes, but are valued as though unaffected by BSE. This means that in many cases owners receive more in compensation than they would get if they were able to sell the animals. One hundred per cent. is paid for animals which are not confirmed as having BSE.

Organic Produce

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of organic *(a)* root vegetables, *(b)* other vegetables, *(c)* apples, *(d)* beef and *(e)* lamb sold in the United Kingdom is satisfied by domestic production.

Mr. Curry: This information is not available.

Enzymes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what analysis has been conducted to establish the implications for animal welfare of the use of the meat tenderiser papain.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the full statement I made on this matter during the Adjournment debate on 7 November 1989.

Infected Place Notice

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in relation to the issuing of an infected place notice by his Department, on Lansdowne Farm Ltd., East Retford, Nottinghamshire, what conclusion was reached as to the origin of the group C organisms which were discovered in the liver, ovaries and oviducts but not in the intestines.

Mr. Maclean: No conclusion was reached as to the origin of the group C organisms found in the livers, ovaries and oviducts but not in the intestines of the birds taken during the investigation at Lansdowne Farm Ltd.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in relation to the issuing of an infected place notice by his Department on Lansdowne Farm Ltd., East Retford, Nottinghamshire, on what basis birds were selected for slaughter.

Mr. Maclean: The birds taken were randomly distributed throughout each house. The birds were selected by a MAFF official of the veterinary investigation service assisted by representatives from Lansdowne Farm Ltd.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in relation to the issuing of an infected place notice by his Department on Lansdowne Farm Ltd. East Retford, Nottinghamshire, the phage type of the enteritidis strain alleged to have been recovered and the serotype of the group C organism recovered.

Mr. Maclean: Following is the information:

(i) The group D isolates were all identified as Salmonella enteritidis phage type 4.

(ii) he group C isolates were identified as Salmonella infantis.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in relation to the issuing of an infected place notice by his Department on Lansdowne Farm Ltd., East Retford, Nottinghamshire, whether the hen carcases remained in the sacks in which they were placed at the farm; at what temperature they were stored; and whether any other material was stored in the same refrigerator.

Mr. Maclean: Following is the information:

(i) The hen carcases remained in the sealed plastic bags into which they were placed at the farm.

(ii) They were stored at 8·5 deg C.
(iii) T other material was stored with the birds.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in relation to the issuing of an infected place notice by his Department on Lansdowne Farm Ltd, East Retford, Nottinghamshire, whether any person who moved the unopened bags to the post mortem room took part in the post mortem procedures; in which room the examinations were carried out and under what circumstances; and whether any other work was carried out in the same room at the same time or immediately before.

Mr. Maclean: One person who moved the unopened bags to the post mortem room took part in the post mortem procedures.

The examinations were carried out in the post mortem room at Sutton Bonington veterinary investigation centre on 8 November 1989. The post mortem room was cleansed and disinfected on 7 November and no work was subsequently carried out in that room until the birds were examined post mortem on the morning of 8 November. Post mortem tables were cleaned and disinfected between each batch of birds examined and fresh sets of gloves and sterile instruments were used to collect and examine samples of different organ types from within each batch.

The birds were examined on the morning of 8 November and no other work was carried out in the post mortem room at the same time or immediately before these examinations took place.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in relation to the issuing of an infected place notice by his Department on Lansdowne Farm Ltd, East Retford, Nottinghamshire, how many salmonella colonies were examined from each plate subcultured for typing; how many colonies were identified as type D; how many times and over what period the plates were examined; and after how many examinations the group D types were isolated.

Mr. Maclean: Not less than three non-lactose fermenting colonies were examined from each plate showing typical salmonella growth characteristics. Four colonies were identified as group D salmonella. Each plate of brilliant green agar was examined twice at 24 and 48 hours after incubation at 37 deg C. Group D salmonellas were isolated from three subcultures at 24 hours and one subculture at 48 hours.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in relation to the issuing of an infected place notice by his Department on Lansdowne Farm Ltd, East Retford, Nottinghamshire, whether the investigation concluded that the group C organism was present.

Mr. Maclean: The investigation concluded that group C organisms were present.

Bovine Animals (Head Meat)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban the use of head meat from bovine animals whose crania have been opened for the purpose of brain removal.

Mr. Maclean: The offal ban prohibits the use of brains for human food but allows meat from bovine heads to be utilised. It is not my intention to change this policy. Whatever method is used to remove the brain every precaution should be taken, in all circumstances, to avoid cross-contamination of the meat.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the risk of cross-contamination from bovine brains of the use of head meat from bovine animals as a result of abattoir practices.

Mr. Maclean: It is incumbent on operators and enforcement authorities at all times to ensure that cross-contamination is avoided from any source during the preparation of meat for human consumption. Brains from adult cattle may not enter the human food chain and the risk of cross-contamination where the crania has been split is extremely small so long as good hygienic practices are followed. The Southwood working party concluded that the risk to humans from BSE is remote.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he gives to environmental health officers about the danger of cross-contamination from animal brains on to other head meat as a result of abattoir practices.

Mr. Maclean: My staff are always available to advise environmental health officers on hygienic practices. The advice will depend on the circumstances of the case.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has had from producers in relation to the policy of environmental health officers from Carrick district council and other authorities in the south-west to prevent the use of head meat from bovine animals whose crania have been opened for the purpose of brain removal.

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware of any such representations.

Lead Contamination Tests

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he hopes to publish the results of the lead contamination tests made on 14 December on calves at Higher Norton farm, East Allington, Totnes, Devon.

Mr. Maclean: The results of these tests were made available to the owner of the holding on 5 January.

Fish Farming

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if grants for the establishment of fish farming facilities are to be made available through the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service.

Mr. Curry: Grants for approved fish farming projects, jointly assisted by my Department and the European Commission, may be made under the provisions of Council regulation (EEC) No. 4028/86 on Community measures to improve and adapt structures in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. I shall be writing shortly to the hon. Member about points raised recently by one of his constituents.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest estimates in pound sterling of the annual costs of crop damage in the United Kingdom resulting from sulphur dioxide emissions.

Mr. Curry: Such estimates are not available and could not be provided on the basis of existing data. Crop damage due to sulphur dioxide is unlikely to be detectable at current ambient concentrations.

Coffee

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress the Director General of Fair Trading has made in investigating the retail price of coffee.

Mr. Curry: The investigation is still in progress. We understand that it is proceeding satisfactorily.

North Sea

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries which in 1989 conducted operations to incinerate toxic wastes in the North sea.

Mr. Curry: Complete information about other countries' incineration activities in the North sea in 1989 is not yet available. In 1988 waste originating from Austria, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom was incinerated in the North sea.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries which in 1989 conducted operations to dump sewage sludge in the North sea.

Mr. Curry: Only the United Kingdom dumped sewage sludge in the North sea in 1989. There was no environmentally acceptable land-based disposal option for the sludge. Strict controls were applied to ensure that the disposals met national and international requirements and that no harm was caused to the marine environment.

Organophosphorous Sheep Dip

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence has been received by his Ministry regarding immune system damage from organophosphorous sheep dip; and what further investigations are now being conducted.

Mr. Maclean: None. If any evidence of immune system damage from the use of organophosphorous sheep dips were to come to light, this would have to be fully investigated by Ministry scientists and the independent veterinary products committee, under Medicines Act procedures.

Lime

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers in the United Kingdom during 1988 and 1989 were reported to have used large quantities of lime for the first time in order to preserve their crops from the effects of increased pH acidity levels in soils; and whether these reports originate from clearly defined geographic areas.

Mr. Curry: Data are not available in the form requested. However, ADAS, which has close contact with the situation in the field in England and Wales, has received no reports of farmers using larger than normal quantities of lime for the first time in 1988 or 1989.

Importation of Bees Order

Sir Dennis Walters: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the Importation of Bees Order 1980 can be retained after the completion of the single market in 1992; and what discussions are taking place within the Community on the future of the order.

Mr. Curry: The Commission has proposed that after 1992 national measures on animal health, including bee health, should be replaced by EC controls. The proposals for bees would not, as drafted at present, permit a total ban on imports to the United Kingdom. Discussions are at an early stage, and we shall continue to press for the highest level of safeguard.

Free Foodstuffs (EC)

Mr. Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the products underused when Economic Community surplus food is made available for free distribution to pensioners in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: In 1988 the United Kingdom's full allocation of produce was taken up under the EC surplus food scheme. All the produce allocated in 1989 had been released from intervention stores and I believe that it will all be used.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the types of food, the quantities ordered and the locations of the distribution of all free foodstuffs received from Economic Community states for free distribution to pensioners in the United Kingdom over the past six months.

Mr. Curry: In the six months from July to December 1989 some 1,495 tonnes of beef, and 2,000 tonnes of butter were delivered to designated organisations participating in the EC surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom. The distribution arrangements are a matter for those organisations, but they are required to notify officials of their planned distributions. I will supply details of those notified over the last six months as soon as possible.

The hon. Member refers to distribution to pensioners, but pensioners as a group are not eligible. Those eligible to receive produce under the current scheme are people on income support or family credit and those living in welfare hostels or who have no fixed abode. Pensioners falling into one or other of these categories are, of course, eligible.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 January 1990

DEFENCE

HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department intends to make a decision on the replacement of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) on 21 December 1989, at column *383*.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Royal Air Force squadrons which are to be equipped with the European fighter aircraft will consist of the same numbers of aircraft as current fighter squadrons.

Mr. Alan Clark: The precise number of EFA to be allocated to each squadron is still under consideration.

Misfires

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been an increase in the incidence of misfires with ammunition purchased from Greek suppliers.

Mr. Alan Clark: No reports of misfires with ammunition purchased from Greek suppliers have been received.

Brokerage Fees

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Al-Hamanah Saudi arms deal provides for brokerage fees to his Department or the Defence Sales Organisation for sales placed in the United Kingdom; and in which years any such fees have been paid.

Mr. Alan Clark: No.

Cash Limit

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce any changes to the defence cash limit for 1989-90.

Mr. Tom King: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced on 29 July 1989 an entitlement of £435,690,000 to increase the cash limit for 1989-90, resulting from carry forward of capital expenditure under the end-year flexibility scheme. I can now announce that we shall receive a further entitlement of £248,770,000. Of this new increase, £239,588,000 comes under the terms of the additional flexibility arrangements announced to the House on 19 December 1986, *Official Report* column *778*. These arrangements provide for carry forward of underspend resulting from procurement decisions taken to improve contractors' performance and the value for money obtained from our defence procurement contracts during the 1988-89 financial year, including the Department's tauter approach to interim payments. The remaining £9,182,000 is to compensate the defence budget for the costs arising from the change in status of the Property Services Agency.

Procurement

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's major procurement purchases which have followed competitive tendering in each year since 1984.

Mr. Alan Clark: The following contracts valued £25 million or more were placed following competitive tendering during the period 1984 to 1989:

1984
- Type 996 Radar
- Forward Repair Ship
- Mine Counter Measures Vessels
- Aviation Training Ship
- Missile Tubes for SSBNs
- A90 Process Equipment
- Sir Galahad Replacement
- Tristar Aircraft
- Academic Instruction and Support at RMCS Shrivenham
- Nine Contracts for Oil

1985
- Type 22 Frigates
- Submarine ESM
- Tucano Aircraft
- Phoenix RPV
- MCT 80 (Warrior) Vehicles
- Seven Contracts for Oil

1986
- Upholder Class Submarines
- Close In Weapon Systems
- Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessel
- Type 23 Frigates
- Type 23 Frigate
- Challenger MBTs
- HVM Weapon System
- Four Contracts for Oil

1987
- Submarine ESM Systems
- Single Role Minehunters
- ALARM Missile
- E3A (AWACS) Aircraft
- SA80 Weapons Systems
- Target Towing Services
- Image Intensifier Tubes
- Development of Bridging Equipment
- Thermal Observation and Gunnery Sighting Systems
- Three Contracts for Aviation Fuel

1988
- Type 23 Frigates
- Development of Air Defence Command and Information System
- Development and Supply of ACEWS EW System
- Insurance Services
- Three Contracts for Oil, Diesel, Fuel and Aviation Fuel

1989
- Magnetic Treatment Facility
- Command System for Type 23 Frigates and AOR
- Type 23 Frigates
- Skynet Ground Equipment
- 4×4 4 Tonne Vehicles

Ammunition

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates of competitions held since 1984 to supply small calibre ammunition of 30 mm and below for the United Kingdom armed services, in each case listing *(a)* the type, calibre and quantity of ammunition involved, *(b)* the names and nationalities of the competing companies and *(c)* the winning company.

Mr. Alan Clark: The data requested are as follows:

Calibre	*Date*	*Type*	*Quantity*	*Tenderers*	*Winner*
7·62mm	September 1985	Ball	10M	Norma (FFV), Sweden SFM, France Hirtenberger, Austria MEN, West Germany Dynamit Nobel, West Germany FN, Belgium Indep, Portugal GPC, Greece Raufoss, Norway Royal Ordnance, United Kingdom	Indep
	September 1985	4 Ball/1 Tracer	15M	FN, Belgium Indep, Portugal Raufoss, Norway FFV, Sweden MEN, West Germany Dynamit Nobel, West Germany	Indep
	September 1985	Blank belted	2·2M	FN, Belgium Indep, Portugal Raufoss, Norway FFV, Sweden MEN, West Germany GPC, Greece Hirtenberger, Austria	FN
9mm	September 1985	Ball	14M	FFV, Sweden SFM, France Hirtenberger, Austria MEN, West Germany Dynamit Nobel, West Germany FN, Sweden Indep, Portugal Royal Ordnance, United Kingdom	FFV
	January 1986	Ball	15M	FFV, Sweden SFM, France Hirtenberger, Austria MEN, West Germany Dynamit Nobel, West Germany FN, Belgium Indep, Portugal Royal Ordnance, United Kingdom	FFV
0·5 inch	September 1985	4 Ball/1 Tracer	440K	Eley, United Kingdom FN, Belgium, Eurometaal, Holland	GPC
		1 Ball/1 Tracer	250K	GPC, Greece Accles & Shelvoke, Canada	
	August 1986	1 Ball/1 Tracer	1·15M	Eley, United Kingdom Accles & Shelvoke, Canada Eurometaal, Holland FN, Belgium	Eley
0·5 inch	March 1988	1 Ball/1 Tracer	1·2M	Eley, United Kingdom FN, Belgium, Eurometaal, Holland Accles & Shelvoke, Canada GPC, Greece	GPC
20mm	October 1986	HE I	25·5K	Matra Manurhin, France	GPC
		HE I Tr	25·5K	GPC, Greece,	
		Practice	105K	BMARC, United Kingdom	
		Practice Tr	19K		
	December 1984	Practice	250K	Olin Winchester, United States of America Raufoss, Norway Dekruithorn, Holland FN, Belgium	Raufoss
	December 1985	Practice	304K	Olin Winchester, United States of America Raufoss, Norway Dekruithorn, Holland FN, Belgium	Dekruithorn

Calibre	*Date*	*Type*	*Quantity*	*Tenderers*	*Winner*
	December 1986	Practice	304K	Olin Winchester, United States of America Raufoss, Norway Dekruithorn, Holland FN, Belgium	Olin Winchester
	December 1987	Practice	228K	Olin Winchester, United States of America Raufoss, Norway Dekruithorn, Holland FN, Belgium	Olin Winchester
25mm	July 1988	Practice	294K	Raufoss, Norway BMARC, United Kingdom	Raufoss

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken by his Department to ensure the quality of ammunition purchased from overseas.

Mr. Alan Clark: The quality requirements called up in MOD tenders and contracts for ammunition are identical for United Kingdom and overseas suppliers. Our quality assurance branches ensure that the requirements are met irrespective of the place of manufacture.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total value of contracts awarded to overseas suppliers to provide the United Kingdom armed forces with small calibre ammunition, 30 mm and below, for each year since 1984.

Mr. Alan Clark: The data for 1984-85 are not readily available. The approximate values for the subsequent years are:

Year	*£ million*
1985-86	31·4
1986-87	6·9
1987-88	28·5
1988-89	14·1

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total value of contracts awarded to United Kingdom suppliers to provide the United Kingdom armed forces with small calibre ammunition, of 30 mm and below, for each year since 1984.

Mr. Alan Clark: The data for 1984-85 are not readily available. The approximate values for the subsequent years are:

Year	*£ million*
1985-86	76·6
1986-87	68·6
1987-88	52·5
1988-89	50·1

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which United Kingdom companies are still able to supply the United Kingdom armed forces with 0·5 in ammunition.

Mr. Alan Clark: After the unsuccessful bid by Eley Ltd. for our last tender in 1988, there have been reports that it has closed its facility. There are no other established manufacturers for 0·5 in ammunition in the United Kingdom, but several could adapt their capabilities should our next requirement be attractive to them.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which United Kingdom companies have in the past 20 years supplied his Department with 0·5 in ammunition.

Mr. Alan Clark: The only United Kingdom company to have supplied 0·5 in ammunition to MOD in the past 20 years is Eley Ltd.

Ministry of Defence Houses

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many surplus Ministry of Defence houses have been sold to service men to date.

Mr. Neubert: As at 8 December 1989, a total of 2,241 surplus married quarters had been sold to service personnel through the Ministry of Defence's own discounted sales scheme since its inception on 1 December 1983.

In addition, approximately 224 surplus quarters were sold to service personnel through the Ministry of Defence's non-discounted sales scheme, which operated from 1 April 1981 to 30 November 1983. We do not maintain records of surplus quarters that may have been sold to service personnel outside these two schemes.

Warsaw Pact

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions when Royal Navy vessels have made visits to ports in Warsaw pact countries since 1985.

Mr. Neubert: Visits made by Royal Navy vessels to ports in Warsaw pact countries since 1985 are as follows:

Port	*Vessel*	*Date*
Constanta, Romania	HMS Naiad	July 1985
Leningrad, USSR	HMS Bristol	May 1989
Gdynia, Poland	HMS Bristol	June 1989
Rostock, GDR	HMS Achilles	June 1989

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions when Warsaw pact naval vessels have visited British ports and naval bases since 1985.

Mr. Neubert: The Polish destroyer Warszawa, which visited London during May 1989, is the only Warsaw pact warship to have visited a British port or naval base since 1985. A number of Warsaw pact naval sail training ships have also visited the United Kingdom during this period to take part in the annual tall ships race.

AWACS Aircraft

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the current value of contracts awarded to United Kingdom companies as a result of the offset arrangement agreed for the purchase by his Department of seven AWACS aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: Boeing has to date submitted five progress reports listing contracts placed with United Kingdom companies to the value of $1,176 million. Our evaluation is not yet complete, but we have so far agreed some $672 million to count for offset credit purposes.

Bounty Payments

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current minimum training commitment per year of Royal Navy Reserve officers and ratings enabling them to claim bounty payments.

Mr. Neubert: The current minimum training commitment of Royal Navy Reserve officers and ratings for bounty purposes is a standard two continuous weeks and 50 drill nights per year, which may be reduced for certain specialist categories.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current minimum training commitment per year of Territorial Army officers and men enabling them to claim bounty payments.

Mr. Neubert: In order to earn bounty, assuming other qualifying criteria are met, members of independent and specialist units of the Territorial Army must complete a minimum of 27 days and 19 days respectively in each training year. In both cases the overall requirement would normally include a continuous period of 15 days, either annual camp or a course in lieu. Where personal circumstances preclude an undertaking at the above level, facilities exist for indi iduals to carry out a lower training liability with a commensurately lower level of bounty being payable.

Royal Ordnance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government retained any share of the patent rights of Royal Ordnance when Royal Ordnance was sold off; and whether they have to pay for the use of any of the patents transferred to British Aerospace.

Mr. Alan Clark: The transfer of patents to Royal Ordnance was subject to the right of the Secretary of State and any Government Department without payment to use and authorise others to use any of the patents for any Government purpose, except for patents for inventions arising out of work funded out of the ROF Trading Fund. These terms are unaffected by the purchase of Royal Ordnance by British Aerospace.

Ambulance duties

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the number of Army man hours employed in ambulance duties per police authority to date.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 8 January 1990]:* Up to 5 January 1990, estimates of the number of Service man hours deployed are as shown. It is not possible to separate out the Army element without disproportionate cost.

Police Authority	*Service Man Hours Deployed*
London.(Metropolitan & City)	215,220
Hertfordshire	32,028
Lincolnshire	6,460
Bedfordshire	15,640
Derbyshire	1,428
South Yorkshire	30,464
West Midlands	35,292
Hereford and Worcester (West Mercia)	14,280
Dorset	9,792

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Oil

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has any plans for specific legislation on waste oil discharges from incineration facilities;

(2) if he has any plans to facilitate the collection of waste oil from small producers;

(3) if he has any plans to introduce legislation to bring Britain into compliance with EEC directive 75/442 on waste by requiring establishments producing, collecting and disposing of at least 500 litres of waste oil each year to keep records and submit a report to the competent authorities;

(4) if he has any plans to introduce legislation to bring Britain into compliance with EEC directive 75/442 on waste by requiring that information be provided on the quantity, quality, origin and location of waste oils as well as on their receipt and dispatch;

(5) if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require mineral and synthetic oil retailers to take back waste oils free of charge;

(6) if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require that in-house disposal of waste oils must be authorised or approved;

(7) if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require the recycling of waste oils;

(8) if he intends to introduce specific provisions to prohibit the discharge of waste oils into water bodies and drainage systems;

(9) if he intends to introduce specific provisions to prohibit uncontrolled discharge of waste oils and to require that they be disposed of in an environmentally safe manner.

Mr. Trippier: The Government are considering what further action to take to ensure compliance with EC directives 75/439, 75/442 and 87/101 regarding the disposal of waste oils. Most large industrial plants burning waste oils are already controlled by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) under the Alkali etc. Works Regulation Act 1906 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. It is intended that waste oil burning will be included in processes listed in regulations made under the Environmental Protection Bill, when enacted, for part I control. The Government will also take steps to make the public aware of the need to dispose of waste oils in an environmentally responsible way.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation specifically concerning disposal of polychlorinated biphenyls and polychlorinated triphenyls.

Mr. Trippier: The disposal of waste PCBs and PCTs is subject to the general legislation on the disposal of toxic waste. The storage and landfilling of waste PCBs/PCTs comes under the licensing system of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and their incineration under the registration system of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Alkali etc. Works Regulations Act 1906. It is intended that storage and landfilling will come under the revised licensing system and chemical incineration under the integrated pollution control system to be established under the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require that the total polychlorinated biphenyl and halogen content of waste oils has to be recorded.

Mr Trippier: Under the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980, the PCB and halogen concentration of waste oils which are special wastes is stated on the consignment note which is raised when the waste is moved from the premises where it is produced. Copies of these consignment notes are kept on registers held by producers, carriers and waste disposal licence holders. The PCB and halogen content of waste oil, which brings it within the definition of special waste, is one of the matters covered in our proposals for revising the Special Waste Regulations which I shall announce shortly.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation whereby a subsidy is paid to operators exchanging or retrofilling equipment containing poly chlorinated biphenyls or polychlorinated triphenyls.

Mr. Trippier: No. Paying subsidies would be contrary to the polluter pays principle.

Cleaning Products

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ban the use of *(a)* nitro-tri-acetic acid, *(b)* ethylene diamino-tetra-acetic acid, *(c)* perborate bleach, *(d)* optical brighteners and *(e)* enzymes in cleaning products.

Mr. Trippier: The Department has no plans to ban the use of these chemicals in cleaning products.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to limit the amount of *(a)* phosphates, *(b)* chlorine bleaches and *(c)* ethlylene diamino-tetra-acetic acid used in cleaning products; if he intends to limit the acidity of toilet cleaners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Department has no plans at present to limit the amounts of these constituents in cleaning products but is planning to place a study contract to review any adverse effects which may occur if polyphosphates used in cleaning agents are replaced by other chemicals.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require an increase in the biodegradability of anionic and non-ionic surfactants.

Mr. Trippier: The Department has no plans to require an increase in the biodegradability of anionic and non-ionic surfactants.

Richmond Metal Company

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has obtained a report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the Health and Safety Executive on how a bar of uranium came to be on the premises of the Richmond Metal Company; what action has been taken; whether any breaches of security were involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the Health and Safety Executive have carried out an extensive investigation into how the small bar of uranium came to be on the premises of the Richmond Metal Company. They have concluded that it arrived in a large batch of mixed scrap metal. The origin of the bar has not yet been established and this may prove difficult in view of the nature of scrap metal operations. Investigations are continuing and arrangements have been made to dispose of the uranium bar. There is no evidence of any breach of security.

Radioactive Waste Disposal

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the findings of the European Commission's PAGIS study into the suitability of British geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal;

(2) what account he will take of the European Commission's PAGIS study findings in determining Government policy on the disposal of high-level radioactive waste in Britain;

(3) how his Department intends to use the findings of the European Commission's PAGIS assessment of the suitability of British geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal.

Mr. Trippier: PAGIS—performance assessment of geological isolation systems—a six-year multinational research project on the safety assessment of high-level radioactive waste disposal, was launched in 1982 as part of the Community plan of action in the field of radioactive waste management. Reports of the PAGIS project have been published by the European Commission. The results indicate that vitrified high-level radioactive waste could be disposed of safely in a variety of geological formations. PAGIS reinforces Government policy on the management of high-level radioactive waste and due account will be taken of the methodology and results when considering its eventual disposal.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department made to the European Commission's PAGIS study into the suitability of British geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal.

Mr. Trippier: My Department was represented on the PAGIS steering committee.

Cyclists

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many personal journeys are made in the United Kingdom each year; and if he will initiate research to estimate gains to be made in vehicle pollution abatement by a ten fold expansion of cycling in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: "Transport Statistics Great Britain, 1978-88" (HMSO, September 1989) includes tables showing the passenger/kilometres travelled using the main modes of transport, and journeys per person per week. No research is planned to estimate gains in vehicle pollution abatement following from an expansion of cycling.

Toxic Wastes (West Yorkshire)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what areas in west Yorkshire were involved in the study undertaken by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on toxic wastes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's recent technical report "Determination of Polychlorinated biphenyls, Polychlorinated Dibenzo-p-dioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans in United Kingdom Soils" report levels of PCB, PCDD and PCDF contamination at specific points on a regular 50 km grid across most of the United Kingdom.

The report lists the grid references of all the sampling locations. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the areas in west Yorkshire where toxic wastes have been found; and if he will identify the so-called hot spots.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's recent technical report "Determination of Polychlorinated biphenyls, Polychlorinated Dibenzo-p-dioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans in United Kingdom Soils" reported levels of PCB, PCDD and PCDF contamination at specific points on a regular 50 km grid across most of the United Kingdom.

The study was aimed at identifying the range of contamination levels of these chemicals in United Kingdom soils. There was no intention, in this study, to identify areas of abnormally high contamination (hot spots).

The report lists the grid references of all the sampling locations. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the result of the soil samples taken from refuse tips in west Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's recent technical report "Determination of Polychlorinated biphenyls, Polychlorinated Dibenzo-p-dioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans in United Kingdom Soils" reported levels of PCB, PCDD and PCDF contamination at specific points on a regular 50 km grid. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The study was aimed at identifying the range of contamination levels of these chemicals in United Kingdom soils. No refuse landfill sites were knowingly sampled in west Yorkshire or elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Romania

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to increase the United Kingdom contribution to the east European programme of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature to provide assistance in improving the ecological situation in Romania.

Mr. Trippier: My Department has recently announced a contribution of £50,000 towards the east European programme of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. It is a matter for the IUCN to decide how much of this programme should be devoted to assisting Romania.

Rateable Values (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment as a result of the recent revaluation, what percentage of businesses in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency area have had their rateable value *(a)* cut, *(b)* increased by 1 to 10 per cent., *(c)* increased by 11 to 20 per cent., *(d)* increased by 21 to 30 per cent., *(e)* increased by 31 to 50 per cent., *(f)* increased by 51 to 100 per cent., *(g)* increased by over 100 per cent., *(h)* increased by over 150 per cent., and *(i)* increased by over 200 per cent., and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The information for which my hon. Friend asks is not available.

Hospital Incinerators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will specify the date when Crown immunity will be removed from all hospital incinerators.

Mr. Trippier: Crown immunity for hospital incinerators with a capacity of over 1 tonne an hour was lifted in March 1989 as a result of the Health and Safety (Emissions into the Atmosphere) (Amendment) Regulations 1989. Clause 54 of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill provides for a widespread removal of Crown immunity from National Health Service premises. This will cover all National Health Service incinerators. The provision will be brought into effect by commencement order at the earliest opportunity.

Radioactive Substances

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment from which persons and bodies he has received responses to the consultation paper on the control of radioactive substances.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) on 6 December, *Official Report*, column *217*.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he proposes to take to control radioactive substances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The improvements we intend to make to the control of radioactive substances under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 were set out in a consultation document, a copy of which has been placed in the Library, and are incorporated in the Environmental Protection Bill now before the House.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has had regard to

the new ionising regulations in the United States based on proposals by the National Academy of Sciences in drawing up proposals for the control of radioactive substances in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: The Radioactive Substances Act 1960 provides a comprehensive framework for controlling the keeping, use, accumulation and disposal of radioactive substances. We take into account legislation in other countries in amending United Kingdom legislation where appropriate.

Urban Programme

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources will be available for local authorities in the urban programme in 1990-91; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I am today announcing initial urban programme resource allocations for 1990-91, totalling over £258 million, an increase of £13 million over last year. The resources will be allocated to the 57 urban programme partnership and programme authorities. The money will be used to support a wide range of projects aimed at stimulating economic recovery, improving the environment and helping people to deal with social problems in urban areas.

The urban programme encourages local authorities, in partnership with Government, to help revitalise our inner cities. It is a key part of the Government's Action for Cities programme, which includes the Department of the Environment's other urban initiatives—urban development corporations, city grant and derelict land grant. Together, these Department of the Environment programmes will provide £920 million for inner city regeneration in 1990-91.

The urban programme allocations made today, some three weeks earlier than last year, are provisional: formal allocations are made after inner area programmes (IAPs) have been assessed and approved. Allocations will not be confirmed until authorities have provided a satisfactory annual report on achievements through the UP in 1988-89. Redistribution of resources can sometimes occur within the course of the year which may lead to outturn being different from the initial allocations.

Copies of the allocations to individual authorities have been placed in the Library.

Soil Contamination

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of soil contamination with polychlorinated biphenyls throughout Britain.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's recent report "Determination of Polychlorinated Biphenyls, Polychlorinated Dibenzo-p-dioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans in UK Soils" contained details of the levels of PCBs found in soils in England, Wales and part of Scotland. The results show that PCBs are ubiquitous in soils, although the levels vary, being higher where there is a history of heavy industry and urbanisation. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of soil contamination throughout Britain from polychlorinated bi-phenyls, contamination from factory chimneys and the burning of plastic wastes in municipal incinerators.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Details of PCB contamination of soils throughout Britain are given in the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution "Determination of Polychlorinated Biphenyls, Polychlorinated Dibenzo-p-dioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans in UK Soils" published by HMSO, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. The use of PCBs is severely restricted by the Control of Pollution (Supply and Use of Injurious Substances) Regulations 1986. Thus they are not likely to be found in emissions from factory chimneys or to arise from the burning of plastic wastes in municipal incinerators.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the location of sites where landfill gases have been identified as a potential problem.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Reliable and complete information on sites where landfill gas has been identified as a potential problem is not held centrally. Waste disposal authorities can advise about specific sites in their area.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the sites, where landfill gases are a potential problem, that are located within 250m of housing.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* This information is not held centrally. Waste disposal authorities provide information to local planning authorities where development is proposed within 250m of a landfill site.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that all future soil samples from the area around the Rechem incinerator at Pontypool required to be taken by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution are collected by persons in the direct employ of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* It is for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to determine the most effective use of its resources and, in part, this will mean deciding on the most appropriate way to obtain samples in particular areas.

Single Homeless People

Mr Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish figures for the number of single homeless people for each year from 1979 to 1989;

(2) how many single homeless people he estimates there are under the age of 25 years currently in England;

(3) if he will publish the figures for the number of single homeless people in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* Cardiff, *(c)* Edinburgh, *(d)* Liverpool and *(e)* London during each year from 1979 to 1989.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Local authorities report the number of households for whom

they accept responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Acts; the single homeless are not separately identified and my Department has no estimates.

For information about Wales and Scotland I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland.

Housing Associations

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the Stonefrost inquiry report into the future of housing associations' development in central London.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* I was pleased to note the report's acknowledgement of the value of work carried out by London housing associations, and the part played in this by private finance. Since the inquiry was concluded, we have announced our decision to move over the next two years to a regional distribution of the Housing Corporation's capital investment programme based on the housing needs indicator, an objective measure of the relative need for investment by housing associations in different areas which was fully reviewed last year by my Department, the Housing Corporation and the National Federation of Housing Associations. As a result housing associations in London and the south-east will receive significantly higher levels of resources to help them continue their important work in providing homes for people in housing need.

Homelessness

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding homelessness.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Following publication last November of our review of the homelessness legislation, we have received comments from a range of public and voluntary bodies.

Water Pollution

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that the general public has immediate and free access to the regional registers of water pollution levels.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amery: Information on water quality and pollution is contained in the registers maintained by the National Rivers Authority in accordance with its duties under section 117 of the Water Act 1989. The public has free access to these registers at the authority's regional offices during normal working hours.

Bathing Waters

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the beaches awarded blue flag safe bathing symbols were tested for, and failed the European Economic Community standards for coliforms, enteroviruses and salmonella.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The results of the 1988 survey of bathing waters were placed in the Library on 21 February 1989. These included details of tests for coliforms, enteroviruses and salmonella. The award of blue flags for 1989 was announced on 5 June 1989 by the organisers of the blue flag campaign.

TRANSPORT

Public Transport

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to implement the recommendations in the report "Public Transport and the Missing Six Million—What Can Be Learned?"

Mr. Atkins: My Department is working closely with the disabled persons transpot advisory committee in following up the recommendations.

Motor Vehicle Accidents

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of motor vehicle accidents, excluding motor cycles, in each of the last five years involving fatalities and non-fatalities in England and Wales.

Mr. Atkins: Information is only available for road accidents which involve personal injury. The information requested is as follows:

Motor vehicle accidents, excluding motor cycles
England and Wales, 1984-1988

	Fatal	*Non-fatal*	*Total*
1984	3,470	166,431	169,901
1985	3,309	165,629	168,938
1986	3,527	172,405	175,932
1987	3,390	171,024	174,414
1988	3,427	181,160	184,587

This table, as requested, counts accidents and not vehicles, and excludes all those accidents involving motor cycles including, for example, an accident involving car and motor cycle.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of motor vehicle accidents, excluding motor cycles, in each of the last five years involving drivers who had passed their test in the previous 12 months in England and Wales.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested is not available; licence details of drivers involved in accidents are not recorded on the accident report form.

Car Drivers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of people who are currently permitted to drive a car in England and Wales.

Mr. Atkins: Over 28 million people in Great Britain have full licences to drive motor cars. There are no separate figures for England and Wales.

Driving Tests

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of people who have passed a driving test to drive a car in each of the last five years; and if he will specify what proportion of those people were aged *(a)* 17 to 25 years, *(b)* 26 to 40 years, *(c)* 41 to 60 years and *(d)* over 60 years.

Mr. Atkins: Statistics in this form are available only from 1985. Those for 1989 have not yet been completed. Figures for 1985-1988 are as follows:—

Year	Tests passed (cars)	Proportion in age-group: per cent. 17-25	26-40	41-60	Over 60
1985	863,339	71·6	22·9	5·1	0·4
1986	941,005	75·6	19·7	4·4	0·3
1987	958,087	74·2	20·8	4·7	0·3
1988	1,039,461	73·5	21·3	4·9	0·3

A38 Trunk Road

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's preferred line of route for the A38 trunk road improvement Liskeard to Bodmin section.

Mr. Atkins: As I informed my hon. Friend in my reply of 4 December, at column *95*, I hope to announce the Department's preferred route early in 1991.

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he hopes to announce the consulting engineers to examine possible alternative routes for the A38 trunk road improvement, Saltash to Trevulefoot section.

Mr. Atkins: I hope to announce the appointment of consulting engineers within the next few weeks.

Mersey Ferries

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received in respect of the funding of the Mersey Ferries; if he will consider giving direct financial aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The director general of the Merseyside passenger transport executive wrote to the Department of Transport on 21 July and 31 August 1989 with details of a project for developing the Mersey Ferries as a leisure facility, and the passenger transport authority also asked for this project to be taken into account in the determination of its annual capital guideline. The Department replied to the PTE on 9 October raising various questions on the project. We have received no representations since then. We would consider any application for direct financial assistance on its merits, in accordance with our normal criteria for grant for public transport projects.

Mark Woodward

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on what was done with the Coastguard and British Telecom tapes of calls relating to the accidental drowning of Mark Woodward on 16 August 1989, following the coroner's inquest.

Mr. McLoughlin: The multi-track tapes that recalled the content and timing of all telephone and radio messages to and from Coastguard stations were wiped clean one month after the coroner's inquest. Up to this time these tapes would have been available for examination should this have been requested. For the benefit of the inquest certain extracts of the tapes were taken, in cassette form, and these are currently held by the police, following their inquiry. These tapes will be returned to the Department's solicitor shortly and will be made available to interested parties. But also it should be noted that in cassette form the content is incomplete and cannot be linked to accurate time. The question of the British Telecom tapes is one which should be addressed to BT in the north Devon area.

British Rail

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what subjects are covered by the commercially confidential matters to which he referred in his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling of 21 December, *Official Report*, column *361*.

Mr. Portillo: The letters cover a wide range of issues, for example the commercial and financial structure of the proposed joint venture, which are now the subject of detailed negotiation between Eurorail and the British Railways Board. They also bear on the negotiations that need to take place with third parties before the joint venture can be established.

A13

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what improvements to the A13 between the North Circular road and the Tower of London will be started before 31 December; at what cost; and when they will be completed;

(2) what improvements to the A13 between the North Circular road and the Tower of London are currently in progress; at what cost; and when they will be completed.

Mr. Portillo: The Department's responsibilities are for the A13 trunk road, which runs as far west as Butcher row. The remainder of the A13 known as Commercial road is the responsibility of the London borough of Tower Hamlets.

Departmental schemes currently under construction are:

Scheme	Works £ million	Completion
Strengthening of Britannia Bridge	0·3	February 1990
Creation of access to "Financial Times"	[1]0·6	February 1990
The following schemes are due to start before 31 December:		
West India Dock Road junction interim improvements	1·2	Mid 1991
Cotton Street junction interim improvements[2]	4·0	Summer 1992
Leamouth Road junction interim improvements	2·0	Early 1991
Ironbridge waterproofing and resurfacing	0·2	September 1990
Cumberland Road Subway refurbishment	0·07	April 1990
Tollgate Road signalled junction	0·75	Summer 1990

[1] Costs met by developer.

[2] Progress dependent upon timely confirmation of LDDC's compulsory purchase order on land for redevelopment at Woolmore street.

Progress on most of the trunk road schemes are dependent on the completion of statutory processes which could be subject to public inquiry and delay. Completion dates are therefore provisional.

Permanent schemes at Butcher row, West India Dock road and Blackwall tunnel northern approach-Cotton street will follow in 1993, when a three and a half year project will commence to make final improvements to the Leamouth road junction and widen the Ironbridge, including the connection of LDDC's East India dock link to the A13.

Towards the end of this year we hope to publish Orders for improvement of the A13 junction with the A117 East

Ham Manor way and to hold an exhibition of proposals for improvement of the A13 junction with the A112 Prince Regent lane.

The traffic control systems unit of the City of London is investigating on behalf of the Department the possible co-ordintation of signals on the A13 trunk road in Tower Hamlets to expedite the flow of through traffic.

West Yorkshire Bus Services

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications for the bus services of the change effected by the community charge on the method of raising finance for the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority from a precept to a levy on the five west Yorkshire districts; and what assessment has been made of the effect of fixing that levy at grant related expenditure.

Mr. Portillo: It is up to the passenger transport authority to decide what level of bus services to provide and what levy to raise to achieve its objectives, in the same way as it decided on the level of services and set an appropriate precept for the present financial year. The districts influence PTA spending policy through their representations on the PTA. The PTA levy is only one of the elements making up total district expenditure, and there is no separate standard spending assessment for PTA services. Instead, districts' standard spending assessments will include an element designed to cover spending on these and other small services.

Oil Companies (Shipping)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of registered oil companies that have their own shipping.

Mr. McLoughlin: The United Kingdom oil majors will have their own commercial arrangements for access to shipping, generally through ownership or chartering, but the information required to provide a more comprehensive reply is not available.

Near Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of reported near-miss occurrences in the transit area that covers the area from Hucknall in the south, through Mansfield, Chesterfield, Worksop, Sheffield and Rotherham to Barnsley, Doncaster and Finningley, that have involved military and civilian aircraft for the last five years; what are the types of aircraft involved; and what is their nationality.

Mr. McLoughlin: Within the area specified, three air misses have been reported, none of which involved commercial air traffic:

1. A civilian glider and a civilian Cessna 172 (2 November 1986).

2. An RAF Buccaneer and a civilian Cessna 152 (1 July 1987).

3. An RAF Tornado and civilian Cessna 152 (27 January 1988).

A27

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has received from East Sussex county council a map detailing a possible route for the A27 dual carriageway from Lewes to Polegate; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy that any scheme brought forward to dual the A27 from Lewes to Polegate will take into full account the landmark of Mount Caburn, and the views therefrom, and from Firle Beacon;

(3) if he will make it his policy that any scheme brought forward to dual the A27 from Lewes to Polegate will bypass Wilmington rather than dualling the present road.

Mr. Atkins: This scheme was admitted to the trunk road programme in May 1989 following a confidential scheme identification study undertaken for the Department by East Sussex county council. This study recommended the improvements to dual carriageway standards of the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, and identified one possible option.

Design agents are to be appointed very shortly to investigate and prepare proposals for the improvement. They will identify and evaluate all feasible route options for the scheme, including combinations of on-line and off-line solutions, on which to consult the public. Their brief will include a requirement for environmental and landscape assessments of the alternatives identified. It is too soon, therefore, to predict what route the improvement might follow or how villages along the existing A27 might be placed in relation to it.

Road Improvements (Compensation)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is for compensating those people whose dwelling is *(a)* compulsorily purchased and *(b)* severely blighted as a result of major road improvements.

Mr. Atkins: Where land is compulsorily purchased, the statutory basis for compensation is the open market value of the land, disregarding any alteration in value due to the scheme for which the land is being acquired. Vendors may also be eligible for additional payments, such as removal costs, reconnection and refitting charges, and legal expenses. A displaced houseowner who had lived in the property for at least five years is also entitled to a home loss payment. Entitlement to compensation is set out in a series of booklets "Land Compensation—Your rights Explained". There are copies in the Library of the House.

Where a dwelling lies in the line of a road proposal and cannot be sold in the open market at a reasonable price, protection is given by the blight provisions in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. An owner-occupier may serve a notice on the highway authority, requiring it to buy the property. In the early stages of a road proposal, before a preferred route is announced, there also exists a discretionary power to buy where there is a genuine possibility that the property will be required. Policy is to exercise this power to alleviate cases of serious hardship.

When roadworks are imminent or in progress, there is discretionary power to buy dwellings not required for the road but likely to be severely affected by the construction works. There is also discretionary power to buy property severely affected by nuisance arising from the use of a new or improved road, up to one year after opening.

The legislation governing compulsory purchase and compensation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. He is currently considering whether improvements are needed in the light of comments on an consultation paper published last year.

M27 Motorway

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans exist for the construction of an M27 motorway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins We have no present plans to extend the M27 motorway. However, consultants are carrying out a study into the possible need to increase the capacity of the existing roads and its junctions. They are expected to report in the spring.

We are also improving progressively the south coast trunk route, running westwards from the M27 to Honiton and eastwards to Folkestone. The national trunk road programme currently includes 36 schemes at various stages of preparation, collectively valued at some £375 million.

Transport Spending (London)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each London borough *(a)* the transport supplementary grant and *(b)* the capital allocations or annual capital guideline for transport purposes for each of the years 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Details of each London boroughs *(a)* transport supplementary grant and *(b)* transport capital allocation, annual capital guideline and supplementary credit approval for the period 1987-88 to 1990-91 are given in the table.

Transport Supplementary Grant for London Boroughs 1987-88 to 1990-91

£ million

Authority	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
City of London	0·479	0·183	0·194	0·101
Barking and Dagenham	0·800	2·836	1·895	1·748
Barnet	0·475	0·400	0·291	0·161
Bexley	0·451	0·649	1·118	2·134
Brent	0·311	0·436	0·450	0·007
Bromley	0·429	3·883	3·833	3·834
Camden	0·107	0·131	0·086	0·189
Croydon	0·202	0·234	0·294	0·888
Ealing	1·911	1·938	2·820	2·429
Enfield	7·413	11·255	11·958	4·881
Greenwich	1·980	0·816	0·023	0·019
Hackney	0·200	0·427	0·410	0·186
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·118	0·065	0·142	0·148
Haringey	1·478	3·662	5·812	2·721
Harrow	1·609	3·578	3·050	3·214
Havering	1·284	0·320	0·207	0·215
Hillingdon	2·421	1·957	4·530	2·742
Hounslow	0·623	0·758	0·714	0·279
Islington	0·103	0·072	0·148	0·168
Kensington and Chelsea	0·261	0·069	0·633	0·285
Kingston upon Thames	4·737	0·331	1·661	0·566
Lambeth	0·288	0·247	0·182	0·154
Lewisham	0·299	0·970	5·314	1·987
Merton	2·719	2·529	4·280	7·100
Newham	1·164	0·343	0·497	1·791
Redbridge	1·048	0·403	0·339	0·134
Richmond upon Thames	0·205	0·186	0·163	0·172
Southwark	0·734	0·997	1·952	0·249
Sutton	0·843	0·778	0·682	0·590
Tower Hamlets	0·169	0·068	0·070	0·091
Waltham Forest	1·091	0·494	0·476	0·056
Wandsworth	2·442	0·554	0·433	1·011
Westminster	0·383	0·210	0·750	0·367

London boroughs' transport capital allocations 1987-88 to 1989-90 and annual capital guidelines/supplementary credit approvals 1990-91

£ million

Authority	*Capital allocations*			[1]*ACG*	[2]*SCA*
	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	
City of London	1·320	0·720	0·630	0·461	0·000
Barking and Dagenham	2·590	6·210	4·580	3,622	0·000
Barnet	1·340	1·110	0·790	0·571	0·000
Bexley	1·835	2·870	2·780	2·869	0·000
Brent	1·120	1·370	1·190	0·736	0·000
Bromley	1·710	8·880	8·880	4·328	0·000
Camden	1·430	0·710	0·260	1·095	0·000
Croydon	1·180	0·800	1·110	1·890	0·000
Ealing	5·145	6·820	6·450	3·592	1·710
Enfield	16·325	15·550	24·210	0·429	6·480
Greenwich	5·160	3·460	2·590	1·149	0·000
Hackney	1·675	1·910	1·550	0·791	0·000
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·360	0·285	0·410	1·303	0·000
Haringey	3·400	8·475	11·592	0·661	2·780
Harrow	4·130	9·690	8·980	5·668	0·000
Havering	3·510	1·330	0·960	0·568	0·000
Hillingdon	7·300	10·710	3·012	2·297	4·917
Hounslow	1·960	1·050	1·630	0·540	0·279
Islington	0·800	0·480	0·530	0·549	0·000
Kensington and Chelsea	0·710	1·170	1·570	0·694	0·000
Kingston upon Thames	9·770	5·690	3·870	1·881	0·000
Lambeth	1·140	0·850	0·610	0·280	0·000
Lewisham	1·840	2·530	11·030	3·081	0·000
Merton	7·780	6·850	9·400	7·282	1·150
Newham	3·510	2·850	2·420	2·869	0·000
Redbridge	2·800	1·980	0·900	0·598	0·000
Richmond upon Thames	0·920	0·850	0·610	0·633	0·000
Southwark	2·970	4·470	5·610	1·701	0·000
Sutton	2·180	2·830	2·330	3·168	0·000
Tower Hamlets	0·970	0·740	0·420	1·007	0·000
Waltham Forest	2·670	1·870	1·250	0·726	0·000

Authority	Capital allocations 1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	[1]ACG 1990-91	[2]SCA
Wandsworth	6·880	2·800	2·690	3·429	0·000
Westminster	2·360	1·840	2·020	4·589	0·000

[1] Annual Capital Guidelines.
[2] Supplementary Credit Approvals.

Bus Deregulation

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the operation of buses in north-west Sussex, following deregulation.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The Department has no detailed records of bus services in north-west Sussex. The operation of services is a matter for operators and local authorities. In West Sussex as a whole, bus mileage has increased whilst the county council has been able to reduce spending on bus support from some £1·5 million before deregulation to £610,000 for 1989-90.

Light Dues

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list those maritime nations, on which he has information, that collect light dues from pleasure craft;

(2) when he expects to reach a conclusion on the payment of light dues by yachtsmen.

Mr. McLoughlin: The British Ports Federation has not yet completed its study on the feasibility of extending light dues to pleasure craft. I expect to invite views on its report from interested parties before reaching any conclusions. Charging practice in relation to navigational aids varies widely in other countries. I understand that almost half the states with membership of the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities levy dues of some kind as the sole source of finance, but information on the treatment of pleasure craft is not available.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Deptford City Technology College

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total liability of his Department, as of the end of December 1989, to reimburse the Haberdashers' company for expenses incurred to that date in connection with the proposed establishment of a city technology college in Deptford.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave yesterday at column *8*.

Middle Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children are currently educated in middle schools.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In January 1989 the number of pupils in maintained middle schools in England was 334,099.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the funding of primary age children in middle schools under schemes of local management of schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under schemes' funding formulae, schools should receive a basic sum of money for each pupil of the same age; that sum should be the same whether the pupil is in a primary or a middle school. Schools will, however, receive additional resources over and above this basic aliocation for a variety of reasons and this may lead to differences in funding both between primary schools and between primary and middle schools with similar numbers of pupils.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet with the teachers' unions to discuss the establishment of negotiating machinery for teachers' pay and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend held a series of meetings with the teacher unions in October and November last year. He is considering carefully the points made to him then. Further meetings will take place in due course.

Higher Education Statistics

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest year for which his Department has any estimates of the numbers of students in higher education in the United Kingdom; and what is the estimate for that year.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has not projected beyond the year 2000, when the most recent figures indicate that there will be about 1,130,000 students in higher education in Great Britain.

Opto-electronics

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his policy towards the funding of academic-only work in relation to opto-electronics.

Mr. Jackson: The policy objectives for Department of Education and Science funding of civil science were set out in the Secretary of State's speech at the first plenary meeting of the Academia Europaea in London on 26 June 1989. Copies are available in the Library.

The Government support scientific research through the science budget which funds the research councils and through the Universities Funding Council block grant to universities. Some research is also carried out by polytechnics funded through the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. It is for the research councils and higher education institutions to determine the priority they accord to opto-electronics or any other scientific field, taking due account of the policy objectives referred to above.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest pupil-teacher ratio for England and Wales; and what was the ratio in 1978-79.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The overall pupil-teacher ratio in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England in January 1989 was 17 and in January 1979 was 18·9. Similar information for Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Teacher Shortages

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the Manchester university study on teacher shortage, a copy of which has been sent to his Department.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department has not received a copy of the report referred to. However, officials have been in touch with the authors of the report, and I understand that their findings are broadly consistent with the Department's statistics about teacher wastage. They confirm that the majority of those leaving teaching do so on retirement. Others resign on maternity, on moving house or on going abroad, and less than 1 per cent. of the work force leaves teaching for other employment, including self-employment.

PRIME MINISTER

Agriculture Spending

Q16. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the operation of the automatic agricultural stabilisers and the legally binding budgetary controls.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. The stabilisers and the legal limit on market support expenditure, for which the United Kingdom fought so hard, have been a considerable success. They have been major elements in reducing expenditure on the common agricultural policy and bringing about significantly lower levels of surplus food.

Bournemouth

Q139. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Bournemouth.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Pornography

Q165. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Prime Minister what action she proposes to take to support moves to remove pornography from the shelves of shops.

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Member's concern about pornography. We have introduced legislation for the control of sex shops and outlawing possession of child pornography. Legislation to outlaw indecent displays has been carried with Government support. The Government have also given support to two private Members' Bills to strengthen the Obscene Publications Act 1959 which were unsuccessful, and has taken other steps to uphold standards in published material. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has commissioned a review of the available research on links between pornography and violence and the effects on attitudes to women.

Low-cost Rural Housing

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received concerning low-cost rural housing.

The Prime Minister: I receive such representations from time to time from hon. Members, interest groups, and members of the public. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is responsible for housing issues in England.

We have announced a significant increase in resources available to the Housing Corporation over the next three years. Total capital expenditure is planned to rise to £1,736 million by 1992-93, more than double the provision in 1989-90. As a result we expect the number of new homes provided by associations in 1992-93 to be over twice the 1988-89 output.

We have specifically enabled the Housing Corporation to establish a special programme for smaller villages which will rise to 1,500 new rented houses a year by 1992-93.

African National Congress

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister whether she continues to regard the African National Congress as a terrorist organisation.

The Prime Minister: I welcome the preference expressed in some of the African National Congress' statements for a resolution of South Africa's problems through negotiation. But there have also been statements repeating the commitment to armed struggle. We hope that the organisation will remove this ambiguity and commit itself explicitly to the pursuit of peaceful solutions only.

Engagements

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

Ms. Gorman: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

AIDS

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the Government Departments which have been or will be funding research into AIDS, giving the amount that each Department contributed to this work for 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have been asked to reply. The latest available information about expenditure by central Government on AIDS research in 1989-90 is as follows:

	£
Medical Research Council	[1]13,100,000
Other Research Councils	2,909,700
Department of Health	496,000
Health Education Authority	1,000,000
National Institute of Biological Standards and Control	440,000
Public Health Laboratory Service	1,100,000
Scottish Home and Health Department	163,000
Overseas Development Administration	533,306

[1] Includes expenditure on work commissioned by the Department of Health.

Figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Occupational Pensions

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what effect the proposed changes made by the occupational pension board will have on small self-administered pension schemes for small businesses.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) on 20 December 1989 at column *304*.

Unemployment Benefit

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost of unemployment benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: For the financial year 1988-89, unemployment benefit is estimated to have cost £1,143 million.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether social security adjudication officers will automatically treat an unemployed claimant whose income support is suspended for not actively seeking work as suffering hardship so that they only lose 40 per cent. of their personal allowance; whether unemployment benefit recipients will be treated automatically as suffering hardship so long as they fulfil the basic qualifying rules for income support; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether unemployed claimants who are quarterly attenders who have had their benefit suspended for not actively seeking work, have to return their order books; whether they will be paid benefit if they are in hardship; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Where an unemployed claimant receiving benefit has failed to show that he is actively seeking employment, hardship payments of income support may be made. The adjudication officer considers each case on its merits. If he is satisfied that the claimant, or any member of his family, would suffer hardship unless benefit were paid, income support is awarded at a reduced rate. Quarterly attenders who do not satisfy the actively seeking employment condition are required to return their order books.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the claimants affected by his introduction on 10 December of the new benefit rule on claimants earning more than £43 a week he estimates *(a)* will have an entitlement to income support or other income replacement benefits, and *(b)* in cases where they have two employers, will not earn enough from one employer to have a National Insurance contribution liability as an employee; and how many of these are married/cohabiting women, lone parents and claimants with intermittent work patterns due to chronic illness and disability.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is estimated that of around 5,000 people who will lose unemployment benefit as a result of this rule up to 1,000 will qualify for income support or housing benefit. I regret that the other information requested is not available.

Pensioners (Canada)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his most recent estimate of the number of British pensioners currently residing in Canada.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The number of British pensioners residing in Canada was 95,228 at 28 December 1989.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent discussions have taken place between the British and Canadian Governments to discuss the payment of uprated pensions to British pensioners residing in Canada.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There have been no recent discussions of this topic.

Invalid Care Allowance

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are in receipt of the invalid care allowance *(a)* in Tower Hamlets, and *(b)* in Bow and Poplar.

Mr. Scott: I regret that this information is not available.

Short-term Foster Parents

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 20 December concerning short-term foster parents, what arrangements he has made regarding requirements for *(a)* availability for work and *(b)* actively seeking work in the periods between placements.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The general rule is that people claiming benefits on grounds of unemployment have to be available for and actively seeking employment. No special arrangements apply to short-term foster parents, who are treated in the same way as natural parents.

Pension Books

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cause of the pre-Christmas computer error which delayed automatic renewal of 42,000 pension books; how many staff, departmental and consultancy, were employed, for how long and at what cost, to send out substitute giros; and what has been the cost of overpayment as a result of the error.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Issue to the Post Office of some 4,300 pension books, not 42,000 was delayed by a recent change to the income support computer system. Immediate action was taken to ensure that all affected beneficiaries received payments before Christmas. A total of 112 man days' effort was spent in preparing interim payments, at a cost of approximately £7,000.

The cost of any duplicate payments is not yet known, but is not expected to be significant. We have taken action to ensure that there will be no recurrence of this incident.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for attendance allowance are awaiting a decision by the attendance allowance board.

Mr. Scott: At 30 November there were about 49,000 claims awaiting a decision by the attendance allowance board and its delegated medical practitioners.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to expedite consideration of the case of Natasha Greig who has been waiting for two and a half years for a decision on the review of her claim for attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: I understand that the attendance allowance board has concluded its review of Miss Greig's case. The board's written decision will be sent to her mother as soon as possible.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken to review claims for attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: The average time taken to process an application for review of a determination made by the attendance allowance board or one of its delegated medical practitioners is about 12·3 weeks where the outcome of the review is in the claimant's favour, and about 29·9 weeks when the result is not in the claimant's favour.

Income Support and Housing Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what basket of specific items is accounted for in each of the disablement-related premiums for income support and housing benefit;

(2) what basket of specific items is accounted for in the weekly personal allowance of the applicable amount for income support and for housing benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There are no specific amounts included in income-related benefit levels to cover particular items of expenditure apart from the amounts included last April to help towards the minimum contribution to the community charge.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Romania

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the ambassador and his staff played in the recent events in Romania.

Mr. Maude: None. The embassy did, of course, fulfil its usual task of observing and assessing events and reporting on them.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government provided any assistance or encouragement to the revolutionary forces in Romania prior to, or during, the civil unrest leading to the fall of Mr. Ceausescu.

Mr. Maude: None.

Treaties and Directives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* directives and *(b)* treaties, have been agreed or ratified by (i) the EEC and (ii) the Council of Europe, since 1960.

Mr. Maude: During the period 1 January 1973 to 15 December 1989, a total of 1,209 directives were adopted and published by the European Community. In the same period, there have been nine treaties revising earlier treaties and Acts relating to the Communities, and the Community has become party to a large number of bilateral and multilateral treaties with third countries and international organisations; these could be quantified only at disproportionate cost. All of these legislative Acts have been published in the Official Journal of the European Communities, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

The Council of Europe does not issue directives or ratify treaties itself. Since 1960, a total of 73 conventions and agreements have opened for signature and ratification by member states of the Council of Europe.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, by name and in chronological order *(a)* the directives and *(b)* the treaties that Her Majesty's Government have initiated and which have been ratified by (i) the EEC and (ii) the Council of Europe since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Under the Community treaties it is for the Commission to initiate proposals for directives and for the ratification of treaties by the Community, and for the Council of Ministers, made up of the representatives of the member states, to decide on those proposals. Nineteen Council of Europe conventions and agreements, set out in the table, have opened for signature by member states.

I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with details of those initiated by the Government.

European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter (1979)

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979)

European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children (1980)

European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (1980)

European Agreement on Transfer of Responsibility for Refugees (1980)
Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (1981)
Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons (1983)
European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes (1983)
European Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (1985)
European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches (1985)
Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1985)
European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985)
European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals used for Experimental and other Scientific Purposes (1986)
European Convention on the Recognition of the Legal Personality of International Non-Governmental Organisations (1986)
European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals (1987)
European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987)
Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters (1988)
European Convention on Transfrontier Television (1989)
Convention on Insider Trading (1989)

South Africa

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been received on behalf of Basayi Maqoko and Zwelinkosi Mjo currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken on these cases.

Mr. Maude: We have received no specific representations about these cases. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been received on behalf of Dilizintaba Lucky Nomgana, Mandla Mngomezulu and Sibusion Sindane currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken on these cases.

Mr. Maude: We have received a number of representations on behalf of Mr. Dilizintaba Lucky Nomgana. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism. With legal avenues yet to be exhausted we have not intervened with the South African Government in this case. We have received no specific representations on behalf of Mr. Mandla Mngomezulu or Sibusion Sindane.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Israel Machasa, Jerry Molebeng and Johannes Mono currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken with regard to these cases;

(2) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Jabu Obed Masina, Frans Ting Ting Masango and Neo Griffith Potsane current under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about these cases;

(3) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Leonard Natange Sheehama and Nkosinathi Zuma currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about these cases;

(4) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Mthetheleli Zephania Mncube and Mzondeleli Euclid Nondula, currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about these cases;

(5) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Mtutuzeli Bottoman Ngqandu, Abraham Zeyo and Gilindoda Norman Gxekwa currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about these cases;

(6) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Mxolisie Ncaphayi, Vuzumsi Jack, Samson Booysen and Bennet Sonamzi currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken with regard to these cases;

(7) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Ndibulele Ndzamela and Pumzile Mayapi currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about these cases;

(8) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Ringo Farland, Sipho Gonya and Phutumile Dlabathi currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken on these cases;

(9) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Sibusiso Senele Masuku and Oupa Josias Mbonane currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about these cases;

(10) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Vuyani Petrus Jacobs, Mthetheleli Lucas and Tozamile Mooi currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken with regard to these cases;

Mr. Maude: We have received no specific representations about these cases. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong

extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been received on behalf of Joseph Chidi, Robert John McBride and Nico Ledube Mnyamana currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action has been taken about these cases.

Mr. Maude: We have received a number of representations on behalf of Mr. Robert McBride. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism. We have not intervened with the South African Government in this case. We have received no specific representations on behalf of Mr. Chidi or Mr. Mnyamana.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been received on behalf of Patrick Manginda, Desmond Majola, and Dickson Madikane, currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action has been taken about these cases.

Mr. Maude: We have received a number of representations about Mr. Patrick Manginda, Desmond Majola and Dickson Madikane. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism. With legal avenues yet to be exhausted, we have not intervened with the South African Government in these cases.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been received on behalf of Rodney Moloi and Stanford Lebepe, currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken with regard to their cases.

Mr. Maude: We received representations from the mother of Mr. Rodney Moloi which were forwarded to the South African authorities. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism. We have received no specific representations on behalf of Mr. Lebepe.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether any representations have been received on behalf of the Upington 14 currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about this case;

(2) whether any representations have been received on behalf of Wilson Matshili, Patrick Molefe, Takalani David Mamphanga and George Maugedzo currently under sentance of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken on these cases.

Mr. Maude: We have received a number of representations about the Upington 14. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism. With legal avenues yet to be exhausted, we have not intervened with the South African Government in these cases.

Afghanistan

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what diplomatic arrangements are in hand for the protection of British citizens in Afghanistan.

Mr. Maude: As I explained in answer to a similar question on 13 November 1989, we have temporarily withdrawn our embassy staff from Kabul, and, therefore, we are not able to offer consular assistance to British nationals in Afghanistan.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to re-establish Her Majesty's ambassador in Afghanistan.

Mr. Maude: Her Majesty's ambassador was withdrawn in 1980 following the Soviet invasion. There are no plans to appoint a new ambassador.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have reopened their embassies in Afghanistan.

Mr. Maude: None of the Western Governments who withdrew their diplomatic staff from Kabul early last year has returned them, although we understand that the French Government have now decided in principle to do so.

Cameroon

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Ministers have made visits to Cameroon in the past five years.

Mr. Maude: The following list gives details of ministerial visits to Cameroon in the last five years:

Mr. Channon (Department of Trade and Industry—13 to 17 February 1985

Mrs. Chalker (Department of Transport)—28 November to 1 December 1985

Mr. Gummer (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)—5 to 8 April 1987

Mr. Bottomley (Department of Transport)—2 to 5 October 1987

Mrs. Chalker (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)—12 to 14 July 1988

Vietnamese Boat People

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received the report to which he referred in his statement of 12 December 1989 on the mandatory return of boat people to Vietnam from Hong Kong; and whether he will make it public.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has received the report to which he referred on 12 December and it has been placed in the Libraries of this House and another place. It is also being made available publicly.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Women Police Officers

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are employed as police officers in each police authority area; and what rank they hold.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information as at 31 October 1989 is set out in the table.

	Assistant Chief Constable	*Chief Superintendent*	*Superintendent*	*Chief Inspector*	*Inspector*	*Sergeant*	*Constable*	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	—	1	—	1	3	16	243	264
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	2	2	8	120	132
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	2		5	114	121
Cheshire	—	1	—	2	1	21	197	222
Cleveland	—	—	1	1	8	7	131	148
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—	4	100	104
Derbyshire	—	1	1	2	8	9	170	191
Devon and Cornwall	—	—	—	—	4	14	255	273
Dorset	—	1	1	—	1	7	131	141
Durham	—	1	—	1	1	3	102	108
Dyfed Powys	—	—	—	—	—	4	82	86
Essex	—	—	1	—	6	20	244	271
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	3	101	104
Greater Manchester	—	1	—	3	11	41	811	867
Gwent	—	—	—	—	2	5	85	92
Hampshire	—	—	—	—	5	11	272	288
Hertfordshire	—	—	1	—	1	11	205	218
Humberside	—	—	1	1	2	4	144	152
Kent	—	—	1	—	4	18	320	343
Lancashire	—	—	1	1	3	17	282	304
Leicestershire	—	—	—	1	5	14	174	194
Lincolnshire	—	—	1	1	4	4	90	100
Merseyside	1	—	2	2	5	37	528	575
Norfolk	—	—	—	—	2	7	92	101
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	1	1	2	107	111
Northumbria	—	—	1	1	5	15	305	327
North Wales	—	—	—	—	2	6	122	130
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	1	—	8	107	116
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	—	2	8	184	194
South Wales	—	—	1	—	3	12	241	257
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	1	5	16	277	299
Staffordshire	—	—	—	1	1	13	255	270
Suffolk	—	—	1	1	1	2	117	122
Surrey	—	—	—	—	2	8	212	222
Sussex	—	—	—	2	1	16	263	282
Thames Valley	—	1	3	2	4	17	430	457
Warwickshire	—	—	—	1	3	3	91	98
West Mercia	—	—	—	—	4	10	225	239
West Midlands	—	1	—	2	12	55	926	996
West Yorkshire	—	1		2	9	24	524	560
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	2	6	94	102
City of London	—	—	—	—	4	10	76	90
Metropolitan	[1]1	3	6	8	27	230	3,112	3,387
Total	2	12	23	43	166	751	12,661	13,658

[1]Commander

Visas

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to require nationals of *(a)* Morocco *(b)* Algeria and *(c)* Jamaica to obtain visas to enter the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on 7 December 1989 at column *378*.

War Crimes

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will accept the recommendation by Sir Thomas Hetherington and Mr. William Chalmers in the war crimes report that, should it be decided to legislate, investigations into those suspected of involvement in Nazi war crimes should commence as soon as possible after the decision to legislate has been taken.

Mr. John Patten: The Government are considering the views expressed in the recent war crimes debates in each House of Parliament, and we shall announce our conclusions shortly. Investigations could begin once it was clear that any proposed legislation had the general support of Parliament.

Gamma Radiation Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for south and west Yorkshire, the comprehensive plans and programmes for implementation of procedures that have been made for the fire and ambulance services to deal with accidents on railways or road involving external emissions of gamma radiation, and for police officers and other workers immediately affected.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

The provision of emergency plans is the responsibility of the consignors of radioactive material. These plans are exercised regularly with the emergency services, which have the relevant operational responsibilities.

Terrorism and Drug Trafficking

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations have been made into the links between international terrorist groups and drug trafficking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Investigation of the links between terrorism and other forms of crime has not so far indicated any significant involvement in drug trafficking by terrorist groups threatening the United Kingdom.

Broadcasting Ban

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to remove the broadcasting ban introduced in October 1988.

Mr. Mellor: We have no plans at present to remove the broadcasting restrictions, but we are keeping the operation of them under review.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the broadcasting ban introduced on 19 October 1988.

Mr. Mellor: We have received representations about the broadcasting restrictions from right hon. and hon. Members, members of the public and interested organisations.

Tobacco Sales

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been initiated against cigarette retailers in alleged breach of the Protection of Children (Tobacco) Act 1986 each year since the Act became effective.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the table. The Protection of Children (Tobacco) Act 1986 came into force on 8 October 1986.

Prosecutions for the sale of tobacco to persons under 16 under the Protection of Children (Tobacco) Act 1986
England and Wales

Year	Number
1986	[1]17
1987	18
1988	29

[1] Includes prosecutions before October 1986 under earlier legislation.

Interpretation Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are currently held in custody awaiting provision of an interpretation service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. The criteria for detention under the Immigration Act do not include the availability of an interpreter.

Mental Health

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to apply the conclusions of the Office of Health Economics report, "Mental Health in the 1990s: From Custody to Care? to prisoners in custody; and if he will make a statement".

Mr. Mellor: The report was published as recently as last month and is wholly concerned with arrangements for care of the mentally ill in the general community. We are always open to ideas which may, directly or indirectly, point to ways of improving the health care of prisoners. In that spirit we will study the conclusions of the report with some care.

Children in Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for 1980, 1985 and for the latest date for which he has figures and by location *(a)* the number of children and babies who are in prison with their mother because of an offence she has committed and *(b)* the length of time the children are kept in prison.

Mr. Mellor: On 10 January 1990, there were 38 babies in the three prison mother and baby units; 12 were at Her Majesty's prison, Holloway, 10 at Her Majesty's prison and young offender institution, Styal, and 16 at Her Majesty's prison, Askham Grange. Equivalent information for 1980 and 1985 is not available.

Rule 9(3) of the Prison Rules 1964 (SI 1964 No. 388) provides that the Secretary of State may, subject to any conditions he thinks fit, permit a woman to have her baby with her in prison. Only a mother can request the admission of her baby but approval depends on a place in the units being available and admission being considered as in the best interests of the child.

The length of time a baby remains in a prison mother and baby unit can reflect a number of factors, including the wishes of the mother and the length of her sentence. But babies are not normally permitted to remain with their mother in prison beyond the age of 18 months because research has shown that after that age there is likely to be an adverse effect on the development of the child.

Prison Officers' Accommodation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prison officers' accommodation for which requests have been made by officers to purchase, for each establishment, at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The prison service scheme for the discount sale of quarters to staff was introduced in June 1987 and to 9 January 1990 we have received the following applications to purchase:

Establishment	*Numbers of Applications*
Acklington/Castington	32
Albany	95
Aldington	14
Ashford	96
Ashwell	13
Askham Grange	3
Aylesbury	51
Bedford	54
Birmingham	42
Blantyre House	15
Blundeston	25
Bristol	71
Brixton	227
Brockhill	23
Buckley Hall	24
Bullwood Hall	16
Camp Hill	61
Campsfield House	29
Canterbury	49
Cardiff	40
Channings Wood	30
Chelmsford	65
Coldingley	103
Cookham Wood	24
Deerbolt	58
Dorchester	41
Dover	47
Drake Hall	2
Durham	66
Eastwood Park	17
Erlestoke House	21
Everthorpe	16
Exeter	57
Featherstone	23
Feltham	115
Finnamore Wood	16
Ford	14
Foston Hall	8
Frankland	40
Full Sutton	25
Gartree	54
Glen Parva	75
Gloucester	39
Grendon-Spring Hill	62
Guys Marsh	15
Haslar	11
Hatfield	6
Haverigg	39
Hewell Grange	16
Highpoint	36
Hindley	17
Hollesley Bay Colony	54
Holloway	78
Hull	58
Huntercombe	42
Kingston	21
Kirkham	15
Kirklevington Grange	11
Lancaster	13
Latchmere House	49
Leeds	37
Leicester	45
Lewes	70
Leyhill	23
Lincoln	36
Lindholme	25
Littlehey	21
Liverpool	100
Long Lartin	111
Lowdham Grange	23
Low Newton	20
Maidstone	80
Manchester	82
Medomsley	2
Morton Hall	1
The Mount	6
New Hall	7
Northallerton	13
Northeye	22
North Sea Camp	3
Norwich	63
Nottingham	19
Onley	43
Oxford	22
Parkhurst	110
Pentonville	117
Portland	63
Preston	23
Pucklechurch	32
Ranby	21
Reading	65
Risley	123
Rochester	40
Rudgate/Thorp Arch/ Wetherby	56
Send	15
Shepton Mallett	19
Shrewsbury	11
Stafford	43
Standford Hill	31
Stoke Heath	13
Styal	1
Sudbury	12
Swansea	21
Swinfen Hall	20
Thorn Cross	14
Usk and Prescoed	28
The Verne	40
Wakefield	70
Wandsworth	157
Wayland	37
Wellingborough	32
Werrington	2
Whatton	29
Winchester	109
Wormwood Scrubs	255
Wymott	39
Total	5,001

These applications include 385 applications that have subsequently been withdrawn and a further 50 that are the subject of applications to purchase at full market value. To date, 3,538 sales have been completed.

Beryl Kennedy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the rules governing the number of letters that may be written by any one person to a prisoner; and how these have been applied in the case of Beryl Kennedy writing to an inmate in Winson Green prison.

Mr. Mellor: Instructions to prison service staff about handling prisoners' correspondence have been published in Standing Order 5B, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Governors have discretion to limit the amount of mail received by a prisoner if the number of letters received causes delays in handling other prisoners' letters. Ms. Kennedy was writing on a daily basis and after being asked to reduce the volume of her correspondence it was judged necessary, so that other prisoners' mail would not be delayed, to return some letters to her.

Offensive Language

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will have discussions with the broadcasting bodies about the use of language which might cause offence.

Mr. Mellor: Programme content is a matter for the broadcasting authorities, who are independent of the Government and are responsible for considering complaints on such matters. In addition the Government have established the Broadcasting Standards Council as a direct response to public concern about standards of taste and decency on television and radio. These include the use of offensive language. The Government's Broadcasting Bill proposes that the council should have statutory powers to consider and adjudicate on complaints.

Lost Property

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints in 1989 were made by inmates to his Department over the loss of money or personal property that resulted from an inmate being moved from one prison to another.

Mr. Mellor: The precise information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the total number of complaints in 1989 relating to lost property and money, including those concerned with property lost on transfer, was about 2,250.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the policies that are followed by the prison department to ensure that money and personal effects belonging to inmates go with them when they are moved from one prison to another prison.

Mr. Mellor: Instructions to prison service staff, requiring that a prisoner's property and cash should be moved with him or her on the day of transfer, are contained in prison Standing Order 1C, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. It has not always proved possible in practice to comply with this requirement in respect of the transfer of money and a number of steps are being taken to improve the present procedures.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints have been made to his Department by inmates who had been held in Canterbury prison and when moved to another prison did not have money belonging to them transferred; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Figures for individual establishments are not available, and could only be produced at disproportionate cost. Because of delays in the transfer of money from prisons in the south-east region of the prison service, which includes Canterbury, the regional director issued instructions in November, so that all receiving establishments will be notified of private cash balances within 24 hours of transfer, by which time the prisoner should be able to spend this money. Loans are available to cover any delays in the transfer of a prisoner's earnings.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of cases that inmates in prisons in England and Wales took to the small claims court against his Department in 1989 following the loss of personal property; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Nineteen claims for lost property were commenced in the small claims court during 1989.

Prisoners Committees

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will encourage the involvement of inmates in prisons in England and Wales in the formation of prisoners committees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Governors of prison service establishments have discretion to use a variety of methods when seeking the views of inmates, including encouraging the establishment of inmate committees.

Grendon Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons that inmates from Grendon prison have been sent to; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Serious defects in the electrical systems at HM prison Grendon meant that the establishment had to be evacuated in December. Inmates have been temporarily moved to the following prisons:

Aylesbury (one inmate only).
Glen Parva
Oxford (one inmate only).
The Mount
Swinfen Hall (two inmates only).
Winchester
Wormwood Scrubs (currently holding inmates originally destined for Parkhurst.

In view of the unique nature of Grendon's therapeutic regime, every effort is being made to enable receiving establishments to maintain that regime, wherever possible.

Grendon inmates and staff will be returned to Grendon when the prison reopens. In the interim, urgent work is in hand to empty HMYOI Wellingborough of young offenders, and convert it for use as a temporary "new" Grendon. All young offenders should have been moved out by the end of this month. Grendon inmates will be individually assessed for their suitability for the levels of security at Wellingborough before they are transferred there.

The two wings at Wellingborough not required for Grendon inmates will be occupied by category C adult male prisoners.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Grendon prison has been closed; and how long this prison will remain closed.

Mr. Mellor: An electrical survey carried out at Her Majesty's prison Grendon revealed a number of serious

faults which made it necessary to evacuate the establishment. The prison is likely to remain closed for between six and nine months while repair work is undertaken.

Prison Kitchens

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints have been made to his Departmet by boards of visitors regarding the conditions existing in prison kitchens; and if he will list the prisons, and the action that has been taken.

Mr. Mellor: The information required is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I place great value on the work undertaken by boards of visitors. Any matters of concern raised or recommendations made by them, whether in their valuable, detailed annual reports or by other means are afforded very careful consideration. I can assure the hon. Member that the same careful consideration is given to any matters raised on kitchens.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is given to inmates who work in kitchens in prisons in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: All inmates who work in kitchens in prisons in England and Wales recieve instruction in personal hygiene and training in the safe operation and care of machinery and equipment. Establishments are also encouraged to provide formal craft training leading to recognised vocational qualifications. At the end of June 1989, a total of 45 establishments were offering 52 certified courses and a further 17 uncertificated courses. An additional 35 establishments plan to introduce formal training courses during 1990.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of senior catering officers who are fully trained and in charge of kitchens in London prisons on 5 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Ashford and Downview employ private catering contractors. In every other London establishment the officer-in-charge of the kitchen is a fully trained caterer.

Alcohol-related Violence

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government measures to curb late-night alcohol-related violence against police officers.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* We continue to be concerned at the level of alcohol-related violence. We therefore encourage the work of local inter-agency groups, such as Newport's, seeking to reduce such crime for the benefit of all members of the community, including police officers. Parliament has provided severe penalties for serious attacks against any person: a maximum of five years' imprisonment for assault occasioning actual bodily harm, and up to life imprisonment for wounding with intent to do grevious bodily harm. The Public Order Act 1986 put in place revised and new offences to help deal with disorder whatever its cause.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Cameroon

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to contribute funds for the building of a ring road in north-west Cameroon.

Mrs. Chalker: Funding of that part of the Bamenda ring road project proposed for UK finance would require an ECGD covered commercial loan in association with aid funds—the latter from the aid and trade provision. There is currently no medium or long-term ECGD cover to Cameroon following its 1987-1988 economic crisis and subsequent structural adjustment programme. In the event of export credit cover being restored, construction of part of the ring road would be considered, alongside any other eligible proposals for ATP funding, if it met the conditions pertaining to such cover.

Vietnam

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has received about Her Majesty's Government's policy on development aid for Vietnam, and from which organisation; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will now consider the joint funding of NGO projects in Vietnam on a case-by-case basis.

Mrs. Chalker: I have received representations from Save the Children Fund, Oxfam and Christian Aid about aid to Vietnam, and also from a number of private individuals. We welcome the withdrawal of Vietnamese combat units from Cambodia, but we also expect the Vietnamese Government to meet their obligations towards their own people, including the boat people in Hong Kong, as a pre-condition for the establishment of a Government-to-Government aid programme. Further progress is also needed in the reform of economic policies.

Following the representations to which I have referred, I am considering whether the time has come to open Vietnam for participation in the joint funding scheme whereby the Government meet half the costs of agreed projects sponsored by voluntary agencies, and in particular how the agencies might be able to contribute to mitigating the economic and humanitarian problems in the areas from which the boat people predominantly come.

Pensions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to uprate the pensions paid to former local government officers overseas to bring them into line with pensions paid to former overseas civil servants.

Mrs. Chalker: The British Government are not responsible for the pensions of officers who served overseas in the local authorities of our former colonies, and have no plans to uprate them.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average pension of *(a)* retired local government officers in overseas service and *(b)* retired civil servants in overseas service.

Mrs. Chalker: We do not hold details of the pensions of officers who served overseas in the local authorities of our

former colonies, nor generally about the pensions of colonial civil servants. The average pension in respect of overseas service paid to some 39,000 former colonial civil servants and their widows, for whom the British Government accept a responsibility, is about £3,800 a year.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average pension paid to local government officers retired from service with Nairobi city council; and what are the highest and lowest pensions received by former officers with the council.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department has no responsibility for the pensions paid to retired Kenya local government officers. Information about Nairobi city council pensions is held by the Public Trust Office which is the trustee of the Kenya local authorities superannuation fund.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many pensions are in payment for the Palestine police force; what is the average pension in payment; when the pensions were last increased; and by how much.

Mrs. Chalker: There are 557 expatriate officers and 613 local officers receiving a pension from HM Government for their Palestine public service. The number of these who served in the police force could be identified separately only at disproportionate cost. The average pension paid to local officers is at present £1,180 a year. Many expatriate officers have pensions for service in several territories, which are treated together for calculating increases. The present value of the pension deriving specifically from Palestine service in these cases can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The average pension paid to the 235 expatriates who served only in Palestine is £2,240 a year. The pensions attract increases under the United Kingdom pensions increase legislation, and are uprated annually in line with inflation. They were last increased with effect from 10 April 1989 by 5·9 per cent.

WALES

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the additional cost faced by local education authorities in Wales arising from the movement of each non-Welsh speaking child into schools where Welsh is the normal language of education *(a)* at primary level and *(b)* at secondary level; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have made no such estimates. The costs of Welsh medium education are, however, taken into account in the annual local government financial settlement.

Forestry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by the Forestry Commission in Wales, giving a sub-regional breakdown indicating labouring and white collar jobs.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information is shown in the table:

Forestry Commission direct employees at 30 November 1989

County	*Non-industrial*	*Industrial*
Clwyd	15	46
Gwynedd	43	139
Dyfed	[1]115	79
Powys	29	96
Glamorgan	41	87
Gwent	19	37
	262	484

[1] includes 78 staff employed in the Conservancy office at Aberystwyth.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much forest land has been sold so far in Wales since 1981; for what sums of money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Forestry Commission sold some 8,600 hectares of forest land in Wales between July 1981 and 31 March 1989. Total receipts from these sales were in the region of £11 million.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the continued supply of forest products to the paper industry consequent upon the sale of woodlands.

Mr. Peter Walker: The guidelines on the selection of Forestry Commission properties for sale which Forestry Ministers issued in 1981 require the Forestry Commissioners to take account among other things, of the maintenance and development of the wood processing industry. The commissioners are continuing to follow these guidelines and are fully meeting their wood supply commitments. The guidelines are to be found at appendix V to the commission's 1981-82 annual report.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up a study group to assess the social and economic impact of forest sales upon rural areas.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. I do not believe that there is any need to set up such a study group.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the likely number of Forestry Commission staff to be made redundant consequent upon the sale in Wales of forests and woods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: It seems unlikely that any Forestry Commission staff will have to be made redundant as a consequence of the sale of forests and woods in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of forests to be sold in Wales giving a sub-regional breakdown.

Mr. Peter Walker: It is expected that about 10 per cent. of the Forestry Commission's forest land in Wales will be sold over the next 10 years. It is not possible to give any sub-regional breakdown.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he will make to protect the public's right of access to woodland sold by the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Peter Walker: In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on

16 June 1989, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland indicated that the Government were concerned that the general public should continue to enjoy access to those forests to be disposed of by the Forestry Commission in a way which was compatible with management for forestry and other purposes. Ways of achieving this objective are being investigated.

Plastic Waste

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines were issued by his Department to health authorities in Wales regarding the safe burning of plastic waste without such burning forming dangerous compounds such as polychlorinated biphenyls, chlorines and flurans.

Mr. Ian Grist: Guidance on the safe disposal of clinical waste including plastics was issued by the Department to district health authorities in June 1982. The code of guidance was prepared by the Health and Safety Commission and offered advice on the handling, transport and disposal of all kinds of clinical waste.

Teachers

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Woolwich of 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *319-20*, in March 1989; how many teachers were employed by each local authority in Wales; how many teachers were in receipt of an incentive allowance for each local authority in Wales; what percentage this was of the total employed by each local authority; and how many teachers in receipt of an incentive allowance in each local authority in Wales held allowances that were *(a)* incentive A, *(b)* incentive B, *(c)* incentive C, *(d)* incentive D and *(e)* incentive E.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information relating to March 1989 is not yet available.

Sport in the Countryside

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to what body he will give responsibility for policies and developmental work with organised and active sport in the countryside in Wales in the future.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will continue to expect all the relevant agencies to work together in this field.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he intends to bring in to ensure that adequate consideration is given in future to the interests of informal users of the countryside, including horse riders and cyclists; and that these interests are reconciled with environmental conservation requirements.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to achieve or maintain a separation of regulatory and promotional functions in relation to the countryside in Wales, particularly in respect to access and recreation.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to ensure full consideration of the views of organised sports and recreational interests in Wales by the proposed Countryside Council for Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This will be a matter for the proposed Countryside Council for Wales when it takes over its full functions.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to ensure that recreation in the countryside in Wales is controlled by agreement and conciliation between conflicting interests wherever possible, and that control by regulation is only undertaken following adequate consultation and attempted conciliation; and what machinery he will establish to this end.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Government have no specific proposals to introduce any controls of this nature.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to ensure that promotional and development work currently undertaken by the Countryside Commission in Wales is continued and developed following the changes proposed in the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The provisions in the Environmental Protection Bill relating to the countryside and conservancy agencies are essentially concerned only with the reorganisation of those bodies. The Countryside Council for Wales will continue to have the same statutory functions as the Countryside Commission. It will be for the council to develop its policies within that framework.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to ensure that the Countryside Commission's target of opening up all rights of way in Wales is achieved by the year 2000; following the restructuring of conservation and countryside bodies.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This will be a matter for the Countryside Council for Wales.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to ensure that the powers of the Countryside Council for Wales are not limited only to national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Countryside Act 1968 not only changed the name of the National Parks Commission to the Countryside Commission but enlarged its functions to include the wider countryside. These broader functions which are in no way limited to national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty will be transferred, in respect of Wales, to the new Countryside Council for Wales.

Bilingual School, Preseli

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest developments regarding the proposed bilingual school, Preseli, Pembrokeshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Dyfed county council published proposals under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 on

22 November 1989 to establish a bilingual comprehensive school in the premises of the existing Preseli county secondary school. The law prescribes that, if statutory objections to the proposals are received by the county council, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must decide whether to approve or reject the proposals.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the income of each district to sustain a common level of services throughout Wales on the basis of his assumed figures for community charge payments in each district.

Mr. Peter Walker: The standard spending assessment for each county and district council is calculated on the basis of formulae which have been agreed by the Welsh local authority associations. It represents a measure of the cost of providing a standard level of service, taking into account the characteristics of each area. If every authority were to spend at the level of its standard spending assessment, the community charge in the area of each charging authority in Wales, after taking account of revenue support grant entitlements and income from non-domestic rates, would be £173—the community charge for standard spending.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Income Support

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in how many cases the personal allowance of an individual in receipt of income support is used to cover costs of *(a)* private residential care and *(b)* private nursing care in each unit of management area of the Southern health board.

Mr. Needham: I regret that the information is not available.

Detention

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of people detained under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 had their requests to have someone told of their detention delayed on the direction of a police superintendent or an officer of more senior rank in 1988 and the period 1 January to 31 October 1989.

Mr. Cope: Figures are available to 30 June 1989. During 1988, a total of 6 per cent. of requests to have someone informed of a person's detention were delayed on the authorisations of a superintendent or above. Between 1 January and 30 June, no such requests were delayed.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of requests made by persons detained under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 for solicitors were delayed on the direction of a police superintendent or an officer of more senior rank in 1988 and the period 1 January to 31 October 1989.

Mr. Cope: Figures are available to 30 June 1989. During 1988, a total of 60 per cent. of requests for access to see a solicitor were delayed on the authorisation of a superintendent or above. Between 1 January and 30 June, 64 per cent. of requests were so delayed.

Home Helps

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average hourly rate of pay earned by home helps in each health board area in each financial year since 1980.

Mr. Needham: Standard hourly rates are payable to all home helps in the Health and Social Services Boards. Details are as follows:

Financial year	*Period*	*Hourly rate*
1980-81	1 April 1980-31 October 1980	154·13p
	1 November 1980-31 March 1981	165·63p
1981-82	1 April 1981-31 October 1981	165·63p
	1 November 1981-31 March 1982	177·13p
1982-83	1 April 1982-31 October 1982	177·13p
	1 November 1982-31 March 1983	190·77p
1983-84	1 April 1983-31 October 1983	190·77p
	1 November 1983-31 March 1984	199·48p
1984-85	1 April 1984-31 October 1984	199·48p
	1 November 1984--31 March 1985	209·74p
1985-86	1 April 1985-30 August 1985	209·74p
	1 September 1985-31 March 1986	230·26p
1986-87	1 April 1986-31 August 1986	232·69p
	1 September 1986-31 March 1987	248·08p
1987-88	1 April 1987-31 June 1987	248·08p
	1 July 1987-31 March 1988	290·13p
1988-89	1 April 1988-31 August 1988	290·13p
	1 September 1988-31 March 1989	306·79p
1989-90	1 April 1989-31 August 1989	306·79p
	1 September 1989-31 March 1990	333·79p

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accounting Standards Committee

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the work of the accounting standards committee.

Mr. Redwood: The work of the accounting standards committee of the Consultative Committee of Accounting Bodies in developing accounting standards has made a major contribution to improvements in accounting practice over the last 20 years. The arrangements for making and enforcing such standards now need strengthening. The Dearing committee's recommendations on this subject have been widely supported and Sir Ronald Dearing is negotiating terms with all concerned so that the new arrangements for making and enforcing acccounting standards are in place by the summer.

Public Houses

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from *(a)* brewers and *(b)* representatives of public house landlords and managers regarding the revaluation of business rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

We received in 1988 and 1989 a number of representations from and on behalf of brewers about the powers available to the valuation officer to obtain information to be used in making a valuation and the subsequent use of such information. We have not, however, received any representations about the levels of value proposed for breweries or for public houses.

Regional Assistance, Corby

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total annual expenditure in each year since 1979-80 on *(a)* regional development grants, *(b)* regional selective assistance, *(c)* regional investment grants and *(d)* regional innovation grants paid in the Corby development area.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is as follows:

(a) Regional development grants[1]

	Payments £ million
1979-80	—
1980-81	0·2
1981-82	2·6
1982-83	6·8
1983-84	6·5
1984-85	2·5
1985-86	3·3
1986-87	7·9
1987-88	6·6
1988-89	7·9
1 April 1989 to 31 December 1989	7·3

[1]From 1985-86 includes payments on both original Regional Development Grants (RDG I) and revised Regional Development Grant (RDG II). RDG I grants were terminated in November 1984 and RDG II grants in November 1988.

(b) Regional selective assistance

	Payments £ million
1979-80	—
1980-81	0·03
1981-82	0·31
1982-83	1·43
1983-84	4·47
1984-85	3·45
1985-86	2·89
1986-87	1·58
1987-88	0·96
1988-89	0·37
1 April 1989 to 31 December 1989	0·32

(c) Regional investment grants[1]

	Payments £ million
1988-89	0·01
1 April 1989 to 31 December 1989	0·12

[1]Scheme introduced March 1988.

(d) Regional innovation grants[1]

	Payments £ million
1988-89	—
1 April 1989 to 31 December 1989	0·03

[1]Scheme introduced March 1988.

International Tin Council

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement about the progress of discussions concerning the liabilities of the International Tin Council.

Mr. Ridley: A proposal supported by all known creditors of the International Tin Council's buffer stock operation for a settlement at £182·5 million payable on 30 March 1990 has been approved by the ITC as the basis for a settlement. A Supplementary Estimate covering a United Kingdom contribution not exceeding £31,790,000 to the settlement amount will be laid before the House in February.

Consumer Guarantee

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those organisations which have made representations to him opposed to the consumer guarantee as set out in the report of the National Consumer Council.

Mr. Forth: A formal public consultation exercise has not been undertaken but, following publication of the National Consumer Council report "The Consumer Guarantee", representations have been made both for and against various aspects of the proposals. It would be inappropriate to name bodies which have expressed views in confidence.

Company Prosecutions

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many prosecutions arising from company investigations commenced after 1 June 1979; and how many of the prosecutions were successful.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* I am aware of 113 successful prosecutions completed since 1 January 1979 arising from investigations under the Companies Acts; some of those prosecutions may have commenced before that date.

Further information is given in the annual report prepared under section 729 of the Companies Act 1985 (formerly section 451 of the Companies Act 1948) and published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office. This report is available in the Library.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department examines published company accounts for compliance with the requirements of the Companies Acts.

Mr. Redwood: Responsibility for compliance with the Companies Act's requirements concerning accounts rests with directors, with auditors required to state whether the accounts meet those requirements. Companies House staff carry out certain basic checks on accounts, but the contents are not scrutinised in detail except in response to specific complaints.

Genetically-Manipulated Animals

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the patenting of genetically-manipulated animals.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Patents are granted in the United Kingdom for inventions which are novel, non-obvious and capable of industrial application, except that plant or animal varieties and essential biological processes, among other things, are not patentable. However, microbiological processes and their products, with which genetic engineering is essentially involved, are patentable and it is therefore likely that patent applications for inventions concerned with genetically-manipulated animals would be granted, provided other relevant conditions were met.

A European Community proposal for a directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions which is currently under discussion would not alter this position. Nevertheless, I am aware that a patent application for a genetically-manipulated mouse similar to one granted by the US Patent and Trade Mark Office has been refused by the European Patent Office. However, this decision is under appeal.

Eastern Europe

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the new opportunities available to British firms in eastern Europe; and what support services his Department is now able to offer such firms.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* My Department is well seized of the new commercial opportunities opening up in eastern Europe. These include, in particular, the opportunities for direct investment; the possibility of increasing exports of goods and services; opportunities for joint ventures and other forms of industrial co-operation; as well as consultancy and management training opportunities.

My Department has an eastern European branch of 25 staff directly responsible for commercial relations and trade promotion in eastern Europe. This branch is able to provide both general and specific advice and guidance to United Kingdom business men on investment opportunites in these markets and about the availability of the various United Kingdom and EC assistance schemes recently created. These resources are supplemented by other staff in my Department working on various specific export service schemes, such as trade fairs, and by the export service staff in the Department's regional offices. My Department also funds the East European Trade Council, the BOTB's area advisory group for eastern Europe.

Coal (Balance of Trade)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the balance of trade in coal and related products at the last available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

Information is available for the period January to November 1989 as shown in the table.

January to November 1989

million tonnes

	Coal	*Other solid fuels*	*Total*
Imports	10·9	0·6	11·6
Exports	1·9	0·5	2·4
Net imports	9·0	0·2	9·2

Note: Figures are rounded independently and some totals may therefore differ from their constituent parts.

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Uranium

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantities of uranium have been imported from Africa in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

Uranium for the United Kingdom's civil nuclear programme has not been imported from Africa since 1984. From 1980, some 6,300 short tons of U_3O_8 (some 4,800 metric tonnes of contained uranium) were imported. Figures for specific years are as follows:

	metric tonnes (to nearest hundred tonnes)
1980	1,200
1981	1,300
1982	1,000
1983	900
1984	400

Output Figures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether output figures based on sales include products which are imported by producers from their overseas subsidiaries, associates and others.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have been asked to reply.

The concepts and methodology employed in the output measure of gross domestic product and its components, including the index of industrial production are fully described in chapter 5 of "United Kingdom National Accounts: Sources and Methods" (third edition: HMSO 1985), a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Trade Surpluses

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the bilateral trade surpluses/deficits with the United States of America of each of the OECD countries, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Romania, India and Brazil, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: The information is in the table.

Trade balances with United States of America 1988

billion

	US $
Australia	−3·7
Netherlands	−3·2
Spain	−2·2
France	−1·8
Ireland	−1·0
Turkey	−0·5
United Kingdom	−0·5
Greece	−0·2
Norway	−0·2
Austria	−0·1
Finland	−0·1
Portugal	−0·1
New Zealand	0·0
Denmark	0·0
Iceland	0·1
India	0·1
Romania	0·5
Belgium/Luxembourg	0·7
Switzerland	1·2
Sweden	1·4
Singapore	2·5
Italy	3·7
Brazil	5·4
South Korea	8·7
Federal Republic of Germany	9·4
Hong Kong	10·4
Taiwan	10·4
Canada	11·5
Japan	48·0

Sources: Taiwan—national statistics.
Others—IMF Direction of Trade.

ENERGY

Low-Sulphur Coal

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the levels of imported low-sulphur coal in tonnes for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Baldry: Information on the sulphur content of imported coal is not available centrally.

Fuel (Energy Values)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to *(a)* the energy values required to manufacture waste derived fuel and refuse derived fuel and *(b)* the balance between the energy required and energy produced by the various types of fuel.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Waste and refuse derived fuels produce typically just over five times more energy than is used in their production, although this figure will depend on the particular process involved.

The less highly refined forms of refuse derived fuel and fuels derived from commercial and general industrial wastes are even more attractive as they require less energy in production. The energy inputs required to produce other fuels will depend on the circumstances of their production.

Hinkley Point C

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects the inspector to the Hinkley Point C public inquiry to submit his report; and if he will publish it when received.

Mr. Baldry: The timing of his report is a matter for the inquiry inspector. My right hon. Friend will wish to see and consider the report before deciding when to publish it.

Oil and Gas (Safety)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the number of fatalities and serious injuries which have occurred involving the use of gangways linking offshore oil and gas installations and other vessels or structures, for each year of operations on the United Kingdom continental shelf.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Since 1 January 1980 my Department has received reports of three fatalities relating to the use of gangways. These occurred in a single incident in 1982 when the bridge connecting Piper Alpha to MSV Tharos collapsed. No serious injuries have been reported.

Private Licensed Mines

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many men were working underground in private licensed mines in 1978-79 and each succeeding year.

Mr. Wakeham: The British Coal Corporation's 1988-89 annual report and accounts provides a figure of 1,524 as the number of men employed underground in licensed deep mines at the end of 1988-89. The Department does not have figures for previous years. I have therefore asked the chairman of the British Coal Corporation, which is the licensing authority, to write to the hon. Member.

HEALTH

Block Contracts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who was the contractor, what was the cost, what was the experimental location by district and unit and what was the date of report of all pilot work carried out on the specification of block contracts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are funding development work on contracting for services in a number of health authorities. For details of this work I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 6 November 1989 at columns *455-56*. The projects involve contracting for a range of services in a variety of local circumstances and identifying the most

appropriate type of contract to use in these different situations. None of the work is limited explicitly to specifying block contracts.

Deaths (Elderly People)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of deaths among those aged *(a)* 60 to 69 years, *(b)* 70 to 79 years and *(c)* 80 years and over for each complete six-monthly period from 1 April 1979 to 31 March 1989 for England and Wales.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table.

Number of deaths among those aged (a) *60-69 years,* (b) *70-79 years and* (c) *80 years and over for each complete six-monthly period from 1st April 1979 to 31st March 1989 for England and Wales*

Period	*Age-group* 60-69	70-79	80+
1 March 1979-30 September 1979	52,657	88,841	86,200
1 October 1979-31 March 1980	58,348	101,304	101,262
1 April 1980-30 September 1980	52,526	88,774	83,433
1 October 1980-31 March 1981	57,706	101,403	104,203
1 April 1981-30 September 1981	51,003	87,722	86,298
1 October 1981-31 March 1982	57,808	104,422	110,338
1 April 1982-30 September 1982	51,151	88,023	88,605
1 October 1982-31 March 1983	57,482	103,202	110,941
1 April 1983-30 September 1983	50,765	88,331	90,264
1 October 1983-31 March 1984	54,512	98,956	106,859
1 April 1984-30 September 1984	49,190	87,007	91,720
1 October 1984-31 March 1985	55,657	102,670	117,664
1 April 1985-30 September 1985	48,927	88,249	96,511
1 October 1985-31 March 1986	54,149	102,276	121,568
1 April 1986-30 September 1986	49,216	87,831	96,419
1 October 1986-31 March 1987	51,524	93,959	109,480
1 April 1987-30 September 1987	48,083	84,043	96,212
1 October 1987-31 March 1988	54,027	95,141	120,224
1 April 1988-30 September 1988	48,657	81,396	100,475
1 October 1988-31 March 1989[1]	52,394	89,272	117,089

[1] Provisional.

Residential Care

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of persons aged over 75 years live in nursing homes.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of persons aged over 85 years live in *(a)* nursing homes, *(b)* residential homes and *(c)* other institutions in England and Wales.

Mr. Freeman: Not all this information is collected centrally. At 31 March 1988, the number of people aged 85 and over in local authority staffed and registered residential care homes for the elderly people and younger physically handicapped people was 100,036 or 15·4 per cent. of the population aged 85 and over. This figure is provisional.

Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training procedures have been introduced at the Royal Hallamshire hospital, Sheffield, on accepting radiation-contaminated casualties and assisting with decontamination of personnel.

Mr. Freeman: Regional health authorities are responsible for planning for emergencies. The hon. Member should contact the chairman of Trent regional health authority for details of training for staff at the Royal Hallamshire hospital.

Backlog Maintenance, Trent

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost of backlog maintenance for National Health Service properties in the Trent regional health authority and by district health authority, for the latest year for which he has figures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 10 January at columns *666-69*.

Infant Mortality

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the figures from 1979 to 1989 for the number of *(a)* spina bifida births, *(b)* hydroencephaly births, *(c)* still births and *(d)* cot deaths, in the Merseyside area.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table.

Numbers of (a) spina bifida births, (b) hydroencephaly births, (c) stillbirths and (d) cot deaths[1] in Mersey Regional Health Authority, 1979-88.

	Stillbirths	*Spina bifida*	*Hydro-encephalus*	*Cot deaths*
1979	278	33	45	9
1980	238	28	42	35
1981	207	25	41	46
1982	214	14	26	48
1983	156	18	22	51
1984	181	15	27	46
1985	179	13	23	53
1986	180	11	12	77
1987	175	12	7	65
1988	135	10	8	56

[1] Sudden Infant Death Syndrome-International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, code 798.0.

NHS Reform

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the North Western regional health authority to discuss the proposed Health Service reforms.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have regular monthly meetings with the chairmen of the regional health authorities including Mr. Bruce Martin, chairman of the North Western regional health authority. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State last met Mr. Martin at the regional chairmen's meeting on 14 November 1989 when a number of management issues including Health Service reforms were discussed.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will show, by regional health authority, the response received to date from general practitioners, by percentage, where health centres and clinics are proposed to be sold; and what terms and conditions will be implemented.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally.

Community Care

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated number of frail elderly, disabled and chronically sick patients no longer in need of acute hospital services who need to be rehabilitated and transferred to community care; what plans he has for professional training and establishing nationally-determined rates of pay for community carers; and what is the estimated average cost of care in the community per seriously disabled patient.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The organisation of rehabilitation services is a matter for individual district health authorities together with local authority social services departments. Information about such numbers is not held in the form requested. As set out in our White Paper "Caring for People" (Cmnd. 849) we welcome the developments in the role of home care workers which are already under way in a number of areas and have no plans to create a profession of community carer. We are currently discussing the detailed financial implications of the White Paper with the local authority associations.

Health Authorities

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to introduce remuneration or compensation for members of the proposed new health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. Paragraph 7 of schedule 1 to the National Health Service and Community Care Bill will enable remuneration to be paid to the new non-executive members of health authorities.

Grant Funding

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time his Department takes to make a decision on grant funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: As the nature and complexity of applications for grants vary considerably, an average time could prove misleading. We have introduced arrangements for our section 64 general scheme which require applications from voluntary organisations to be submitted by October with the intention that most decisions will be announced before April. A few complex applications and those where additional information is required may take a little longer to process.

Intra-fallopian Transfer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the National Health Service centres that do not charge patients for gamete intra-fallopian transfer treatment;

(2) if he will list the National Health Service centres that do not provide full National Health Service funding to National Health Service patients for gamete intra-fallopian transfer treatment and the cost per centre.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why payments are required from National Health Service patients for the cost of gamete intra-fallopian transfer treatment at some National Health Service centres.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Gamete intra-fallopian transfer (GIFT) is a relatively new technique used in the treatment of infertility and is available in only a few centres. Treatment under the National Health Service, including that for infertility, is provided free of charge. In addition, in some NHS hospitals GIFT may be provided as part of an academic research programme when patients may be asked to contribute to its costs.

Hospital Building

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the 10 largest hospital building projects in the United Kingdom currently under construction.

Mr. Freeman: Information held centrally shows that the 10 largest hospital building schemes, based on the cost of construction at tender, currently under construction in England are as follows:

Region	*Scheme*
Northern	Royal Victoria Infirmary, Scheme 1, Phase 5
Northern	Wansbeck General Hospital, Scheme 1, Phase 1
Trent	Lincoln County, Phase 2
North West Thames	Westminster and Chelsea Hospital
South East Thames	Hastings District General Hospital, Main Phase 1
South West Thames	Mid Sussex, Phase 1
Wessex	Bournemouth District General Hospital, Phase 2B
Wessex	Salisbury District Hospital, Phase 1
South Western	Royal Devon and Exeter, Wonford
North Western	Ormskirk District General Hospital, Phase 1

Information on Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of their respective Secretaries of State.

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the 10 largest hospital building projects completed in the United Kingdom since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: Information held centrally shows that the 10 largest hospital building schemes, based on the cost of construction at tender, completed in England since 1979 are as follows:

Region	*Scheme*
Trent	Queens Medical Centre Development, Phase 2
North West Thames	St. Mary's W2, Phase 1B
North East Thames	Homerton Hospital, Phase 1
South West Thames	St. Georges Block H, Phase 2A
Wessex	Bournemouth District General Hospital, Phase 1A
West Midlands	Walsall, Phases 4A and 4B
West Midlands	City General, Stoke, Surgical Accommodation
West Midlands	Telford District General Hospital, Phase 1
West Midlands	Bromsgrove Redditch District General Hospital, Phase 1, Contract 2
Mersey	North Sefton District General Hospital, Southport, Phase 1

Information on Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of their respective Secretaries of State.

Camberwell Breast Screening Unit

192. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the Camberwell health authority breast screening unit.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No changes are planned at present to this unit. Since October 1988 it has provided women aged 50 to 64 from south-east London with a successful and popular screening and follow-up assessment service.

Social Work Training

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of social work training.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have accepted the need to improve training for social workers and other social care staff and we are implementing a balanced programme of improvements. This includes the provision of additional funding for phasing out one-year post-graduate social work courses in favour of a minimum of two years training, improvement to the quality and quantity of practice placements and improvements to course curricula. Additional funds are also being made available to the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work to introduce a new qualifying course, the diploma in social work which will replace the existing qualifying courses in due course. We are also giving consideration to improving opportunities for social work post-qualifying training.

Hospices

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to introduce a scheme of financial assistance to voluntary hospices for Her Majesty's Government to match pound for pound, up to 50 per cent. of running costs, money raised by the voluntary sector.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 15 December 1989 at columns *846-47*.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will visit the Hospice of the Good Shepherd, Backford, near Chester, to meet the medical director to discuss the work of the hospice.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We would be pleased to consider an invitation from the hospice.

Population Statistics

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use the registrar general is making of information collected for the community charge in respect of improving the accuracy of population statistics.

Mr. Freeman: None, at present. The registrar general will be examining aggregated community charge data with a view to their use in making population estimates. If it becomes clear that use of community charge data would improve the accuracy of population estimates, this will begin as quickly as practicable.

Lewisham Hospital

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is yet able to announce a decision on the proposed new Health Service development at Lewisham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Agreement has recently been reached on a major new development, known as phase II, at Lewisham hospital, the cost of which will be around £27 million. This scheme should provide, from the mid-1990s, a greatly improved range of health care to local people. The development complements the equally impressive phase III scheme at Guy's hospital in the north of Lewisham and North Southwark health authority costing around £75 million.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inquiries were undertaken each year since 1979 into prescribing practices by the Prescription Pricing Authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No such inquiries have been undertaken, as this is not a function of the Prescription Pricing Authority.

Prescriptions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in how many cases in each year since 1979 family practitioner committees deducted prescription costs from general medical practitioners, remuneration; and in which National Health Service regions those cases occurred;

(2) in how many cases in each year since 1979 local medical committees invoked their powers under section 20 of the National Health Service Regulations 1974; and in which National Health Service regions such cases occurred.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information for the period prior to August 1988 is no longer held in the Department. For the period since August 1988 the table shows for each region, on the basis of the information reported to the Department, the number of cases considered by local medical committees (LMCs) under regulation 20 of the NHS (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1974, the number of cases in which LMCs decided that the substances should not have been prescribed, and the total number of cases in which the cost of the prescription was recovered from the GP concerned.

Prescriptions investigated under regulation 20[1]
August 1988 to December 1989

Region	*Cases considered by LMCs*	*LMC decisions against the GP*	*All decisions to recover the cost from the GP[2]*
East Anglia	5	1	7
Mersey	0	0	7
North East Thames	4	3	3
Northern	3	1	1
North Western	15	3	5
North West Thames	4	3	3

Region	Cases considered by LMCs	LMC decisions against the GP	All decisions to recover the cost from the GP[2]
Oxford	1	0	12
South East Thames	2	2	11
South Western	3	1	19
South West Thames	10	1	3
Trent	7	0	1
Wessex	2	1	11
West Midlands	1	0	9
Yorkshire	12	2	2

[1]The figures are based on information provided by Family Practitioner Committees (FPCs) and Local Medical Committees (LMCs).
[2]Includes cases determined by the Family Practitioner Committee without reference to the Local Medical Committee by agreement with the GP concerned.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many cases in each year since 1979 PD8 inquiries were undertaken into individual doctors' prescribing practices; and in which National Health Service regions these inquiries were carried out.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Inquiries into the prescribing of practices whose costs overall are significantly above the local average (previously known as PD8 inquiries) are undertaken by medical officers of the Department's regional medical service (RMS). RMS boundaries are not conterminous with NHS regional boundaries and it is therefore not possible to provide information in exactly the form requested. The RMS is organised in six divisions and covers the NHS regions as follows:

Eastern Division
North West Thames, North East Thames and East Anglian Regions.
East Midlands Division
Trent and Oxford Regions.
North Eastern Division
Yorkshire and Northern Regions, excluding Cumbria.
North Western Division
North Western and Mersey Regions, plus Cumbria.
Southern Division
South East Thames, South West Thames and Wessex Regions.
Western Division
West Midlands and South Western Regions.

The numbers and total of visits to high cost practices undertaken in England since 1979 in each of the RMS divisions is shown in the following table:

RMS Division	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Eastern	121	104	97	87	72	24	43	87	55	143	143
East Midland	90	67	35	89	110	31	34	47	92	93	129
North Eastern	92	62	49	70	62	33	14	116	114	94	128
North Western	161	82	50	121	96	26	53	63	143	114	99
Southern	121	91	35	101	59	17	36	34	105	84	168
Western	143	94	87	144	120	46	56	48	101	143	77
TOTALS	728	500	353	612	519	177	236	395	610	671	744

Tranquillisers

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many benzodiazepine tranquilliser addicts are known to have broken their dependency.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will provide the necessary funds to ensure that the national tranquilliser advice centre can continue operating;

(2) what help or advice has been given to the national tranquilliser advice centre by his Department towards preventing its closure through lack of funds.

Mr. Freeman: The Department awarded a grant of £10,000 to TRANX (UK) Ltd. in 1988-89 to enable the organisation to balance its books in that year. The organisation was advised that it should collaborate closely with local statutory authorities in order to secure adequate funds for the future. In the current financial year representatives of TRANX (UK) Ltd. met departmental officials who advised them that central funding was unlikely to be available in their existing circumstances. To assist TRANX, officials therefore suggested that it should provide details of its budget expectations and how it would set priorities for the services it offers in line with the funding likely to be available. Following this reappraisal by TRANX, the Department would consider whether there was any advice or help which it could offer.

When the North West Thames regional health authority and the London borough grants unit decided not to continue to support TRANX the Department wrote in December explaining that because the local statutory authorities are no longer prepared to fund local elements of the service TRANX (UK) Ltd. provides and given the constraints on central funds the Department is unable to offer the organisation any further grant aid.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will summarise the nature of the new provision for drug misusers that has been made by the regional health authorities with the near £15 million provided by his Department; and approximately what proportion of this provision is specifically aimed at those addicted to tranquillisers.

Mr. Freeman: Regions are due to report in detail on the use made of the £14·793 million allocated in 1989-90 specifically for the development of drug misuse services in July 1990. We will be asking regions for full details of developments funded from these earmarked allocations which will include information on services for people dependent on tranquillisers.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the spread of the service provided by the national tranquilliser advice centre for tranquilliser addicts;

(2) what information he has been given by the national tranquilliser advice centre about the national service it provides; and what information he has on the proportion of the inquiries it receives from people living in areas which are not part of the North West Thames region.

Mr. Freeman: Direct client services of the kind TRANX (UK) Ltd. offers are best provided locally rather than nationally. Local statutory authorities are best placed to decide which services are worthy of support and fit in with their overall plans. TRANX (UK) Ltd. has provided the Department with details of the national service it offers. This consists of telephone counselling, written information about tranquillisers and advice on how to withdraw from them, together with a newsletter.

Figures from TRANX (UK) Ltd's annual report for 1988 (the most recent available) show that 44 per cent. of inquiries in England were from areas not covered by the catchment areas of the four Thames regions. The breakdown of inquiries from the North West Thames area is not separately available.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efforts his Department has made to establish the number of people at risk of addiction through taking benzodiazepine tranquillisers on a long term basis.

Mr. Freeman: It is unlikely that it would be possible to obtain accurate statistical data on those dependent on benzodiazepines. What is important is to encourage careful prescribing of benzodiazepines, to promote alternatives to their use and to provide services for those experiencing problems as a result of their dependence: the right hon. Member will be aware of the initiatives the Government are taking in this respect.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the number of tranquilliser advice centres, similar to the national tranquilliser advice centre, operating throughout the United Kingdom and on their source of funding.

Mr. Freeman: We are aware of a number of centres in various parts of England which provide advice for those working with those dependent on tranquillisers. We are also aware of many local services for this group. The provision and funding of these local direct client services is the responsibility of the local statutory authorities. We are funding the National Association for Mental Health (MIND) to produce a national directory of services for this group. Up to £81,000 has been made available for the work which is spread over three financial years starting in 1988-89.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigation there has been of the type of support and advice that best enables those addicted to tranquillisers to overcome their addiction.

Mr. Freeman: Studies have shown that in other fields of dependence face-to-face counselling and contact with a local treatment service improve the likely prognosis compared with other treatment approaches. The available evidence is that this also applies to tranquillisers.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated number of people dependent on the benzodiazepine tranquillisers; and how the numbers have changed in the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: Detailed information is not held centrally, but it is known that in recent years the increase in the number of local agencies which have been established partly as a result of Government initiatives, has resulted in a far greater number of people coming forward for help in withdrawing from their prescribed drugs.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the most recent figure for the annual rate of prescription of benzodiazepine tranquillisers; and which pharmaceutical companies currently supply the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest estimate of the number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed by community pharmacists in Great Britain is 23·2 million in 1988. Under the selected list scheme prescriptions for most benzodiazepine sedatives and tranquillisers must be written generically. It is not possible to produce a comprehensive list of pharmaceutical companies whose products are being supplied. However some benzodiazepines may be prescribed at NHS expense using the brand name for example for intravenous use. The manufacturers concerned are

C. P. Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
Farmitalia Carlo Erba Ltd.
Kabi-Vitrum Ltd.
Roche Products Ltd.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response has been given to the pharmaceutical company Roche which has indicated that it would contribute towards the organisational costs of the national tranquilliser advice centre if his Department did likewise.

Mr. Freeman: My noble Friend Lady Hooper has written to Roche, informing it of the decision by North West Thames regional health authority and London borough grants unit and the Department of Health that no further funding can be awarded to TRANX (UK) Ltd.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to mental illness and mental handicap hospitals under compulsory powers; how many were resident in such hospitals when detained, excluding special hospitals; and what percentage of total admissions and residents they constituted, at the latest available date.

Mr. Freeman: The most recent complete information is for 1986. During that year there were 237,311 admissions, of which 16,193 (6·8 per cent.) were formal admissions under compulsory powers, to National Health Service mental handicap and mental illness hospitals and units in England. It is estimated that 9,900 patients, already admitted as informal, were subsequently detained as formal patients and 7,600 formal patients had a change of legal status although remaining detained. On 31 December 1986 there was a total of 93,442 patients resident in these hospitals and units, of whom 4,602 (or 4·9 per cent.) were formally detained patients.

Welfare Milk

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the proportion of total redeemed token value in the welfare milk scheme submitted by roundsmen in each year since 1979 in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his proposals for apportioning revenue loss costs between farmers, dairies and distributors with respect to his proposed welfare milk scheme discount; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The regulations laid on 5 January enable the dairy trade, on a voluntary basis, to accept tokens for the supply of liquid welfare milk and pass them up through the trade so that the cost of the price reduction can be shared equitably. The dairy trade has well-established mechanisms and procedures for deciding prices and discounts between milk marketing boards and distributors.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what negotiations have taken place with the milk trade and its constituent companies concerning proposals for changes to the welfare milk scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Before negotiations commenced we wrote to all suppliers explaining that as part of the Government's initiative to see whether better value for money could be obtained the cost of purchasing liquid welfare milk was to be examined. Detailed and extensive negotiations subsequently took place over a period of eight months involving over 40 separate companies and six major supermarket chains. Discussions were held with representatives from all sectors of the dairy trade including the dairy trade federations, the National Dairyman's Association and the milk marketing boards. Meetings were held with representatives of the British Retail Association, the National Farmers Union and the National Fedration of Self Employed and Small businesses. Following the decision to introduce a revised pricing structure, we have written to all suppliers explaining the decision together with details of the measures that we have introduced to enable the cost of the price reduction to be shared equitably throughout the trade.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations have been received by his Department with respect to current proposals to change funding arrangements for the welfare milk scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Following the announcement of the decision to implement a revised price structure for the supply of liquid welfare milk we have received representations from the English Dairy Trade Federation and the National Dairyman's Association. In response my noble Friend Baroness Hooper met with officers and members of the English and Scottish dairy trade federations on 9 January to hear the trade's views and make arrangements to discuss implementation of the new structure.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether imported blood products are tested for hepatitis C; and what are the differences in testing procedures between imported blood products and fresh blood donations from British resident donors.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 10 January 1990]:* As far as we are aware, at present there is no routine testing for hepatitis C carried out by the home authorities in any country from which blood products are imported to the UK. Such tests as are available are still being developed and evaluated.

It is a matter for the authorities in each country to decide on appropriate screening procedures for blood. These may vary according to the prevalence of certain infectious agents in the country of origin. The Department keeps testing procedures under review and recommends the introduction of new tests in the light of scientific and other developments.

Blood or plasma collected overseas for processing into blood products which are to be imported into the United Kingdom under United Kingdom product licence is subjected to such screening tests as are laid down by the home authority, as well as any that are required by our licensing authority—the Medicines Control Agency.

SCOTLAND

Training

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how employment training and YTS will be administered after the Scottish Enterprise and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise proposals are implemented.

Mr. Lang: Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise will contract with local enterprise companies for the provision of all Government training in their respective areas.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he intends to promote any measures to increase the take-up of YTS and employment training places in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have no present plans for further measures specifically designed to increase uptake of employment training and youth training. However, I fully expect that the creation of local enterprise companies and the opportunities that they will have for flexibility in the provision of training will lead to more attractive locally-oriented training arrangements for both adults and young people that are closely geared to their needs and those of local employers.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis of training expenditure in Scotland, consistent with page 40 of "Public Expenditure to 1991-92: A Commentary on the Scotland Programme", indicating for the years 1983-84 to 1991-92 *(a)* public expenditure in Scotland on training, *(b)* the public expenditure programme in which it was included for that year, *(c)* the Vote on which it was taken for that year and *(d)* the impact of the definitional and classification changes upon the annual totals of public

expenditure on the Scotland programme, as shown in table 16.1 of Cm. 616 and in the table appended to the Secretary of State's statement to the House on 6 December, *Official Report*, columns 330-33.

Mr. Lang: It is not possible to provide details of spending on training only. Spending in Scotland by the Manpower Services Commission, the Training Commission and the Training Agency cannot be broken down in sufficient detail to distinguish fully spending on training from spending by these bodies on other employment-related programmes such as the employment rehabilitation service and the enterprise allowance scheme. The figures given in the table therefore represent total expenditure in Scotland by these bodies, which were funded by the Secretary of State for Scotland:

Year	*(a) Spending in Scotland by Manpower Services Commission, Training Commission and Training Agency £ million*	*(b) Public expenditure programme*	*(c) Class and Vote*
1983-84	119 outturn	4	Class XV Vote 4
1984-85	127 outturn	4	Class XV Vote 4
1985-86	134 outturn	4	Class XV Vote 4
1986-87	162 outturn	4	Class XVI Vote 4
1987-88	164 outturn	4	Class XVI Vote 4
1988-89	205 outturn	4	Class XVI Vote 4
1989-90	277 planned expenditure	4	Class XVI Vote 4
1990-91	267 planned expenditure	4	Class XVI Vote 4
1991-92	not yet available	15	Class XVI (Vote not yet available)

(d) Since this expenditure has been in programme 4 definitional and classification changes affecting it have had no impact on the Scotland programme.

Steel

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of employment in steel and steel-related industries in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The total number of employees in steel and steel-related industries in Scotland in 1989 was estimated at 7,400 using data from the Industry Department for Scotland's regional data system.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of employment in steel and steel-related industry in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to my reply given on 16 January to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars).

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of employment in steel and steel-related industries in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to my reply given on 16 January to the hon. Member for Govan.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of employment in steel and steel-related industry in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to my reply given on 16 January to the hon. Member for Govan.

Community Charge

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from local authorities in Scotland about the collection of poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations from local authorities about different aspects of the community charge.

Dangerous Weapons

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there have been any recent alterations to the rules governing the holding of potentially dangerous weapons within Scottish prisons.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The Prison Rules (Scotland) do not authorise the holding of potentially dangerous weapons and there is no reason to alter them.

Mr. Gordon Jackson

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if weapons were involved in the authorised training processes carried out within the Scottish prison service by Mr. Gordon Jackson.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Mr. Jackson was authorised to train teams in negotiating procedures. Weapons are not authorised or necessary for such training.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what authority the former governor of Glenochil prison, Mr. Gordon Jackson, established a special squad from the prison service to be trained to SAS standards; and what was the basis for selection.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A special squad from the prison service was not established and trained to SAS standards.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the special training initiated by governor Gordon Jackson at Glenochil has continued following his departure.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no evidence to suggest that governor Gordon Jackson initiated any special training at Glenochil and no such training has been introduced since his departure.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement as to why Gordon

Jackson, governor of Glenochil prison, kept CS gas cartridges and ammunition at the gaol; and what was his policy on the keeping of similar supplies at other prisons.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Mr. Jackson pled guilty to being in unauthorised possession of CS cartridges and ammunition at Alloa sheriff court on 1 December 1989. The Prison Rules (Scotland) do not authorise the possession or use of these items and no change to this position is considered necessary.

Drought Orders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by *(a)* water company and *(b)* location those areas where drought orders still remain in force.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Water supply in Scotland is the responsibility of the regional and islands councils. No drought orders are in force at the present time.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage by volume of drinking water in Scotland that is treated by the addition of *(a)* chlorine and *(b)* ozone.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Over 99 per cent. of drinking water in Scotland is disinfected by chlorination. Of the remainder, broadly equal proportions are disinfected by either ozone or ultraviolet radiation.

Planting of Evidence

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of alleged planting of evidence were made in 1989 against the police in Scotland; and how many of these resulted in prosecutions.

Mr. Rifkind: I understand from inquiries made of chief constables that in 1989 five cases of alleged planting of evidence involving the police in Scotland were reported to the procurator fiscal. No proceedings were taken in three cases; the remaining two are still under consideration by the procurator fiscal.

Two Homes Allowance

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount of the two homes allowance payable by the Scottish Education Department in addition to students who own or rent property which they cannot reasonably be expected to give up on moving to another area for educational purposes, in each of the last five academic years including 1989-90.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is as follows:

Academic Year	*£*
1985-86	410
1986-87	455
1987-88	473
1988-89	490
1989-90	515

Museum of Scotland

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the location of the planned Museum of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I am delighted to announce that the new Museum of Scotland will be located in Edinburgh, on the vacant site adjacent to the Royal Museum of Scotland in Chambers street, and to confirm the Government's agreement to fund the development.

The Museum of Scotland will provide a worthy setting for the outstanding Scottish collections of the National Museums of Scotland. The need for new accommodation in which to display the nation's heritage has been acknowledged for many years. The project was given fresh impetus in 1985 with the formation of the National Museums of Scotland. The board of trustees identified the provision of a new museum as their prime objective and last year submitted to the Secretary of State a detailed assessment of their requirements and a comprehensive investment appraisal of optional locations for the development. This clearly demonstrated that the need for the new museum was more pressing than ever, and that the Chambers street site was the most appropriate and cost-effective location.

On the basis of the investment appraisal, we have allocated resources for the new building within our recent public expenditure settlement, and I am pleased to confirm that these resources will now be made available to the National Museums' board of trustees.

The Government's decision to invest in this project reflects the importance that we attach to the care and display of our heritage, and to expanding the opportunities for the people of Scotland and for visitors to enjoy and learn from the wealth of material held by the museums.

I congratulate Lord Bute and his fellow trustees and the director Dr. Anderson and his staff on their success in securing a new home for Scotland's heritage.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what uses are being made by health boards of the moneys released from competitive tendering initiatives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Boards have been using the moneys released in a variety of ways and examples of the projects funded or partially funded by them are as follows:

Argyll and Clyde

1. Increased medical and support staff in community care and special needs (children).
2. Employment of additional occupational therapist and chiropodist.
3. Increased staffing for accident and emergency.
4. Upgrading of pathology posts and enhancement of cervical cytology screening.

Ayrshire and Arran

1. Provision (including nurse staffing) of self-contained paediatric out-patient clinic at Crosshouse hospital.
2. Part funding of gynaecology day unit at Crosshouse hospital.
3. Increase in medical staffing (including three registrars in anaesthetics, one ophthalmist and increased GP sessions).
4. Additional community nurses.

Borders

1. Advancement of opening dates of Innerleithen and Hawick health centres.
2. Assistance with development costs of the Borders general hospital.

Dumfries and Galloway

1. Provision of new 30-bed geriatric unit at Annan and additional beds at Lockmaben.
2. Development of mental handicap services.
3. Appointment of additional consultant medical staff in ophthalmology.

Fife

1. An extra clinical psychologist at the priority care unit.
2. Extra nursing staff at Cameron hospital.
3. Options under consideration at Dunfermline are development of medical photography services, recruitment of more trained operating theatre staff or extra nurses to allow psycho-geriatric day hospital services to be made available for longer periods of time.

Forth Valley

1. Appointment of additional 15 psycho-geriatric nurses.
2. Appointment of additional consultant histopathologist.
3. Provision of additional treatment facilities for geriatric patients at Falkirk and district royal infirmary.
4. Provision of funds to enable the devolution of psychiatric care from Bellsdyke hospital to the community and establishment of a community care team.

Grampian

1. Part funding of a joint venture project with voluntary organisations and social work departments to meet the running costs of five houses to accommodate 20 mentally handicapped patients being transferred back into the community.
2. The establishment of a number of additional posts, primarily in nursing and paramedical services, in the board's geriatric and specialist services unit.
3. Additional nursing posts in the neuro-surgical, renal dialysis and vascular surgery areas.
4. Additional physiotherapists and occupational therapists.
5. The establishment of five new low technology delivery rooms and recovery facilities, allowing women in labour to be midwife managed.

Greater Glasgow

1. Additional 44 nurses for mental illness.
2. Additional 17 paramedicals and 13 staff of other kinds for mental handicap.
3. Additional 16 paramedicals and 11 district nurses to reduce waiting lists in the community.
4. Additional 15 nurses and four other staff for improvements in service for cancer treatment.
5. Additional 10 staff to improve and develop cervical cytology services.
6. Additional 14 staff to meet increasing demand on renal services.
7. Additional six staff for improvements in accident and emergency services at Glasgow royal infirmary.

Highland

1. Additional paramedical posts in geriatric services at Sutherland.
2. Creation of waiting list team assisting medical staff at Raigmore hospital.
3. Creation of "travelling day hospital" for psychiatric patients who live some distance from Inverness.

Lanarkshire

1. Additional community nursing posts in Mental Handicap Services Unit.
2. Additional speech therapy posts in the community.
3. Additional occupational therapy posts.
4. Additional paramedical posts (physiotherapy, chiropody etc).

Lothian

1. Increased renal dialysis sessions.
2. Increased support funding for joint working with local authorities.
3. Increased nurse staffing for mental handicap and psychiatric services.

Tayside

Developments in patient services in the following areas:—

1. Mumps, measles and rubella vaccinations;
2. Blood products;
3. Resource management;
4. Support finance;
5. Accident and emergency-consultant support staff;
6. A senior physicist;
7. Community nursing.

Window Replacement

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amounts spent by the Scottish Special Housing Association on window replacement programmes for its housing stock in each year since 1979; and if he will also list the amounts currently being spent and planned to be spent on window replacement programmes by Scottish Homes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* Such information is not held by the Scottish Development Department. The hon. Member may wish to write directly to Scottish Homes, which may be able to provide information on past expenditure by the Scottish Special Housing Association and its own expenditure programmes on window replacement.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what extra resources will be made available for the provision of community care for the mentally ill;

(2) what plans he has to earmark financial resources for the care of the mentally ill.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The recently published White Paper "Caring for People" (Cmd. 849) states that local authorities will receive adequate resources to enable them to discharge their new responsibilities. These extend to the provision of care and support for persons with mental illness in the community. Local authorities will have transferred to them resources that the Government would otherwise have used to finance residential care through social security payments to people in residential and nursing homes.

Local authorities are generally free to determine the use of the resources available to them for their various responsibilities. The White Paper announced that there will be a specific grant to help accelerate the development of community-based services for persons with mental illness.

Rural Legal Partnerships

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will conduct a survey into the financial viability of small legal partnerships in rural areas.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* I have no plans to do so.

Legal Aid

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the levels of legal aid fees in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Legal aid fees in Scotland are set after consultation with the Law Society of Scotland and the Faculty of Advocates. The next consultations will begin soon.

Community Water Charge

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has regarding the community water charge set in each region and islands council area for 1989-90.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Information on water charges is available in the booklet "Water Charges in Scotland—The New Arrangements" published by the Scottish Office in April 1989, copies of which are available in the Library. The community water charges set in each region and islands council area for 1989-90 are set out in the table:

Regional/Islands Council	*Community Water Charge £/person*
Borders	31·00
Central	15·00
Dumfries and Galloway	28·00
Fife	18·00
Grampian	30·00
Highland	20·00
Lothian	18·00
Strathclyde	19·00
Tayside	21·00
Orkney	26·00
Shetland	6·78
Western Isles	34·00

Homelessness

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many single homeless people he estimates there are currently in Scotland under the age of 25 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The Scottish Development Department does not make such estimates.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the figures for the number of single homeless people in Scotland for each year from 1979 to 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* This information is not collected centrally.

CIVIL SERVICE

Government Documents

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what measures have been taken to increase the safety of Government documents being transported by Ministers in Great Britain following the recent theft from the car of the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney).

Mr. Luce: I am satisfied that the measures which are already in place for the protection of Government documents are sufficient to ensure their safety.

Staff Relations

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will take steps to improve staff relations in the Civil Service.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The Government have always attached importance to good staff relations in the Civil Service. The next steps initiative is intended, amongst other things, to increase motivation and satisfaction by releasing staff talents to provide a better service to the public. In some cases group performance bonuses can be earned. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have both paid public tribute to the quality and commitment we see in staff in the Civil Service. As I made clear in my speech at a RIPA seminar last year the Government care greatly about the men and women of the Civil Service and the way they deliver Government services.

THE ARTS

Opera

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he has any plans to increase funding for the provision for opera facilities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Luce: The funding of opera is a matter for the Arts Council. However, I am pleased to say that, as a result of the increase in the Arts Council's grant which I announced in November, companies will receive significant increases in their grant. Among these, Welsh National Opera will receive an 8 per cent. increase from the Arts Council of Great Britain, and a 10·1 per cent. rise from the Welsh Arts Council taking its total grant to £4·8 million in 1990-91.

Arts for Labour

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will meet representatives of Arts for Labour to discuss the allocation of resources, both national and regional.

Mr. Luce: I have no plans to do so.

National Railway Museum

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will take steps to save the unique double turntable installation at the national railway museum in York during works involving the replacement of the roof at the museum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The proposed changes at the national railway museum at York are a matter for the director and the trustees of the science museum. I understand that they have formulated their proposals for the new roof and a single turntable after careful and extensive consultation. The north engine shed has a long history of alteration and the museum has never sought to interpret the main hall or any part of it as a former locomotive depot.

Arts Funding

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next plans to discuss arts funding and tax deductibility.

Mr. Luce: I keep these matters under general review.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Friendly Societies

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is now ready to publish a Green Paper on his proposals for the future legislative regime for friendly societies.

Mr. Major: I have today laid before Parliament a paper entitled "Friendly Societies: A New Framework". This Green Paper sets out the Government's proposals for a new legislative framework for friendly societies. The main proposals are to give societies wider powers to offer a more comprehensive and competitive range of services through subsidiary companies. The main new powers would be to allow establishment and management of unit trust schemes and personal equity plans; to act as agents of other insurers (life or general business); to give advice on insurance; to provide loans; and to reinsure other friendly societies' business.

This range of powers was requested by the Friendly Societies Liaison Committee in its submission to the Economic Secretary in 1988 and I have decided to accept its case in full.

The proposals include legislation to provide societies with a cheap and simple route to incorporation as a special category of body under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts. This will enable societies to achieve the legal status which is necessary to own subsidiaries and hence to offer services other than long-term insurance business, without losing their special identity as friendly societies.

The paper also proposes that the regulatory system for friendly societies should be updated to give improved investor protection. In particular, I propose that a solvency requirement should be extended to all friendly societies, that the chief registrar should be given enhanced powers to deal with moribund societies, and that the requirements for societies' systems of accounts and control should be updated to bring them into line with other financial institutions. I also propose that all societies should be required to join a statutory investor protection scheme and that a new ombudsman scheme should be established to deal with members' complaints.

I believe that the Green Paper will establish a satisfactory constitutional and legislative framework for societies, which will allow for their continued development over the coming years. I hope that there will be support for these proposals from both sides of the House.

Exports

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what exports per capita were in each of the OECD countries, in the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) what percentage of gross domestic product exports amounted to in each of the OECD countries, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Ryder: The data for exports per capita and exports as a percentage share of gross domestic product in each of the OECD countries for 1988 are shown in the table:

	Exports of goods per capita US $	*Exports of goods as a percentage of gross domestic product*
United Kingdom	2,539	17·8
United States of America	1,301	6·7
Canada	4,314	23·2
Japan	2,161	9·3
Germany	5,268	26·9
France	2,895	17·1
Italy	2,248	15·6
Netherlands	6,981	45·2
Belgium/Luxembourg	8,963	59·3
Australia	1,976	13·3
New Zealand	2,652	21·0
Austria	4,086	24·5
Denmark	5,279	25·2
Finland	4,394	20·7
Greece[1]	649	14·6
Iceland	5,781	23·8
Ireland	5,295	60·6
Norway	5,343	24·9
Portugal	1,033	25·5
Spain	1,032	11·8
Sweden	5,891	27·9
Switzerland	7,601	27·4
Turkey	215	16·2

[1] The data for Greece refers to 1987.

Source: OECD Monthly Statistics of Foreign Trade.
OECD Main Economic Indicators.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Radice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis, comparable with Table 2.4 of Financial Statistics, of the public expenditure classification changes contained in table 1A.1 of the Autumn Statement 1989, Cm 879.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The classification changes contained in table 1A.1 of the Autumn Statement include the following:

1. Statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay are now included in the planning total;
2. Recipts of fines and fixed penalties are now treated as revenue and outside the planning total;
3. Expenditure on police, education and fire services in Northern Ireland is now treated as central Government's own expenditure. Previously this was treated as local authority expenditure;
4. Expenditure by the Training Agency on the technical and vocational educational initiative (TVEI) and work-related further education (WRFE) formerly treated as central Government's own expenditure, is now included in support for local authorities;
5. Expenditure of National Rivers Authority on land drainage financed by levies on local authorities is now included in central Government's own expenditure. Equivalent expenditure was previously included in local authority expenditure as payments to water authorities;
6. Receipts from visa fees are now treated as revenue and outside the planning total;
7. Receipts of OFTEL and OFGAS are now treated as revenue and outside the planning total.

Their contributions to the aggregate classification change shown in table 1A.1 are as follows.

£ million

	1990-91	*1991-92*
Central Government's own expenditure		
Statutory Sick Pay/Statutory Maternity Pay	1,259	1,311
Fines and Fixed Penalties	275	291

	1990-91	1991-92
Northern Ireland switch from local authority	791	831
TVEI and WRFE	−243	−248
NRA land drainage	155	160
Visas	32	33
OFTEL and OFGAS	7	7
Others	3	2
Total	2,279	2,387
Public Corporations		
Local authority airport and bus companies	−86	−70
Total	−86	−70

A similar analysis covering the period from 1984-85 to 1991-92 will be included in the 1990 public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Radice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables showing, for the latest years now available, identifiable public expenditure by function in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as an index, United Kingdom total identifiable public expenditure = 100, *(c)* as an amount per capita and *(d)* as an amount per capita expressed as an index, United Kingdom amount per capita = 100.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 19 December 1989 at columns *179-91*.

EEC Payments

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what payments from the European Economic Communities due in the calendar year 1989 have yet to be made; when such payments are expected; and if he will state the reasons for any delay.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* As far as I am aware, all of the payments which the United Kingdom was due to receive in 1989 were made.

Capital Investment

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest trends on capital investment by British industry.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Figures of manufacturing investment up to the third quarter of 1989 are shown at table 1 of the press release CSO(89)147 (Manufacturers' Investment Intentions for 1990 and 1991) issued on 20 December 1989. That release also contains projections of future investment by manufacturers. For non-manufacturing industries, comparable figures to the third quarter 1989 are given in table 3 of the Central Statistical Office *Business Bulletin Issue 16/89*. Projections of future investment for these industries are not available. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

City of London (Foreign Earnings)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the foreign earnings of the City of London in *(a)* insurance, *(b)* banking, (net), *(c)* commodity trading, *(d)* brokerage, *(e)* investment trusts, *(f)* pension funds, *(g)* unit trusts, *(h)* leasing, *(i)* securities dealer and *(j)* in total in (i) 1970, (ii) 1979, (iii) 1987, (iv) 1988 and (v) 1989.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Information up to and including 1988 is given in the published annual Pink Books on the United Kingdom balance of payments and from the CSO Databank, both of which are available in the Library. Information for 1989 will be published later this year.

VAT

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current rates of value-added tax on *(a)* electricity and *(b)* gas in each European Community country; and whether it is intended to maintain a zero rate in the United Kingdom for fuels after 1992.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Based on the latest available information the current rates are as follows:

Per cent.

Country	Gas	Electricity
Belgium	17	17
Denmark	22	22
France	5·5	5·5
Germany	14	14
Greece	[2]—	[2]—
Ireland	10	5
Italy	9	9
Luxembourg	6	6
Netherlands	18·5	18·5
Portugal	8 (6)	[1]8 (6)
Spain	12	12
United Kingdom	0	0

[1] Lower rates apply in autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira Archipelagoes.
[2] Information not available.

To comply with the European Court of Justice ruling of 21 June 1988, VAT at the standard rate will apply in the United Kingdom to fuel and power supplied to businesses from 1 July 1990.

In the context of the Commission's indirect tax proposals for the single market, the Government have repeatedly made it clear that they intend to maintain the zero rate of VAT for domestic fuel and power. As changes to EC law require unanimous agreement, the United Kingdom's position is safeguarded.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Consumer Panel

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the names of individuals that have been nominated to sit on his consumer panel, giving the name of the nominating organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have not yet written to all the nominees. When I have done so, it is my intention to announce publicly the names of the members of the consumer panel and details of its meetings. I will send the hon. Member the information he has requested at that time.

Cattle Auctions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle auction markets are *(a)* licensed and *(b)* unlicensed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: All cattle auction markets must be licensed under the provisions of article 17 of the Brucellosis (England and Wales) Order 1984.

Organic Extensification

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to introduce an organic extensification option; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I shall shortly be issuing a consultation document outlining a possible scheme under which grant aid would be available to those farmers wishing to convert from conventional to organic production.

Organic Produce

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what plans he has to encourage further the practice of organic farming;

(2) what steps he proposes to take to lessen dependence on imports to satisfy consumer demand for organic produce.

Mr. Curry: It is for those who produce, process or market organic produce to respond to the growing demand for organic foods and to lessen our dependence on imported supplies. However, my Department has already taken a number of steps to encourage this process while additional proposals are current under consideration.

Of particular significance has been the setting up of the United Kingdom register of organic food standards (UKROFS) which in May 1989 launched production and processing standards for organic produce and an independent certification and inspection system. We understand that the UKROFS board has now reached an advanced stage in its discussions on registration with the organic sector bodies through which it is expected the large majority of registrations will be effected. Once the board has satisfied itself on the inspection and certification arrangements to be operated by these bodies, consumers will be able with confidence to purchase British organic produce backed by the UKROFS standards and monitoring provisions.

Other steps being taken, or under consideration, by the Government include the funding of a comprehensive economic survey of organic farming; the provision of R and D and of specialised ADAS advice; the help for conversion available through the fallow option of the set-aside scheme; and the benefits available through the farm and conservation grant scheme and from assistance towards establishing co-operatives. In addition, we are proposing shortly to issue a consultation document on an organic conversion option under the EC extensification scheme.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he proposes to take to prevent the sale of produce inaccurately labelled as organic.

Mr. Maclean: It is already an offence under the Food Act 1984 to apply a false or misleading description to food. In proposed EC regulation, currently under consideration, there are specific provisions to prevent the sale of produce labelled as organic but which does not conform to specified standards.

Farm Woodland Scheme

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will accept further applications from those who have already made a first application under the farm woodland scheme to cover a further three-year period.

Mr. Curry: Initially, the rules of the farm woodland scheme allowed only one application to be accepted for any one agricultural unit or applicant. Last August, in the light of experience, we changed the rules so that farmers with more than one agricultural unit could make a separate application for each of them.

The rule limiting farmers to one application per agricultural unit remains in force to minimise administrative work and to encourage farmers to formulate a firm three-year planting plan at the outset. However, I am keeping it under review, along with the other rules, in the light of operational experience and the level of uptake under the scheme.

At the end of the initial three-year experimental period in September 1991 all aspects of the scheme will, of course, be reviewed to help establish what arrangements should apply thereafter.

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the hectarage applied for during the first three years of the farm woodland scheme; and how much under the target figure this is.

Mr. Curry: In the first 14 months of the farm woodland scheme applications to plant 8,938 hectares of trees throughout the United Kingdom were received. This compares with the target for applications in the first experimental three-year period of 36,000 hectares.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made an assessment of polychlorinated biphenyl levels in all parts of fish; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Ministry scientists regularly measure the concentrations of PCBs in both edible and non-edible parts of fish in English and Welsh waters as part of an extensive programme on the quality of fish and shellfish. The results are published in the directorate of fisheries research's aquatic environment monitoring report series. The most recent report is AEMR 16, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Microwave Ovens

Ms. Short: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether there is any evidence of a risk to health in heating milk in microwave ovens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Microwaving is simply one method of heating food. I am not aware of any good evidence that

changes in food brought about by microwave heating would not also be brought about by other methods producing equivalent amounts of heat.

I understand that the account of the research carried out at the University of Vienna and reported in *The Lancet* of 9 December was very incomplete. It failed to mention that a very small milk sample was microwaved at full power in a sealed tube to an unknown temperature (probably well in excess of 100 deg. C) until it was brown. This heat treatment was far more severe than that received by other samples with which it was compared and bears no relation whatever to the way consumers would heat milk in the kitchen.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the nature and scope of his new research programme into the vertical tranmissibility of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 18 December 1989 at col. *30*.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the research work into bovine spongiform encephalopathy as announced by him on 9 January, will be published in full as recommended by the Tyrrell report.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* I shall adhere to MAFF's general policy and publicise the results of research which we fund.

Enzymes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the use of gels containing enzymes as binding agents in meat products.

Mr. Maclean: Meat products offered for sale have to comply with the provisions of the Food Act 1984, the Food Labelling Regulations 1984 and the Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984. Meat products made using the techniques mentioned would have to be carefully labelled so as to ensure that consumers are adequately informed of their true nature and means of production.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban the use of vegetable enzymes as meat tenderisers.

Mr. Maclean: The continued use of vegetable enzymes to tenderise meat will be subject to single market rules yet to be determined. However during the course of the Adjournment debate on 7 November 1989, I announced the Government's decision not to seek provision for the continued use of the pre-slaughter injection of cattle with the enzyme papain when Community proposals are discussed.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will require meat subjected to treatment with the vegetable enzyme papain to be labelled in such a manner that the use of this enzyme is clear to prospective consumers.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Labelling Regulations 1984 already require that the name used for any meat which has been treated with proteolytic enzymes or which is derived from an animal that has been so treated shall include or be accompanied by the word "tenderised".

Fish Disease

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what surveys have been conducted by his Department to establish the incidence of *(a)* dab, *(b)* flounder, *(c)* cod, *(d)* herring and *(e)* plaice caught in water around Britain which show evidence of disease.

Mr. Curry: Since 1980 my Department, together with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, has conducted both annual and ad hoc surveys to establish the prevalence rates of diseases in commercial fish species, including dab, flounder, plaice, cod and herring in water around Britain.

My Department has played a key role in establishing standardised sampling and disease recording methods with other European countries and collaborates with these countries in fish disease survey programmes.

Simplesse

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department has discussed the product Simplesse with Monsanto.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. Representatives of Nutrasweet, a Monsanto subsidiary, have discussed the product with officials of my Ministry and the Department of Health. It is a product made from common food ingredients using existing food production methods and has been considered by the advisory committee on novel foods and processes. The likely impact on the diet of this and similar products is under consideration.

Industrial Pollution (North Sea)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from consumers about the effect on fish in the North sea of industrial pollution and waste disposal; and what response he has made.

Mr. Curry: I receive a number of inquiries from members of the public about the safety of North sea fish for human consumption.

The waste disposal operations directly licensed by my Department are very carefully assessed to avoid adverse effects on marine life either in the short or long term. My Department carefully monitors the quality of the marine environment both round disposal sites and more generally and this includes an extensive programme of monitoring fish.

As a consequence, I am able to assure correspondents that the health of the North sea is good, that fish offered for sale from British waters are not adversely affected by pollution, that they fully comply with relevant public health standards and that they are quite safe to eat.

Fish Liver Oils

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is known by his Department about the extent of polychlorinated biphenyl contamination of fish liver oils; and what tests are, or have been, carried out on fish liver oil products.

Mr. Maclean: Results of surveillance of fish liver oil products for the presence of polychlorobiphenyls (PCBs) have been published in food surveillance papers Nos. 13 and 16, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Wastes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields, 14 December, *Official Report*, column *800*, whether the replies received from *(a)* Sweden, *(b)* Denmark, *(c)* the Netherlands, *(d)* Germany and *(e)* Norway, were in support of his proposals to issue a licence to dump the relevant wastes in the North sea.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 11 January 1990]:* Sweden, Denmark and Norway objected to each of the three proposals, the Netherlands objected to two and the Federal Republic of Germany raised no specific objections.

The other seven countries of the Oslo convention did not comment, an indication that they were content with our submissions.

A full response has been sent to each country which raised objections, clarifying misunderstandings which appear to underlie the comments.

In response to concerns that heavy metals could cause harm we have confirmed that there are no detectable heavy metals in the wastes. We have explained that the biochemical oxygen demand would be far too insignificant to have any effect in the sea and that standard works of reference show that the trace level of biodegradable phenol in one waste will not taint fish.

As regards monitoring, we have reminded the countries concerned that these specific wastes are rapidly neutralised in the sea and that their presence in the water is undetectable very shortly after release. We have described our fish and shellfish monitoring programme which shows that fish are not affected by the disposals.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to his answer of 11 December to the hon. Member for South Shields, *Official Report*, columns *512-16*, if he will list the active ingredients which have had their reviews concluded by the ACP according to the categories *(a)* approval withdrawn, *(b)* use restricted and *(c)* use continues unchanged following their review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 January 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) Approvals Withdrawn
- Aldrin
- Binapacryl
- Bitertanol
- Captafol (Phased withdrawal)
- Chlordane (Phased withdrawal)
- Cyhexatin
- DDT
- Dieldrin
- Dinoseb
- Dinoseb-acetate
- Dinoterb
- DNOC
- Endrin
- Ethylene dibromide
- Mercury compounds (some approvals)

(b) Use Restricted or other amendments to approvals
- Aminotriazole
- Dimethoate
- Fentin acetate
- Fentin hydroxide
- Iprodione
- Sulphonyl Ureas (ii)
- Synthetic pyrethroids

(c) Use continues unchanged
- Aldicarb
- Biological agents used as pesticides
- Daminozide (iii)
- Fenbutatin oxide
- Glycolethers
- Maleic hydrazide
- Mercury compounds (some approvals)
- 2,4,5-T
- Triazophos

It should be noted that (i) Alachlor, which appeared under "Reviews concluded by the ACP" in my answer of 11 December to the hon. Member should in fact have been listed under "Reviews currently in progress"; (ii) Sulphonyl Ureas should have been listed under "Reviews completed by the ACP" and (iii) the partial review of Daminozide was completed in December 1989 and has therefore been included in the list.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

13. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his revised estimate for the numbers and value of overseas visitors to the United Kingdom for 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: A total of 14·9 million overseas visitors are estimated to have come to the United Kingdom in the first 10 months of 1989, spending about £5·8 billion.

Both the number of visitors and their total expenditure were 9 per cent. more than in the same period last year. The estimate for the whole of 1989 will be published on 7 March.

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he has taken to assist the tourist industry since the ending of section 4 grants.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 28 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *212*, regarding my Department's review of tourism policy.

Employment Training

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of employment training places in the north-west are unfilled.

Mr. Nicholls: At 15 December 1989 about 21 per cent. of employment training places in the Training Agency's north-west region were unfilled.

31. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations he has received about employment training.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department receives a wide range of representations, from both individuals and organisations about employment training, all of which receive careful consideration.

50. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to publish his Department's survey into the overall performance of the employment training scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: The first results from the 100 per cent. follow-up survey of employment training leavers have already been made public. These show that 58 per cent. of trainees completing their agreed training went into jobs or self-employment or further full-time education or training.

70. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's 100 per cent. follow-up survey of employment training.

Mr. Nicholls: The latest results from the 100 per cent. follow-up survey of employment training leavers show that 58 per cent. of trainees completing their agreed training went into jobs or self-employment or further full-time training or education. This is clear evidence that the programme is playing a major role in helping unemployed people to get back into work.

Footwear and Textiles

16. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on job losses in the footwear and textile industries.

Mr. Eggar: As the hon. Member knows, owing to competitive pressures there have been some job losses in the footwear and textile industries. I refer him to the reply given by my hon. Friend on 8 January, *Official Report*, column *491*.

Minimum Wages

17. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to increase the number of prosecutions for breaches of minimum wage legislation.

Mr. Nicholls: The policy of the wages inspectorate under all Governments has been to seek compliance with wages council regulations by advice and persuasion and to prosecute ones where an offence is deliberate or repeated and the evidence is considered adequate. There are no plans to change this policy.

43. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to increase minimum wage levels.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) on 5 December 1989, *Official Report*, columns *202-3*.

EC Ministers

18. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met his European Community counterparts; and what was discussed.

Mr. Howard: My predecessor last met his European Community counterparts on 30 November 1989, at the meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council. The outcome of that meeting was reported in the *Official Report* of 19 December 1989, columns *144-45*.

Disabled People

19. **Mr. McAvoy :** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to raise the number of disabled persons in the work force.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett).

41. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the appropriateness of anti-discrimination legislation to protect disabled persons within the labour market.

Mr. Eggar: The Government's preferred option for improving opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market is to educate, persuade and assist employers to adopt constructive policies and practices. The appropriateness of anti-discrimination legislation is being examined in the Employment Department's current review of its services for people with disabilities. The conclusions of the review will be published in a consultative document soon.

Industrial Disputes

20. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate how many working days have been lost in disputes for a shorter working week in the last 12 months.

Mr. Nicholls: In the 12-month period ending October 1989, 15,000 working days were lost through disputes about basic working hours.

Training and Enterprise Councils

21. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how his Department intends to avoid preferential funding by TEC members in organisations in which they may have an interest.

Mr. Howard: Every TEC's memorandum and articles will contain a clause requiring a director to refrain from voting on any matter in which he has an interest. TECs' plans will be scrutinised to ensure they reflect market needs and they will contract on a competitive basis for training and enterprise services. Furthermore, a TEC will publish an annual report of its performance against its plan.

22. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress is being made with the establishment of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Howard: I have been very encouraged by the excellent response from employers throughout the country since we issued the invitation to form training and

enterprise councils. Applications for development funding from over 50 groups of senior employers from around the country have been approved. A table listing the areas from which we have had applications and indicating their current status has been placed in the Library.

61. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further applications have been received to set up training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

63. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on recent progress with the training and enterprise council programme.

78. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Eggar: I have been very encouraged by the excellent response from employers throughout the country since we issued the invitation to form training and enterprise councils. Applications for development funding from over 50 groups of senior employers from around the country have been approved. The table lists the areas from which we have had applications and indicates their status.

List of training and enterprise councils that have applied for development funding

	Applications
South East	
Milton Keynes	Approved
Hertfordshire	Approved
Essex	Approved
Hampshire	Approved
Isle of Wight	Approved
Thames Valley	Approved
Oxfordshire	Approved
Kent	Approved
Surrey	Under Consideration
London	
Kingston/Merton	Approved
London East	Under Consideration
South London	Under Consideration
South West	
Devon/Cornwall	Approved
Dorset	Approved
Somerset	Approved
Avon	Approved
Gloucestershire	Under Consideration
West Midlands	
Birmingham	Approved
Walsall	Approved
Staffordshire	Approved
Coventry/Warwickshire	Approved
Dudley	Approved
Wolverhampton	Approved
Sandwell	Under Consideration
East Midlands and Eastern	
North Nottinghamshire	Approved
Norfolk/Waveney	Approved
Suffolk	Approved
Greater Peterborough	Approved
Bedfordshire	Under Consideration
Central and South Cambridgeshire	Approved
Lincolnshire	Under Consideration
Northamptonshire	Under Consideration
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Sheffield	Approved
Calderdale/Kirklees	Approved
North Yorkshire	Approved
Rotherham	Approved
Leeds	Approved
Barnsley/Doncaster	Approved
Wakefield	Under Consideration
North West	
Cumbria	Approved
East Lancashire	Approved
Rochdale	Approved
Oldham	Approved
South and East Cheshire	Approved
Wigan	Approved
Manchester	Approved
Stockport/High Peak	Approved
Bolton/Bury	Approved
St. Helens	Approved
Northern	
Teesside	Approved
Tyneside	Approved
Wearside	Approved
County Durham	Approved
Northumberland	Approved
Wales	
Mid Glamorgan	Approved
North East Wales	Approved
West Wales	Approved
North West Wales	Approved
South Glamorgan	Approved
Gwent	Approved

44. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how his Department will assess the competence of training and enterprise council board members.

Mr. Eggar: The competence of training and enterprise councils will be judged by their ability to achieve agreed levels of performance on quality as well as quantity. TECs will also be accountable to their community by holding public meetings and by publishing an annual report. It will be for board members themselves to consider the competence of other members of their board.

Labour Statistics

23. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about unemployment in Cleveland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In recent months my Department has received one letter on unemployment in Cleveland. In the year to November 1989, unemployment in Cleveland county fell from 36,150 to 27,964, a reduction of 22·6 per cent. on the November 1988 figure.

24. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by what amount the work force in the United Kingdom has increased in the last quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The work force in employment in the United Kingdom increased by 78,000 in the last quarter to stand at 26,341,000 in June 1989—the highest level ever.

25. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the fall in the numbers of unemployed in the latest month for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Between October and November 1989, seasonally adjusted unemployment in the United Kingdom fell by 25,200. Unemployment has now fallen for 40 consecutive months on a consistent basis and is now at its lowest for over nine years.

45. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the fall in unemployment for the last quarter and what were the figures for the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The following table shows the change in unemployment in the United Kingdom for the latest available quarter and the change for the corresponding quarter in each of the last five years. Unemployment has now fallen for 40 consecutive months and is at its lowest level for over nine years.

Change in unemployment (seasonally adjusted)

	Thousands [1]quarter 3 change
1984	+57·3
1985	+16·6
1986	−15·9
1987	−139·1
1988	−132·4
1989	−115·4

[1] September compared with previous June.

46. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment.

Mr. Nicholls: In November 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the United Kingdom was 1,649,700, the lowest for over nine years.

47. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently unemployed in the Devon, North constituency; and how many in 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: Figures for current parliamentary constituencies are available only back to June 1983 when there were 3,124 unemployed claimants in the parliamentary constituency of Devon, North. This compares with 1,968 in November 1989, a fall of 1,156 or 37 per cent. The comparison is affected by the change in the compilation of the unemployment count in March 1986 to reduce over-recording and by the change in benefit regulations affecting under 18-year-olds in September 1988.

48. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest quarterly figure for those in work in the United Kingdom, and what were the comparable figures for the last five years.

Mr. Nicholls: In June 1989, the United Kingdom work force in employment, seasonally adjusted, stood at 26,341,000—the highest level ever. The table shows comparable figures for the past five years:

Workforce in employment—United Kingdom

	Workforce in employment Thousands[1]	*Annual change Actual*	*Percentage*
June 1984	24,226	—	—
June 1985	24,527	300	1·2
June 1986	24,553	26	0·1
June 1987	25,065	512	2·1
June 1988	25,864	799	3·2
June 1989	26,341	477	1·8

[1] Seasonally adjusted.

56. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of unemployed people in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Canada; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In September 1989, the latest date for which international standardised unemployment rates are available, the percentage of unemployed claimants, seasonally adjusted, was 6 per cent. in the United Kingdom and 7·3 per cent. in Canada. Over the past two years the unemployment rate in the United Kingdom has fallen faster than in any other major industrialised country.

77. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average unemployment rate in the United Kingdom and in each country of the European Community for each of the last five years.

64. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average level of unemployment in the other members of the European Community; what is the comparable level of unemployment in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In October 1989, the latest available date, the rate of unemployment in the United Kingdom was 6·2 per cent. compared to an EEC average of 9·1 per cent. Over the past two years the unemployment rate in the United Kingdom has fallen faster than in any other major industrialised country.

66. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the fall in the numbers of long-term unemployed in the latest month for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The number of claimants in the United Kingdom unemployed for 12 months or more fell by 62,000 between July 1989 and October 1989. Long-term unemployment continues to fall at a faster rate than total unemployment.

67. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are now in employment in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The work force in employment in the United Kingdom was 26,341,000 in June 1989; that is the latest figure available, and is at its highest level ever.

69. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the fall in the rate of unemployment in the United Kingdom over the last two years; what were the figures in other OECD countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The table shows for the United Kingdom and for each other OECD country, the change in the standardised unemployment rate, over the latest available

two-year period. Over the past two years unemployment has fallen faster in the United Kingdom than in any other major industrialised country.

International comparisons of unemployment rates latest month compared with two years earlier (OECD standardised unemployment rates)

Country	[1] *Percentage points change*
United Kingdom	−3·8
Spain	−3·2
Portugal (May)	−2·2
Belgium	−1·9
Australia	−1·7
Finland (August)	−1·5
Canada	−1·1
France	−0·9
Germany	−0·7
United States	−0·6
Japan	−0·6
Sweden	−0·4
Netherlands (January)	−0·2
Italy (April)	0·2
Norway (May)	3·1

Note: September 1989 unless otherwise stated.

73. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which region in the United Kingdom recorded the greatest fall in the rate of unemployment in the last quarter.

Mr. Nicholls: Scotland.

75. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on employment levels in the north of England.

Mr. Nicholls: In the three regions, north, north-west, and Yorkshire and Humberside, the civilian work force in employment was 6,126,000 in June 1989, an increase of 403,000 or 7 per cent. in the last five years.

76. **Mr. Barry Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures his Department has taken to help further reduce unemployment in Merseyside; how successful these have been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department, through its employment service and Training Agency, operates a wide range of employment, enterprise and training measures, which are all available in Merseyside, as well as elsewhere.

In addition, as in other inner city areas, a number of initiatives have been adopted aimed at helping unemployed people in Liverpool to find employment, and at encouraging employers to recruit local unemployed people. Since April the Liverpool city action team has approved 29 employment and training projects which will create almost 800 jobs and training places, and improve the facilities for nearly 1,300 training places.

During the 12 months to November 1989 unemployment in Merseyside county has fallen by 16,166—16·4 per cent. of the November 1988 figure.

79. **Mr. Churchill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase in jobs in the north-west in the most recent five-year period for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholls: The civilian work force in employment in the north-west has increased by 202,000 (8 per cent.) from 2,570,000 to 2,772,000 over the five years from June 1984 to June 1989.

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the percentage unemployment reductions in Lancashire travel-to-work areas since June 1987.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available in the Library. Percentage changes in unemployment between June 1987 and November 1989 for all travel-to-work areas covering the county of Lancashire were:

Travel-to-work areas	*Percentage change*[1]
Pendle	−58·4
Settle	−56·3
Clitheroe	−53·1
Accrington and Rossendale	−50·5
Burnley	−50·4
Blackpool	−45·8
Bolton and Bury	−44·9
Preston	−44·6
Blackburn	−43·0
Wigan and St. Helens	−42·4
Rochdale	−42·1
Lancaster and Morecambe	−39·0
Liverpool	−34·1

[1] unadjusted.

Local Offices

26. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on staffing levels in jobcentres and unemployment benefit offices.

Mr. Eggar: During November 1989 the equivalent of approximately 7,643 full-time staff were working in jobcentres on placing people into jobs. A total of 17,382 full-time staff were working on benefit payments in unemployment benefit offices. A further equivalent of 3,791 full-time staff were employed on counselling functions.

Wages Councils

27. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research his Department has commissioned into the removal of wages councils.

58. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research his Department has commissioned into the rates of pay set by statutory wages councils.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 21 July 1989, *Official Report*, column *390*.

42. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning his plans to abolish the wages councils.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer to the hon. Member to the replies given to my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 21 March, *Official Report*, columns *555-56*, for Luton South (Mr. Bright) on 28 July, *Official Report*, column *1037*, and to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 23 March, *Official Report*, columns *798-802*.

68. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on research he has commissioned into the effects of removing young people from wages council protection.

Mr. Nicholls: There is clear evidence in studies both in the United Kingdom and internationally on the link between pay and jobs, especially for young people. These findings are supported by indications from employers that their freedom since 1986 to offer jobs at rates they can afford has resulted in the engagement of young people who would not otherwise have been recruited. Further research is therefore unnecessary.

Wales

30. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what responsibilities he has for employment policy in Wales.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for formulating policy on employment and training matters throughout Great Britain, in consultation with colleagues, including the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland, as appropriate.

Inner Cities

28. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the reduction of unemployment in inner cities.

Mr. Nicholls: The table shows the fall in unemployed claimants in the 57 local authority areas in England within which the Government target inner city programme aid. The sustained fall in unemployment in these areas is very encouraging and reflects the success of our action for cities package. My Department's programmes are continuing to equip unemployed inner city residents in Wolverhampton and elsewhere with the skills, confidence and motivation to compete for jobs.

Local authority areas in England within which the Government target inner city programme aid (not seasonally adjusted)

	Unemployed claimants		*Change*	*Percentage change*
	November 1988	*November 1989*		
Halton	7,130	5,248	−1,882	−26·4
Knowsley	13,492	11,651	−1,841	−13·7
Liverpool	42,406	35,812	−6,594	−15·6
Sefton	14,892	11,947	−2,945	−19·8
St. Helens	9,708	7,872	−1,836	−18·9
Wigan	14,023	10,703	−3,320	−23·7
Wirral	18,112	15,162	−2,950	−16·3
Blackburn	5,638	4,782	−856	−15·2
Bolton	11,356	8,902	−2,454	−21·6
Burnley	3,280	2,450	−830	−25·3
Manchester	32,107	26,931	−5,176	−16·1
Oldham	8,633	7,039	−1,594	−18·5
Preston	5,561	4,459	−1,102	−19·8
Rochdale	8,964	6 960	−2,004	−22·4
Salford	12,228	9,711	−2,517	−20·6
Gateshead	11,341	9,155	−2,186	−19·3
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	18,302	14,794	−3,508	−19·2
North Tyneside	9,987	7,379	−2,608	−26·1
South Tyneside	10,836	8,577	−2,259	−20·9
Sunderland	19,828	16,018	−3,810	−19·2
Hartlepool	6,278	4,764	−1,514	−24·1
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	8,833	6,688	−2,145	−24·3
Middlesbrough	10,868	8,659	−2,209	−20·3
Stockton-on-Tees	10,171	7,853	−2,318	−22·8
Barnsley	12,649	8,986	−3,663	−29·0
Bradford	18,788	15,206	−3,582	−19·1
Doncaster	16,865	12,494	−4,371	−25·9
Kirklees	12,153	9,638	−2,515	−20·7
Leeds	26,795	21,580	−5,215	−19·5
Rotherham	13,934	10,550	−3,384	−24·3
Sheffield	29,576	23,068	−6,508	−22·0
Kingston-upon-Hull	15,856	13,584	−2,272	−14·3
Birmingham	58,740	46,515	−12,225	−20·8
Coventry	14,861	12,225	−2,636	−17·7
Dudley	11,166	8,182	−2,984	−26·7
Sandwell	15,452	11,744	−3,708	−24·0
The Wrekin	5,181	3,278	−1,903	−36·7
Walsall	11,154	8,404	−2,750	−24·7
Wolverhampton	13,761	11,634	−2,127	−15·5
Derby	9,807	6,985	−2,822	−28·8
Leicester	11,531	9,629	−1,902	−16·5
Nottingham	16,542	13,382	−3,160	−19·1
Bristol	15,886	12,485	−3,401	−21·4
Plymouth	11,298	8,952	−2,346	−20·8
Brent	11,928	7,808	−4,120	−34·5
Greenwich	9,402	7,951	−1,451	−15·4
Hackney	14,644	12,370	−2,274	−15·5
Hammersmith	8,091	6,273	−1,818	−22·5
Haringey	12,270	10,412	−1,858	−15·1
Islington	11,297	9,324	−1,973	−17·5
Kensington and Chelsea	5,526	3,887	−1,639	−29·7
Lambeth	17,209	13,737	−3,472	−20·2
Lewisham	12,453	10,232	−2,221	−17·8

	Unemployed claimants		Change	Percentage change
	November 1988	November 1989		
Newham	11,318	10,248	−1,070	−9·5
Southwark	15,295	11,798	−3,497	−22·9
Tower Hamlets	11,203	9,322	−1,881	−16·8
Wandsworth	9,861	7,630	−2,231	−22·6
Total	806,466	643,029	−163,437	−20·3

Closed Shop

29. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking in relation to the closed shop; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Employment Bill published on 21 December 1989 makes it unlawful to refuse to employ a person because he is, or is not, a trade union member and provides that any person refused employment for such a reason may complain to an industrial tribunal. This measure, together with the protections afforded by the 1988 Employment Act, will make all forms of the closed shop unenforceable in law.

49. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the abolition of the closed shop; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department continues to receive letters that describe difficulties experienced as a result of the operation of closed shop arrangements. The majority of these letters support measures against the closed shop. The Employment Bill published on 21 December 1989 will make it unlawful to refuse anyone employment because he is, or is not, a member of a trade union and this, together with the protections already afforded under the 1988 Employment Act, will make all forms of the closed shop unenforceable in law.

55. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has held any recent meetings with his EEC counterparts to discuss the legal and practical aspects of trades union closed shop procedures in the member states.

Mr. Nicholls: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor his predecessor the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) has held any such meetings recently.

Part-time Workers

32. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how his Department intends to extend protection at work for part-time workers.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans to extend the employment protection legislation.

Industry Training Boards

33. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress is being made with the privatisation of industry training boards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) announced on 8 November that the majority of the remaining industry training boards would move towards independent status as soon as possible. This process is proceeding satisfactorily.

Vocational Qualifications

34. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of implementing the national vocational qualifications framework.

Mr. Nicholls: The council's task of rationalising and reforming our vocational qualification system is well under way. Over 165 qualifications have now been accredited within the first four levels of the new national vocational qualifications framework.

In discussion with relevant professional bodies, the council has also begun to prepare the ground for extending its work to higher level qualifications.

Details of the council's work are contained in its annual report, a copy of which is in the Library.

Child Care

35. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with employers' organisations regarding the provision of child care.

Mr. Nicholls: I have had discussions on child care with representatives of the CBI at my advisory committee on women's employment. This committee also includes the EOC chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson), representatives of the TUC and the Women's National Commission.

I also attended the CBI conference, "Tomorrow's Workforce: practical employment policies in a changing labour market", where child care was one of the major topics. I am also a member of the ministerial group on women's issues which has been looking at the whole question of child care.

Recruitment

36. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further measures he will introduce to encourage employers to recruit people over 50 years of age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department is taking a range of steps to encourage employers to recruit people over 50 years of age, including publicising the implications of the declining numbers of young people, questioning upper age limits on vacancies notified to jobcentres, and making all adult employment and training programmes available to people over 50. There are no current plans to introduce further measures, but the position will be kept under review.

If employers in the 1990s are to deal with the consequences of demographic changes, it will be essential for them to utilise fully the talents of people over 50.

Ballots

37. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the code of practice for trade union ballots for industrial action; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Over 50 responses were received on this draft code of practice during the public consultation period which followed its publication in November 1988. A modified draft was laid before Parliament last year, and the next stage is to seek approval by resolution of each House.

Health and Safety

38. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to improve health and safety conditions in the workplace.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Members for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), *Official Report* 5 December 1989, column *186*.

Training

39. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the adult work force currently receives some form of training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: It is estimated that in 1986-87, 48 per cent. of employees received some job-related training from their employer. More recent figures from the labour force survey show that in the spring of 1988, 12 per cent. of all economically-active adults were taking part in job-related training in the four weeks prior to the survey—an increase from 8 per cent. in 1984. It is vital for our international competitiveness that this upward trend continues. The primary responsibility lies with employers and with the new training and enterprise councils to take the lead in promoting training locally.

40. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the appointment of the national training task force.

Mr. Nicholls: The national training task force was established to advise my right hon. and learned Friend in carrying out his training responsibilities throughout Great Britain and he very much values its contribution.

It is the best team ever put together on training and my right hon. and learned Friend is pleased that it has been further strengthened recently with the appointment of Andrew Collier, chief education officer for Lancashire county council.

60. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the Confederation of British Industry's vocational education and training task force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: A number of representations have been received concerning the CBI's vocational education and training task force and the publication of its report "Towards a Skills Revolution—a Youth Charter".

The report makes a number of timely and important recommendations. New arrangements have been announced for youth training to take effect later this year *(Official Report,* 5 December 1989 column *196.)* Youth training incorporates a number of the recommendations, including demanding targets for the achievement of qualifications by young people and a key role for training and enterprise councils.

The Government are giving close attention to other recommendations in the report.

72. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he intends to implement to ensure that all young people in employment under the age of 18 years should receive some form of training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: It is primarily for employers to ensure that young people receive quality training in order to meet the challenges of technological change and the need to achieve greater international competitiveness at a time when the number of school leavers is falling sharply. The Government will continue to help employers to respond effectively to these challenges through the training and enterprise councils (TECs), the introduction of the new youth training arrangements and the compacts initiative. Our aim is to move to a position where every young person under 18 years of age in this country is in full-time education, or a job with training, or training leading to a job.

Disability Advisory Service

51. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to improve the working of the disability advisory service.

Mr. Eggar: The working of the employment service's disablement advisory service is being considered as part of the internal review of services for people with disabilities which my Department is currently undertaking. A consultative document covering the conclusions of the review will be published soon.

Women Workers

52. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further measures he will take to encourage the return of women to the work force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Government are already taking many steps to facilitate the re-entry of women to the labour market, and will continue to do so. We also recognise that women who choose not to take paid work are doing an equally valuable job in looking after the family at home.

The Government are encouraging employers to adapt traditional working practices to accommodate the needs of women. This means more flexibility in hours of work and in holidays, job sharing, career breaks, part-time working and, where possible, help with child care costs.

All Government schemes to help the unemployed, to help inner cities and to help people set up their own businesses are open equally to women and men. Women returning to the labour market and certain single parents on order books can enter employment training, full or

part-time, without fulfilling the usual six-month unemployment eligibility condition. All lone parents on employment training can qualify for a child care allowance.

My Department's employment service has produced a special leaflet to tell women interested in returning to work about available opportunities and schemes.

My Department is also jointly undertaking a major project with BBC radio's "Woman's Hour" aimed at providing information and practical assistance to women returners. The project, which will be called "Back to the Future", will consist of eight conferences, each attended by 120 women on the following subjects: Being Personally Effective; Selling Yourself; Retraining; Working for Yourself; Getting that Job; Managing Money; Flexible Working and Childcare; Planning Your Life. The conferences, the first of which takes place in London on 22 January, will be run in tandem with "Woman's Hour" programmes, publicity material, visits by the Employment Department action bus and a national telephone helpline.

Manual Workers, London

53. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of manual workers who travel to London every Sunday night to work and leave again on Friday.

Mr. Nicholls: These figures are not collected by my Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

EPCOT Centre

54. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to visit the EPCOT centre at Disney World in Florida.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

School-Industry Compacts

57. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications have been received for development funding for school-industry compacts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: In England, all but four of the 57 urban programme authority (UPA) areas have applied for development funding for compacts. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales have received eight and seven applications respectively.

These applications have led to 29 compacts becoming operational, and a further 11 are currently in their development phase. This is an excellent start and the response of employers, young people, parents and the schools has been very enthusiastic. I am therefore announcing today additional funding of £12 million to support the introduction of further compacts. This brings total Government support for the initiative to £28 million, and means that by next year all urban programme authority (UPA) areas currently without a compact will be able to set one up.

Seven inner city areas are to be offered immediate funding to set up compacts. They are Barnsley, Burnley, Lambeth, Nottingham, Rotherham, Wandsworth and Wigan.

The remaining inner city areas eligible to receive compact funding are being encouraged to develop proposals. Funding will be made available to them from April 1990.

Low Pay, Yorkshire and Humberside

59. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he will introduce to eradicate the problem of low pay in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) on 16 May 1989, *Official Report* column *164*.

Picketing

62. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about picketing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Government receive various representations on all aspects of industrial relations law including matters relating to picketing.

Youth Training Scheme

65. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many YTS places in Scotland remained unfilled at the most recent date.

Mr. Nicholls: There were 13,000 unfilled YTS places in Scotland at the end of November 1989.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the costs of production of the YTS video entitled "YTS—Designed for You".

Mr. Nicholls: The YTS video "YTS—Designed for You" cost £30,000 to produce.

Factory and Agriculture Inspectors

74. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest number of factory and agriculture inspectors in the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 January 1990, 624·5 factory inspectors and 172 agricultural inspectors were in post in the Health and Safety Executive.

Multi-lingual Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff at his Department's offices in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough, speak (i) Urdu, (ii) Punjabi, (iii) Bengali, including the Sylheti dialect, (iv) Chinese, (v) Farsi, (vi) Hindi, and (vii) Gujerati.

Mr. Eggar: None of the Employment Department's staff in the jobcentres and unemployment benefit offices in Doncaster and Mexborough speaks any of the languages or dialects referred to.

Wage Rates

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the wage rates and cost of living rates *(a)* in Northamptonshire and *(b)* the county in the south-east region with the lowest rates.

Mr. Nicholls: Information is not available in the detail requested.

Small Businesses

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the actions taken by the Government since 31 December 1988 to encourage small and medium-sized businesses.

Mr. Eggar: *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* In 1989 the Government continued their efforts to create and foster a climate in which small businesses can flourish and to provide incentives for enterprise by minimising the burdens of taxation, regulation and red tape.

Last year's Budget raised the small companies' profit limit for corporation tax, the limit for marginal relief and the VAT registration threshold. The Companies Act 1989 enabled private companies to opt out of certain provisions of the Act which are of concern only to shareholders, by means of unanimous written resolutions and the agreement of shareholders.

In November 1989 improvements were announced in the conditions of the VAT cash accounting scheme, widening eligibility for small businesses.

Two booklets promoting good purchasing practice and equal opportunities in Government procurement for small firms were launched—"Think Big, Buy Small", aimed at Government purchasing officers, and "Tendering for Government Contracts".

There was a high level of demand for the Government's services to small firms, showing that they meet a real need. The services generally are described in the new report "Small Firms in Great Britain" issued by my Department last December. In 1989 the main developments were:

The launch of Business Growth Training, a major new package of training available for small business managers and their staff;

Improvements to the Enterprise Initiative, including greater flexibility under the Consultancy Initiatives, the relaunch of the Export Initiative, the introduction of the Managing into the 90s programme, and a second Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology (SMART). A special Action Guide to the Single Market for the smaller firm was also introduced; and

An increase in the limit for loans under the Loan Guarantee Scheme.

In addition the 1989 Employment Act has prepared the ground for the introduction of training and enterprise councils. They will be responsible for the delivery and development of training and other support services for small businesses and will be able to ensure that these meet the needs of local business communities.

Disabled People (Training)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements he is making in the establishment of training and enterprise councils to ensure that disabled people do not experience undue delays in receiving training.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 10 January 1990]:* Training and enterprise councils will set out their training proposals in their business plan. My Department will need to be satisfied that these proposals meet the training needs of the local community and that all clients including people with disabilities have ready access to training.

Written Answers to Questions

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TRANSPORT

Merchant Shipping

146. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of British merchant shipping capacity.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are encouraging signs that the worst of the decline in world shipping in recent years is over. British operators are among the most entrepreneurial and cost-effective and should be well placed to take advantage of the improved opportunities.

Hydrography

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the cost of hydrographic work carried out on behalf of his Department by *(a)* the Royal Navy and *(b)* the private sector;

(2) if he will list the number of marine surveys ordered by his Department for the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1989-90 the civil hydrographic survey programme is expected to cost about £6·3 million, of which about £2·1 million represents contracts let to the private sector, £2·8 million surveys undertaken by the Royal Navy survey flotilla, and £1·4 million work undertaken by the Royal Navy personnel in commercially chartered ships. The numbers of surveys undertaken in the last five years are 1985—21; 1986—18; 1987—21; 1988—20; 1989—15.

NAVTEX

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those countries whose NAVTEX is fully operational and those which are not, together with the implementation dates.

Mr. McLoughlin: NAVTEX services are fully operational in the following countries: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Cyprus, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and Yugoslavia.

NAVTEX services are operational in parts of, or under trial in, the following countries: Bulgaria, Canada, China, Egypt, France, United States of America and USSR.

NAVTEX services are planned in the following countries, with an indication of the implementation date, where known: Bahrain, Bermuda, Cameroon, German Democratic Republic, India, Israel, Italy (1990-93), Korea (August 1993), Japan, Spain (1990), Thailand and Uruguay.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that EEC countries implement the NAVTEX broadcast requirements.

Mr. McLoughlin: The United Kingdom, through its participation in the worldwide navigation warning system and membership of the International Maritime Organisation NAVTEX co-ordination panel, is actively encouraging the development of NAVTEX both within the EEC area of interest and on a worldwide basis.

Pilotage Commission

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Pilotage Commission to be wound up.

Mr. McLoughlin: For reasons beyond its control the Pilotage Commission is not yet able to complete the winding up of the former pilotage authorities' affairs. It is therefore not yet possible to say when the commission itself will be wound up. The Department and the commission are considering what can be done to expedite the process.

Horne Report

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has made of the effects of pot-holes and poor road standards upon cyclists; if he will reconsider his decision not to implement the Horne report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has not undertaken specific studies of this sort. It did publish a local transport note last June entitled "Making Way for Cyclists", which gives detailed guidance to local authorities and others on a range of planning, design and legal aspects of providing for cyclists, and emphasises the importance of proper inspections and maintenance.

King's Cross Railways Bill

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail about how it proposes to justify to him, for investment authorisation, expenditure on the works covered by the King's Cross Railways Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail's investment at King's Cross will need to be justified according to the normal criteria agreed between the Department and the board.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information British Rail has presented to him, for investment authorisation purposes, in relation to its anticipated revenues in connection with expenditure on the works contained in the King's Cross Railways Bill, in relation to *(a)* projected revenues from additional services on existing lines to King's Cross and *(b)* revenues from planned services on new lines for which parliamentary approval will be required and has yet to be sought; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail has not yet sought authorisation from the Secretary of State for its proposed investment at King's Cross.

Departmental Policies

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to assess the environmental friendliness of his Department's policies.

Mr. Atkins: The Department pays close attention to the environmental implications of its policies and many have a directly beneficial effect. For example, we are taking steps to control vehicle emissions; we build new roads to relieve congestion and bypass communities; and we are supporting massive investment in public transport. We shall be making an important contribution to the White Paper on the environment to be published later this year.

A5 Bypass

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is now able to say when he expects to announce the preferred route for the north-south A5 Dunstable bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Comments made during public consultation and the new national road traffic forecasts have made it necessary to reconsider our original proposals. Further consultation may be necessary, but we hope to announce a preferred route for the bypass by the autumn.

Severn Estuary

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest timetable for the construction of a second highway crossing of the Severn estuary.

Mr. Atkins: We are currently considering tenders and remain on course to provide the second crossing by the mid-1990s.

THE ARTS

Arts Funding

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will estimate the contribution to arts in the metropolitan area of *(a)* the Arts Council and *(b)* the London local authorities; upon what items this money is principally spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I am advised that in 1987-88, the last year for which complete records are available, the Arts Council's grants to arts bodies in the London area (excluding the national companies) was £26·7 million. This sum was spread across the entire spectrum of art forms: music, drama, dance, literature, and the visual arts. Figures for local authority spending on the arts are more difficult to isolate. The Policy Studies Institute, however, has estimated that spending by local authorities on the arts in London for 1988-89 totalled some £42 million, of which £28 million went to arts premises and promotions, and £14 million in grants to arts organisations.

Televised Performances

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has held with national opera houses and theatres on increasing the number of televised performances.

Mr. Luce: It is for the companies themselves to decide on these matters. It is, however, the policy of the Arts Council to encourage the televising of performances in order to promote access to the arts. In addition, many new operatic productions are now broadcast on the radio. Between the two media, there were 15 broadcast productions in 1989; nine from the royal opera house, and six for English national opera.

EDUCTION AND SCIENCE

National Curriculum

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science pursuant to his answer of 8 January, *Official Report*, col, *487*, what guidance he has issued to the National Curriculum Council about how much of a school's curriculum it should prescribe in its circulars to schools.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold: None. The Education Reform Act requires all maintained schools to provide a basic curriculum consisting of the national curriculum for all pupils of compulsory school age and religious education for all registered pupils at the school. Neither my right hon. Friend nor the National Curriculum Council has the power to prescribe what else is taught in schools, nor how the timetable is arranged.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on circular No. 6 of October 1989 from the National Curriculum Council on the subject of the whole curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received one representation concerning the place of religious education and worship in the whole curriculum.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to change the remit of the National Curriculum Council.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no plans to change the remit of the National Curriculum Council which is set out in section 14 (3), (5) and (6) of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any long-term plans to improve teacher remuneration.

Mr. Rumbold: The Government's policy is that teachers' pay should be such as to enable the maintained school system to recruit, retain and motivate sufficient teachers of the required quality, within what can be afforded.

Teacher Shortages

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are his Department's current figures for teacher shortages in England and Wales; and if he will set out his answer in tabular form giving details for individual local education authorities.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend gave on 21 December 1989 to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) at columns *353-55*. Data for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

WALES

Earnings

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the average earnings in the valley communities.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information is not available below county level.

Language Teachers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many qualified teachers there are in the high schools of the local education authorities in Wales of *(a)* Welsh, *(b)* German, *(c)* French, *(d)* Spanish, *(e)* Italian and *(f)* Latin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Provisional estimates of the numbers of secondary school language teachers holding a post A-level main subject qualification are shown in the table:

Subject	*Number of Teachers*
Welsh	1,100
German	300
French	1,000
Spanish	100
Italian	100
Classical Languages	200

Teachers possessing a qualification in a particular subject will not necessarily be teaching that subject. The figures are obtained from the Welsh secondary staffing survey conducted in February and March of 1989.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will call a conference of local education authorities' parent-teacher associations and teacher unions to consider the need to increase the number of qualified foreign language teachers in Welsh high schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. The future pattern of demand for language teachers can be clearly determined in the light of the provisions of the national curriculum.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he has taken to increase the number of qualified secondary teachers of *(a)* Welsh, *(b)* German, *(c)* French, *(d)* Spanish, *(e)* Italian and *(f)* Latin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The future demand for language teachers is being taken fully into account when setting the intakes to initial teacher training, in the revision of the criteria for initial teacher training courses and in planning the LEA in-service training grant scheme and education support grants.

Business Rate

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the levying of the uniform business rate in Wales on properties open for only part of the year as a result of seasonal trade.

Mr. Peter Walker: Such property will be liable for non-domestic rating for the days on which it is used for non-domestic purposes and is entered on a local non-domestic rating list. Property used for non-domestic purposes can include property which is open all the year around, and also property where paying guests are not admitted out of season but where rooms are maintained in preparation for non-domestic use in the next holiday season. Where, however, the off-season use becomes domestic (for example, where the proprietor's family occupies the property for domestic purposes), the property is not rateable and should be deleted from the rating list for that period.

Valuation of seasonally operated properties will take into account seasonal patterns of trade. The assessment of a hotel or guest house in an isolated tourist location can take into account the likelihood that winter trade may be minimal or non-existent. The pattern of trade is taken into account by the valuation officer in his valuation of a range of properties including hotels, guest houses, public houses and holiday cottages.

Occupiers of seasonally operated properties which are liable to rates for any period will have their rate liabilities calculated in accordance with the Welsh non-domestic rating multiplier for the year. For the financial year 1990-91 that multiplier has been set at 0·368, or 36·8p in the pound.

Mental Health Strategy

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements are under consideration for the all-Wales mental health strategy at the conclusion of the current 10-year programme.

Mr. Grist: We assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the all-Wales mental handicap strategy, as our all-Wales mental illness strategy was launched only last year and does not have a set 10-year programme. The Welsh chapter of the Government's White Paper "Caring for People" indicates that there will be a full review of service development and of the framework provided by the mental hanicap strategy in 1991-92. This review will help to inform consideration of future arrangements for mental handicap services.

A465

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the timetable for making the A465, the Heads of the Valleys road, a continuous dual carriage highway throughout its entire length.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There are no plans for dualling the Heads of the Valleys section of the A465. The position is being reviewed as part of the south Wales traffic study, which will be completed towards the end of 1990.

A470

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the timetable for the completion of the Pentrebach bypass, and other bypass work, to take the A470 round Merthyr Tydfil.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The A470 Pentrebach-Cefn Coed improvement is programmed to start in the period April 1991 to March 1994. Construction is expected to take two years.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average price paid for the following agricultural land in Wales during 1989 *(a)* lowland, *(b)* marginal and *(c)* hill land; what were the corresponding figures for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information is available only on the basis of land grade. The average price paid for agricultural land of five or more hectares in vacant possession is shown in the table:

Average land prices (£): Reported in 12 months ended September

	Grades 1 and 2	*Grade 3*	*Grades 4 and 5*
1979	2,593	2,368	1,607
1980	4,351	3,240	2,181
1981	4,504	3,117	2,027
1982	3,353	3,119	1,792
1983	3,002	3,443	2,079
1984	4,801	3,816	2,427
1985	5,512	3,705	2,070
1986	4,238	3,642	2,213
1987	3,292	3,171	2,196
1988	4,376	2,906	1,604
1989	5,065	3,680	3,627

Note: Grades 1, 2 and 3 approximate to the lowland areas, grades 4 and 5 to the less-favoured areas of marginal and hill land. There is a lag between agreeing a sale and reporting it which means that prices reported in the 12 months ended 30 September generally related to sales agreed in the previous calendar year.

ENVIRONMENT

Disabled People (Housing)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the need for purpose-built bungalows for disabled people.

Mr. Chope: No such estimates are made. Generally the Government favour the design of housing, of whatever kind, which is accessible to the disabled and convenient for them to use. We aim to enable people with disabilities to lead, as far as possible, an independent and active life without having to move to specialised accommodation or institutional care. New grant arrangements coming into effect in April will facilitate adaptation and improvement works to help those who become disabled to remain in their existing homes.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to prohibit the disposal of consumer durables containing chlorofluorocarbons to landfill.

Mr. Trippier: The Government have at present no plans to do so, although the Department of Trade and Industry has commissioned an intensive study of the problems associated with the use of CFCs which is being carried out by Coopers and Lybrand. Further action will be considered in the light of that report. In addition, various pilot schemes are being undertaken by individual local authorities, some in conjunction with industry.

EC Housing Ministers

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the meeting of EEC Housing Ministers held in Lille in December.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The meeting was arranged by the French Government with a view to establishing direct links between Housing Ministers from the EC member states. Almost all member states were represented, most at ministerial level, and discussions were cordial and productive. At the conclusion of the meeting it was unanimously agreed that similar meetings should be arranged annually, by the country holding the EC presidency for the second half-year, and that national Administrations should make the necessary arrangements to prepare for them.

Pollution

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by *(a)* location and *(b)* water authority the sites that suffered from toxic pollution due to blue-green algae, caused by phosphates and nitrogen from sewage and farming entering public reservoirs; and if any successful prosecutions have been made.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There were 53 sites in England where blooms of toxic blue-green algae were identified in 1989. The causes of the blooms have not yet been determined, but the National Rivers Authority is investigating the issue.

Drought Orders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by *(a)* water company and *(b)* location those areas where drought orders still remain in force in England and Wales.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The table lists, by water company area, the drought orders currently in force in England (and that part of Wales served by Severn Trent Water), the locality or water supply source affected by each order and its expiry date. Orders affecting the supply area of Welsh Water are a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

Water company area and locality or water supply source affected	*Date of expiry of Order*
WATER SERVICE COMPANIES	
Anglian	
Ely-Ouse River, Essex[1]	28 February 1990
North West	
Ullswater	31 January 1990
Bottoms and Teggsnose	31 March 1990
Lamaload	31 March 1990
Tytherington Boreholes	31 March 1990
Severn Trent	
Tittesworth	6 March 1990
Clywedog Reservoir[1]	18 March 1990
Buxton	21 March 1990
Derwent Valley Reservoirs, Ambergate	6 April 1990
Homesford, Little Eaton, Church Wilne	
Derby, Notts, Leicester	26 April 1990
Southern	
North and West Kent and West and East Sussex	20 January 1990
River Medway	31 March 1990
Kent Groundwater (No. 2)	31 March 1990
West and East Sussex	21 May 1990
Hardham (West Sussex)	31 March 1990
River Rother, Robertsbridge	31 March 1990
Plucks Gutter	31 March 1990
South West	
River Torridge	29 January 1990
Avon Reservoir	21 January 1990
River Tamar	4 February 1990

Water company area and locality or water supply source affected	*Date of expiry of Order*
River Tavy	26 January 1990
Venford Reservoir	4 February 1990
Devon and Cornwall	2 February 1990
River Axe, Whitford Bridge	10 February 1990
River Yealm	28 February 1990
Fernworthy Reservoir	28 February 1990
Colaton Raleigh Stream	23 February 1990
Challacombe Reservoir	22 February 1990
River Dart at Littlehempstead	28 February 1990
Upper Tamar Lake and Lower Tamar Lake	6 March 1990
Bude-Stratton Canal	7 March 1990
Leswidden Pool	19 April 1990
Yorkshire	
Harrogate area	6 April 1990
Hebden Valley and Withens Clough	18 April 1990
Pennine Reservoirs	13 April 1990
Bradford Reservoirs	12 April 1990
Underbank Reservoir	18 April 1990
River Wharfe	30 April 1990
River Hull	22 June 1990
Lindley Wood Reservoir	1 June 1990
STATUTORY WATER COMPANIES	
Eastbourne	
Eastbourne	22 February 1990
River Wallers, Haven	24 April 1990
Folkestone	
Folkestone	14 March 1990
Mid Kent	
Mid-Kent	25 January 1990
West Kent	
River Medway, Hartlake	4 February 1990

[1] Orders made on application of the National Rivers Authority.

War Memorials

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial assistance his Department has given to the joint project being carried out by the imperial war museum and the royal commission on the historical monuments of England towards the national inventory of war memorials.

Mr. Trippier: The proposed joint project by the imperial war museum and the royal commission on the historical monuments of England is being supported by grants from the Leverhulme Trust, the Western Front Association and the Imperial War Museum Trust. With this support, the museum and the royal commission expect to be able to meet the full cost without the need to seek any additional funding from the Department of the Environment or any other Government source. The royal commission's day-to-day operations are, of course, largely funded through the grant-in-aid from the Department, which in 1990-91 will be £6·07 million. The grant-in-aid in 1990-91 to the imperial war museum from the Office of Arts and Libraries will be £9·6 million.

Home Improvements

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in which 10 local authority areas in the United Kingdom the Government have provided the largest sums of money for home improvement since 1979.

Mr. Chope: The table shows those local authorities in England which, between the financial years 1981-82 and 1988-89, received the largest total amount of Exchequer contribution towards the cost of loan charges incurred by them in giving home improvement grants. Information for years prior to 1981-82 is not readily available. I refer my hon. Friend to the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland for information relating to the rest of the United Kingdom.

Local authority	*Total payment £ million*
Birmingham	69,640
Liverpool	61,475
Manchester	58,713
Bradford	39,970
Leicester	35,480
Wirral	35,229
Wandsworth	34,526
Nottingham	31,543
Hammersmith and Fulham	30,957
Sheffield	29,952

Public Footpaths and Bridleways

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make regulations under sections 150 and 151 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to provide for charges to be made for anything done by a local authority in connection with public footpaths and bridleways.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We are presently considering whether, and if so how, the enabling power in the Act might be used in respect of charging for public path orders. No regulations will be made without full consultation with interested parties.

Environmental Assessment Directive

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to whom his Department has let the contract for monitoring the implementation of the environmental assessment directive.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department is currently considering tenders which have been received from invited organisations.

Town and Country Planning

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he plans to introduce legislation to consolidate town and country planning legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: It is hoped to introduce consolidating legislation prepared by the Law Commission into Parliament shortly.

Bathing Water Survey

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the "Bathing Water Survey" (1989 results).

Mr. Trippier: The results are at present being collated. I expect to place a report in the Library shortly.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the use of ozone as a purifier of drinking water within the EEC.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand that ozone is used to some extent in most member states while it is used extensively in France.

Houseboats

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the desirability of introducing legislation to afford protection to those who reside on houseboats on canals and rivers; what recent representations he has received on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department occasionally receives letters from hon. Members and the public about security of moorings for houseboat residents. We have no plans to introduce legislation providing statutory security of tenure for them.

Migrant Households

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which data source is used to determine the number of households headed by migrants from the new Commonwealth and Pakistan in determining levels of rate support grants for local authorities.

Mr. Chope: The data source for the number of households headed by migrants from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan is the 1981 Census.

Homelessness

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to deal with the causes of homelessness.

Mr. Chope: The review of the homelessness legislation, published in November 1989, sets out the Government's proposals for tackling homelessness. Copies are in the Library.

Competitive Tendering, Kirklees

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made by Kirklees metropolitan council in implementing the provisions of the Local Government Act 1988 in relation to compulsory competitive tendering of *(a)* refuse collection, *(b)* cleaning of buildings, *(c)* other forms of cleaning, *(d)* catering in schools and welfare roles, other forms of catering, *(f)* grounds maintenance, and *(g)* repair and maintenance of vehicles; what are the projected annual savings as a result of competitive tendering for each of the services; and when the successful tenderers will commence operating each of the services.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The dates by which local authorities are required to expose their services to competition under the terms of part I of the Local Government Act 1988 are prescribed in the Local Government Act 1988 (Defined Activities) (Competition) (England) Regulations 1988 (SI 1988 No. 1371). The dates by which Kirklees metropolitan borough council is required to expose services to competition in this way, and the progress in implementing those requirements is as follows:

(a) refuse collection—the date prescribed was 1 January 1990. I understand that the contract was awarded to the authority's Direct Service Organisation (DSO) and commenced on that date. The authority estimate that net savings of approximately £½ million or 10 per cent. have been achieved;

(b) cleaning of buildings—the date prescribed is 1 January 1991 and I understand that the authority is taking steps to ensure that competition is introduced in accordance with that timetable;

(c) other cleaning—the date prescribed is 1 August 1990. I understand that the authority is currently considering applications from persons wishing to be included on its select tendering list and intends to commence the contract in accordance with the timetable;

(d) catering for purposes of schools and welfare—the date prescribed is 1 January 1992. I understand that the authority is taking steps to ensure that competition is introduced in accordance with that timetable;

(e) other catering—the date prescribed is 1 August 1991. I understand that the authority is taking steps to ensure that competition is introduced in accordance with that timetable;

(f) grounds maintenance—the regulations require that authorities should expose a first tranche of 20 per cent. of this work to competition by 1 January 1990, and subsequent tranches of 20 per cent. at six monthly intervals thereafter. I understand that the contract comprising the first 20 per cent. tranche was awarded to the authority's DSO and commenced on 1 January and that a further contract comprising an additional 20 per cent. tranche of work was also won by the DSO and will commence on 1 April. The authority estimate that no net savings will be achieved from those contracts;

(g) repair and maintenance of vehicles—the date prescribed in Regulations for competition was 1 August 1989. I understand that the contract was awarded to a private contractor and commenced on that date. The authority estimate that net savings of approximately £50k or 2 per cent. will be achieved.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the research projects commissioned by his Department in the past 10 years on rural matters, giving details of cost, publication and follow-up action on recommendations.

Mr. Trippier: Annual expenditure under the Department's countryside research programme and lists of publications resulting from it are given in the Department's periodic reports on research and development, published by HMSO, copies of which are in the Library. The individual research projects are listed in the annual surveys of research prepared for the countryside recreation research advisory group by the school for advanced urban studies at the university of Bristol, copies of which are obtainable from the school. It is usually left to the contractor to make the final report on a research project available to others on request. Such reports do not normally include recommendations for action.

Water Companies

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many employees of each of the recently privatised water companies became shareholders; and what percentages of the total work forces this represented.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A total of 37,488 employees, representing 85·57 per cent. of the eligible work force of the 10 companies, have successfully applied for shares in the companies under free and matching offers.

The figures for each company are as follows:

	Employees	Per cent. of workforce
Anglian	3,723	82·97
North West	6,379	87·09
Northumbrian	1,298	89·46
Severn Trent	6,486	88·53
Southern	2,453	80·56
South West	1,496	82·15
Thames	6,778	83·17
Welsh	3,280	85·73
Wessex	1,495	85·38
Yorkshire	4,100	88·59

In addition, some of the small number of employees not eligible for the free and matching offers will have successfully applied for shares, but exact figures could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Recycled Material

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to introduce a standard symbol to denote material which has been recycled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend announced on 9 January that, following consultation, the Government are to set up an advisory group to develop an eco-labelling scheme to reflect the key characteristics of a product's environmental impact from design to disposal or "cradle to grave". Thus the extent to which a product includes recycled material and can itself be recycled will be taken fully into account.

Business Rates

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of profits and trading surpluses the unabated post-revaluation uniform business rate represents for each standard region.

Mr. Chope: The information from which to make such estimates is not available.

Association of County Councils

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the centenary of the Association of County Councils to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 5 February to Friday 9 February.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to respond to the report of the Environmental Protection Agency of the United States of America in regard to the hazardous waste material which remains in Wath upon Dearne; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *111*.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the transfrontier shipment of toxic waste within the European Community.

Mr. Trippier: Transfrontier shipment of hazardous waste into, out of or within the Community is subject to control under existing EC directives. Discussion is taking place in Brussels to revise these directives and to implement the Basel convention on transfrontier shipment. It is the Government's view that international waste movements should be reduced to the environmentally justified minimum and those that are necessary should be subject to effective monitoring and control.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) of 23 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *16*, he will give the likely cost of creating a joint co-ordinating committee for the restyled nature conservancy bodies and the estimated annual cost of serving it; and what is the overall annual impact on public expenditure of the proposed reorganisation.

Mr. Trippier: Preparatory work to establish the new conservation agencies, including the joint committee, is likely to cost £1·5 million in 1990-91. Some additional costs are likely to be incurred thereafter in operating the new agencies and servicing the committee. It is too early to give an estimate of these costs, as several issues, such as the staff complement of each agency and the programme of the joint committee, are still under detailed consideration by the Government and the Nature Conservancy Council.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the siting of large toxic waste disposal plants in the middle of major conurbations.

Mr. Trippier: The siting of waste disposal facilities is determined by local planning authorities in dealing with relevant planning applications. Any planning appeal to my right hon. Friend would be considered in relation to the circumstances of the case.

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce a decision concerning the appeal by Thomas Brown of Whinfield farm, Pennington, against revocation of his waste disposal licence by Cumbria county council, submitted in summer 1988.

Mr. Trippier: Written representations have been completed on this appeal, lodged on 16 September 1988, and an official from the Department will make a site visit on 20 February. The Secretary of State hopes to be able to determine the appeal once he has received the site visit report.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet established the criteria he will use for community charge capping.

Mr. Chope: If authorities insist on budgeting excessively my right hon. Friend will not hesitate to cap

them, but it would not be right to speculate on the detailed operation of any charge-capping scheme which might be needed.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the measures announced by the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities in October 1989 to limit the increase in the amount of the community charge to not more than £3 per week will apply to charge payers in the London borough of Hillingdon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The community charge transitional relief scheme will apply in all charging authority areas. In properties containing one or two community charge payers, relief will be paid where there is a difference of £156 a year (£3 a week) or more between the assumed rates bill and the community charges which would be set if local authority spending were in line with the Government's assumptions for this purpose. For properties with more than two charge payers relief will be based on a comparison between the assumed rates bill and two assumed community charges and distributed equally among the chargepayers. Elderly and disabled people who were not former ratepayers or the partners of former ratepayers will be entitled to relief to reduce their assumed community charge to £156. As was made clear in the announcement, however, relief will not cover any excess of the actual community charge over the assumed community charge.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department is considering measures to ensure that his recommendation that seafarers out of the country for more than six months are eligible for exemption from community charge will be complied with; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Guidance on the treatment of Royal Navy personnel was contained in the community charge practice note No. 9 "UK Service Personnel". This advised that married seagoers might be regarded as having their residence with their family except for continuous absences in excess of six months, that single seagoers who are householders might be treated in the same way, and that single seagoers with no permanent home address need not be registered for the personal community charge except during periods of shore leave in excess of 61 days. My Department issued further guidance which suggested that merchant seamen might be treated in broadly the same way as their service counterparts. It is for community charges registration officers to determine liability taking into account all the circumstances of any individual case. Anyone dissatisfied with a determination may appeal to a valuation and community charge tribunal.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the poll tax for Nottingham.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* If each authority seeks to raise from its residents an amount consistent with its behaviour in 1989-90 and with total standard spending of £32·8 billion for 1990-91, its community charge will be that shown in table 2 of the revised exemplifications which my right hon. Friend laid in the Library on 11 January. In the case of Nottingham that would be £254.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish an up-to-date list of all the regulations in respect of the community charge setting out the area each regulation covers, the primary legislation giving rise to each regulation, the date each came into force, details of amendments to the regulations and the number of pages of each regulation.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The information is as follows:

	Date of coming into force
Regulations made under the Local Government Finance Act 1988	
1. The Personal Community Charge (Exemptions) Order 1989—2 pages —These cover persons in detention, the severely mentally impaired and patients in homes	7 April 1989
2. Valuation and Community Charge Tribunals Regulations 1989—15 pages Regulations 4 to 8 and 11 All others —These establish new appeal procedures	7 April 1989 1 May 1989
3. Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989—51 pages All except Regulations 4 and 5 Regulations 4 and 5 —These define the detailed powers of authorities for registration, billing and collection of the charge	7 April 1989 22 May 1989
4. Valuation and Community Charge Tribunals (Transfer of Jurisdiction) Regulations 1989—10 pages —These transfer powers of Local Valuation Panels to the new Tribunals	1 May 1989
5. Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) (Amendment) 1989—1 page —This inserts a line of print missing from item 3 above	19 May 1989
6. The Community Charge (Information Concerning Social Security) Regulations 1989—2 pages —These enable Social Security offices to supply CCROs with details on persons receiving income support	22 May 1989
7. The Community Charges (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1989—2 pages —This amends the wording of item 3 above on service of summonses and redefines co-owners	21 July 1989
8. The Community Charge Benefits (Transitional) Order 1989—4 pages —These allow for the transition from Housing Benefit to a scheme of community charge benefits	30 August 1989
9. The Community Charges (Cross-Border Information) Regulations 1989—1 page —These allow for specific information to be supplied between CCROs in England and Wales and Scotland	1 Sepember 1989
10. The Personal Community Charge (Students) Regulations 1989—5 pages —These define full-time students and the functions of certification offices	1 October 1989
11. The Collection Fund (England) Regulations 1989—7 pages	13 December 1989

	Date of coming into force
—These provide for the payments to and transfers from collection funds of charging authorities	
12. The Community Charges (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Regulations 1989—7 pages	28 December 1989
—These provide for local authorities to offer discounts and amend regulations on billing and the standard charge	
13. The Personal Community Charge (Relief) (England) Regulations 1990—10 pages	21 January 1990
—These provide for a transitional relief scheme	
Regulation made under the Social Security Act 1986	
14. The Community Charge Benefits (General) Regulations 1989—61 pages	
Regulations 1, 59-63, 92, 93	11 August 1989
All other regulations	1 April 1990
—These provide the operation of the community charge benefit system	
Regulations made under the National Health Service Act 1977	
15. The National Health Service (General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services) Amendment Regulations 1989—3 pages	25 August 1989
—These provide a procedure to identify and exempt severely mental impaired people	

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the sums raised by the London borough of Newham from its industrial and commercial ratepayers for the financial year 1989-90 *(a)* in total and *(b)* per expected payer of the community charge; and what is the sum he expects to pay the borough in respect of the uniform business rate for the financial year 1990-91 (i) in total and (ii) per community charge payer.

Mr. Chope: I estimate that in 1989-90 industrial and commercial ratepayers will pay about £32·2 million in non-domestic rates to the London borough of Newham. This is £201·64 per community charge payer. Under our proposals for 1990-91 the share of the non-domestic rate pool paid to Newham will be £46·7 million. This is £292·51 per chargepayer. The two figures are not directly comparable. The relevant population calculation for Newham is 159,694.

Dangerous Substances

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to ensure compliance with European Community quality objectives for list I dangerous substances in water; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Surface Waters (Dangerous Substances) (Classification) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 2286) came into force on 1 January 1990. These contain the quality standards for surface waters for each of the list I dangerous substances for which Communitywide standards have been set. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have now issued a notice to the National Rivers Authority under section 105 of the Water Act 1989 establishing these standards as statutory water quality objectives. They have also issued directions to the authority under section 146 of the Act requiring it, with effect from 8 January, to implement the quality standards in the regulations, to undertake the necessary monitoring and to supply the Secretaries of State with the appropriate information. Copies of the notice and direction to the National Rivers Authority have been placed in the Library.

Land Reclamation

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce a decision concerning the Crooklands Brow, Dalton-in-Furness, derelict land reclamation scheme.

Mr. Moynihan: The application for derelict land grant in respect of this scheme is currently receiving consideration. It is hoped to issue a decision within four weeks.

Council Grants

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what grant gain has resulted for the London boroughs of *(a)* Brent and *(b)* Ealing as a consequence of the reduction in the standard spending assessment of those boroughs; and on what basis the assessment was reduced.

Mr. Chope: The standard spending assessments (SSAs) for Brent and Ealing published on 11 January are lower overall than those published on 6 November 1989 primarily because of reductions in the highway maintenance SSA (in the case of Brent) and in the highway maintenance and capital financing SSAs (in the case of Ealing).

The increase in the estimated revenue support grant entitlements for Brent and Ealing for 1990-91 (before safety net adjustments) flowing from the reports laid on 11 January as compared with our 6 November proposals is £1·004 million and £5·763 million respectively. This is primarily attributable to changes in our figures for estimated population and for the Metropolitan police budget.

City of London Heliport

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to make an assessment of the noise impact upon the Palace of Westminster arising from helicopter movements using the proposed City of London heliport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 21 December 1989]:* No.

Refuse-Derived Fuel and Humus

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy in respect of grant aiding future research into refuse-derived fuel and refuse-derived humus; and what priority will be given to industry-led and funded research.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* A substantial programme funded by my Department of research into combustion of refuse derived fuel is drawing to a close. Industry has developed techniques for solid waste composting. The reclamation and recycling group set up by my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry is currently looking at barriers to the increased use of recycled compostibles.

Water Privatisation

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the water privatisation share issue.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Over 2·7 million applications for shares in the 10 water plcs were received. The public offers were nearly 5·7 times oversubscribed. After clawback of shares from institutional and overseas offers, almost 47 per cent. of the shares available were allocated to the public. Nearly 1·35 million registered customers applied for incentives and preference in their local company. We allocated to registered customers 57·5 per cent. of the shares available to the public.

The response from the public represents the second-highest level of applications for any privatisation. This is a privatisation that will bring benefits for the environment, for customers and for the 10 water plcs.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the record of the National Rivers Authority since it was established.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The NRA fully assumed its responsibilities on 1 September 1989. Since then regional rivers advisory committees, regional fisheries advisory committees and regional flood defence committees have been established in the 10 NRA regions together with regional advisory boards chaired by the regional board members. Priorities for future action are currently being set by the authority and will be set out in its corporate plan. The authority has already embarked on a number of reviews of policy areas. In addition, the authority has successfully prosecuted a number of offenders under its pollution control powers against offenders.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of times per year since 1979 that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution officials have inspected each of the following waste disposal sites *(a)* Rechem Incinerator, Pontypool, *(b)* Leigh Interest, Stubbers Green, Walsall, *(c)* Leigh Interests, Lumshill quarry, Matlock and *(d)* Leigh Interests, Killamarsh, Sheffield.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and its predecessors have inspected the Rechem incinerator at Pontypool at least 12 times in 1981 and in 1982 and between 15 and 18 times in each subsequent year. No inspections have been made of Lumshill quarry, Matlock by the inspectorate. The sites at Killamarsh and Walsall were inspected as follows:

	Killamarsh	*Walsall*
1981	23	—
1982	20	—
1983	8	1
1984	14	—
1985	30	—
1986	9	1
1987	13	—
1988	39	—
1989	26	1

Leigh Interests plc

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the plan by Leigh Interests plc to build a toxic waste incinerator at Kirk Sandall.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Various representations have been received from hon. Members and the public about this proposal which is to be the subject of a public local inquiry in April.

Thermally Stable Plastics

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what are the products of combustion from thermally stable plastics used in the medical industry during combustion in hospital-type incinerators;

(2) what studies have been carried out by his Department of the problems experienced by the combustion of plastic clinical waste in hospital incinerators within the United Kingdom;

(3) whether there is a requirement placed upon the suppliers of thermally stable plastics to provide a thermal analysis of their products to enable the combustion characteristics of such plastics to be understood.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The products will include carbon dioxide and water and may include hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, sulphur dioxide, metal oxides and halides and a range of organic materials. Some of these chemicals may be removed from the exhaust gases by scrubbing equipment. Because the quantities of plastics used in the medical industry are increasing and the compositions are changing, my Department has placed a research contract with the Warren Spring Laboratory to study combustion of them. The chemical compositions of these plastics are well known and no purpose would be served by requiring suppliers to provide thermal analyses.

Tin Cans

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will consider prohibiting mixing of metals in tin cans where consumer safety does not require it, in order to allow recycling.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

No. The mixed composition of some cans does not inhibit their recycling. Indeed, the aluminium contained in the ends of certain steel cans is beneficial to current reprocessing operations.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list in rank order, by number of questions, the 20 right hon. and hon. Members who asked the most parliamentary questions during the 1988-89 Session.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The information is as follows:

		Number
1.	Mr. Ron Davies	775
2.	Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas	717
3.	Mr. Graham Allen	707
4.	Mr. Martin Redmond	699
5.	Mr. Harry Cohen	661
6.	Mr. Tony Banks	613
7.	Mr. Paul Flynn	519
8.	Dr. David Clark	483
9.	Mr. Jack Ashley	456
10.	Mr. Austin Mitchell	445
11.	Mr. Archy Kirkwood	443
12.	Mr. Frank Dobson	439
13.	Mr. Nicholas Bennett	426
14.	Mr. David Hinchliffe	398
15.	Mr. Jim Sillars	368
16.	Mr. Henry McLeish	347
17.	Mr. Jimmy Wray	342
18.	Mr. Jeremy Corbyn	337
19.	Mr. Barry Jones	327
20.	Mr. Tam Dalyell	326

Note: The figures include oral, written and private notice questions but exclude supplementary questions and unreached oral questions asking the Prime Minister to list her engagements.

Select Committees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the the Lord President of the Council what extra seating facilities for the general public are being made available, following the admission of television cameras to Select Committee meetings; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The arrangements for televising Select Committees are at an experimental stage and I understand that the two temporary camera stands can take up space for some eight seats previously available to the general public. Every effort is made to make maximum use of space for those persons wishing to attend sittings of Select Committees and I understand that, in some cases, Chairmen have agreed to make available for the public parts of the Committee Room previously available to hon. Members.

The Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House will consider the availability of seating in Committee Rooms during its review of the experimental period.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Shops Act 1950

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make it his policy to give a favourable response to any application by a local authority for his fiat to a relator action in pursuance of its statutory duty to enforce the Shops Act 1950.

The Attorney-General: The statutory duty of local authorities to enforce the Shops Act 1950 is not subject to the consent of the Attorney-General. Local authorities act independently in the exercise of the duty.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Attorney-General what *(a)* assistance or *(b)* guidance he is proposing to give local authorities on the taking of measures to secure compliance with the Shops Act 1950 in the light of the recent decision of the European Court of Justice on 23 November.

The Attorney-General: Section 71 of the Shops Act 1950 places a clear duty on local authorities to enforce the provisions of the Act. That duty has not been altered by the judgment of the European Court of Justice in case 145/88.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received from the chairman of the Keep Sunday Special Campaign on the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950 in the light of the European Court decision on 23 November; if he will publish his response in the *Official Report*; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The chairman of the Keep Sunday Special Campaign asked to see me with a group of trade representatives from the retail trade. I found the meeting helpful. It was useful to hear at first hand the problems of the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950 as they are perceived by some members of the trade.

It is now for the domestic courts to apply the judgment of the European Court of Justice in case 145/88. Parliament has conferred the responsibility for enforcing the legislation on local authorities and I am not persuaded that it is appropriate for me to take an initiative on either a local or a national basis at present.

Ko Hsuan School

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General if he will investigate the charitable status of Ko Hsuan school in north Devon; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have caused investigations to be made and can inform my hon. Friend that the Ko Hsuan school in north Devon is not a registered charity.

Accident Compensation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list by category the United Kingdom's accident compensation payment laws, when they were last brought up to date in line with inflation; and if he intends a further update in line with the current rate of inflation.

The Attorney-General: With the exception of the statutory provisions relating to damages for bereavement under the Administration of Justice Act 1982, which apply in England and Wales and Northern Ireland, it is not clear to what provisions the hon. Member may be referring, and there is, therefore, no further specific information which I am able to give. As to the position in relation to bereavement damages, I refer him to the reply which I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 12 January 1990 at column *774*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Four Winds Park (Flooding)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has received any complaints about flooding at the rear gardens of dwellings at Four Winds park, Castlereagh; what proposals he has to remove the cause of this flooding; what works were carried out at the location of this flooding during the month of December 1989; what assessment he has made of the dangers to young children living at Four Winds park due to this flooding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A complaint was received by the Department of Agriculture on 16 December 1989. Flooding was caused by an obstruction in a culverted section of the watercourse to the rear of the dwellings and the Department deployed pumps to alleviate the flooding and removed debris from the entrance to the culvert.

Responsibility for the efficiency of the watercourse lies with riparian occupiers. The culvert, which in any case is inadequate to discharge storm flows, was installed without the consent of the Department and in 1986 residents were asked to have it upgraded in size: householders will again be advised of their responsibilities.

Telecommunications

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what groups comprise the task force established in April 1989 by the Department of Economic Development to promote awareness of, and stimulate demand for, the new telecommunications services as a result of the launch of the STAR programme;

(2) what steps have been taken by the task force established in April 1989 by the Department of Economic Development to promote awareness of and stimulate demand for the new telecommunications services as a result of the launch of the STAR programme.

Mr. Needham: The STAR task force comprises representatives of the Department of Economic Development, the Industrial Development Board, the Local Enterprise Development Unit, the Technology Board for Northern Ireland, Queen's university of Belfast and the university of Ulster. To date £328,360 of grant aid from the European regional development fund has been committed to 10 projects in Northern Ireland aimed at promoting awareness and use of the new telecommunications infrastructure. These cover promotional seminars, feasibility studies and demonstration projects. Additional projects are being developed.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services has to establish an institute for those suffering from cystic fibrosis similar to the one in Peto in Hungary.

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand that conductive education as practised in the Peto institute in Budapest is not appropriate for the treatment of cystic fibrosis.

However, the Government have agreed to contribute to the funding of a new international institute to be established in Hungary. Detailed discussions with the Hungarian Government on this project are continuing and it would not be appropriate to take decisions on proposals for similar provision in Northern Ireland until those discussions are concluded.

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will announce the membership of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope: Mr. Speaker is the chairman of the Boundary Commission. The other members are as follows:

Members	*Appointed by*
Deputy Chairman	
The Hon. Mr. Justice Higgins	The Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland
Members	
Mr. P. G. Duffy	The Secretary of State
Mr. D. J. Clement	The Secretary of State

Wounded Soldiers (Compensation)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the sums payable in compensation to officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers wounded on service in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope: They depend in each case on the seriousness of the injuries received.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums are payable in compensation to the families of officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers killed on service in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope: They depend in each case on the amount of pecuniary loss suffered and expenses actually and necessarily incurred by the families as a result of the victim's death.

Action for Community Employment

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of ACE placements in each district council area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Following is the information:

Action for Community Employment (ACE) Placements in each District Council area in Northern Ireland as at 5 January 1990
The numbers of filled places in each District Council area are—

District Council	*Number*
Belfast	3,452
North Down	185
Lisburn	479
Ards	210
Down	211
Castlereagh	153
Carrickfergus	207
Larne	121
Ballymena	209
Antrim	202
Moyle	132
Coleraine	224
Magherafelt	247
Ballymoney	171
Newtownabbey	353
Cookstown	171
Dungannon	391
Armagh	281
Banbridge	127
Craigavon	371
Newry and Mourne	648
Derry	1,050
Limavady	185
Strabane	307
Fermanagh	316

District Council	Number
Omagh	255
Total	10,658

Youth Training

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of youth training placements in each district council area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, the table shows that 10,184 full-time training places, broken down by job market area, were occupied at 29 December 1989. In addition, 2,415 young people were receiving employment with training under YTP work scheme across the province at the same time.

Youth training programme full-time training

Job market	Occupied places at 29 December 1989
Bangor	404
Lisburn	462
Newtownards	157
Belfast	3,328
Antrim	165
Carrickfergus	148
Larne	137
Magherafelt	172
Ballymena	544
Ballymoney	135
Coleraine	277
Limavady	145
Londonderry	1,153
Strabane	191
Armagh	85
Cookstown	81
Dungannon	197
Enniskillen	227
Omagh	395
Portadown	345
Ballynahinch	86
Banbridge	102
Downpatrick	192
Kilkeel	1
Lurgan	243
Newcastle	84
Newry	728
Total	10,184

Roads

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount allocated for *(a)* major works and *(b)* minor works by the Department of the Environment's roads service to each of the district offices in each division of the Northern Ireland roads service in each year since 1985.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Allocations for major works and minor works are primarily made on a divisional basis as follows:

£ thousand

Financial year		Roads service headquarters	Ballymena	Belfast	Coleraine	Craigavon	Downpatrick	Omagh
1985-86	Major works	612	906	3,154	757	1,434	985	1,568
	Minor works	—	1,108	1,045	1,237	1,351	1,367	1,164
1986-87	Major works	416	1,014	3,268	1,505	1,804	1,092	879
	Minor works	—	1,090	1,706	1,689	1,358	1,537	1,061
1987-88	Major works	690	1,071	3,169	1,821	1,784	890	793
	Minor works	—	1,341	1,480	1,271	1,174	1,401	1,382
1988-89	Major works	1,755	3,063	1,999	986	1,844	1,827	694
	Minor works	—	1,078	1,399	1,147	1,057	1,307	1,306
1989-90[1]	Major works	119	1,830	7,839	1,425	1,569	2,215	3,107
	Minor works	—	1,305	1,593	1,416	1,399	1,358	1,524

[1] To 11 January 1990.

Note:

The roads service headquarters expenditure was mainly in respect of specific major works handled centrally rather than divisionally.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed this case with the assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire, Mr. Shaw. However, Home Office officials have maintained close contact with the Police Complaints Authority, which is supervising Mr. Shaw's investigations into the West Midlands serious crime squad. We will consider carefully whether anything emerges from this investigation which might cast doubt on the safety of the convictions of the Birmingham Six.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the investigations into the Birmingham Six to be concluded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering very carefully the further material which has been presented to him by a solicitor on behalf of the Birmingham Six, and will decide as soon as possible whether it justifies any intervention on his part.

Bingo Clubs

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to exclude bingo clubs from section 42 of the Gaming Act to allow them to advertise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Licensed bingo clubs already advertise freely as social clubs, and specific games of bingo, and certain prizes in them, are already advertised on the front of club premises. The principal effect of section 42 of the Gaming Act 1968 on bingo clubs is to prohibit the wider advertising of the specific locations of the clubs as places where gaming takes place. We have informed the Bingo Association of Great Britain (BAGB) that we cannot accept its campaign for the complete removal of the controls on the advertising of bingo clubs, but that it is open to them to resume discussions with the Gaming Board for Great Britain on the scope, if any, for some relaxation of the controls.

Boundary Commissions

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement of progress on the work of the boundary commissions on parliamentary constituencies; and when he expects the new boundaries to take effect.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The boundary commissions have a duty to keep the distribution of seats under continuous review. They are also required to present reports on the whole country 10 to 15 years after their previous report. The English commission's next such report is due between 1993 and 1998. I understand that the commission is likely to begin work in 1991. At present the commission is reviewing the Buckingham and Milton Keynes constituencies; revised draft proposals were published in November 1989, and in due course it will report. New parliamentary constituency boundaries come into effect at the general election following Parliament's approval of the commission's recommendations and the making of an Order in Council.

Nuclear Bunkers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by local authority, how many nuclear bunkers have been built or provided by local authorities to date; and how many additional bunkers are being planned.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 18 December 1989 at columns *18-19*.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many retail outlets in England and Wales have been prosecuted for trading on Sundays during each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to secure widespread agreement to a reform of the existing law.

Mr. Mellor: Figures are not yet available for 1989. Those for the previous four years 1985-88 show that the number of prosecutions for Sunday trading offences in England and Wales were 647, 724, 646 and 536 respectively. The Government accepted the findings of the Auld committee that there was no satisfactory solution short of total deregulation. Since the defeat of the Shops Bill, the Government have made clear that they are prepared to consider reform short of total deregulation if a solution can be found which is widely accepted, enforceable, practicable and likely to command a parliamentary majority. No such solution has yet emerged.

Bail Lodging Places

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will undertake a review of the number of bail lodging places since the coming into force of the Social Security Act 1988.

Mr. John Patten: I see no need for such a review at the moment in the light of other measures we are already taking to increase the accommodation available for bailees. The target for the bail hostel development programme has been considerably increased to 1,000 new places by April 1993. Planned expansion in bail information schemes should allow the number of courts being served to increase from the current 45 to 100 courts by April 1992. We are also examining ways of increasing accommodation in the community for bailees and how bail information schemes and accommodation networks can best be developed.

Prostitution

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many men were convicted of kerb crawling in each of the last five years at *(a)* the South Western magistrates court and *(b)* courts in England and Wales;

(2) how many men were sent to prison for *(a)* kerb crawling and *(b)* living on immoral earnings in each of the last five years by the South Western magistrates court;

(3) how many men were sent to prison for *(a)* living on immoral earnings and *(b)* kerb crawling by courts in England and Wales in each of the last five years;

(4) how many times the maximum fine has been imposed on men convicted *(a)* at the South Western magistrates court and *(b)* courts in England and Wales of kerb crawling in each of the last five years;

(5) how many women were convicted of soliciting *(a)* at the South Western magistrates court and *(b)* in England and Wales during each of the last five years.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the tables:

Persons found guilty and sentenced for kerb crawling and prostitution

Table 1

Males convicted of kerb crawling

	England and Wales			South Western magistrates court		
	Convictions	*Immediate custody*	*Number fined maximum*[1]	*Convictions*	*Immediate custody*	*Number fined maximum*[1]
[2]1986	163	—	—	—	—	—
1987	275	—	—	—	—	—
1988	517	—	—	36	—	—

[1] The maximum fine is £400.
[2] The offence was introduced by the Sexual Offences Act 1985.

Table 2

Males found guilty of living on immoral earnings

	England and Wales		South Western Magistrates court	
Year	*Found guilty*	*Immediate custody*	*Found guilty*	*Immediate custody*
1984	29	11	—	—
1985	25	8	1	—
1986	24	7	1	—
1987	16	7	—	—
1988	29	11	—	—

Table 3

Females convicted of soliciting

Year	*England and Wales*	*South Western Magistrates court*
	Convicted	*Convicted*
1984	8,595	402
1985	9,159	579
1986	9,091	288
1987	8,171	399
1988	8,829	226

Planting of Evidence

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of alleged planting of evidence were made last year against the police in England and Wales; and how many of these resulted in prosecutions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Such information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will bring forward amendments to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 in order to guard against the planting of evidence on suspects by police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Such conduct, if proved, already constitutes an offence under the police discipline code, and I see no justification for amending the Act along the lines suggested.

Police Complaints Authority

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the findings of the Hertfordshire police, acting on behalf of the Police Complaints Authority, in the series of cases relating to PC Judd, and other officers, in Notting Hill in 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. I understand that the report of the investigation carried out under the supervision of the authority is under consideration by the authority. Home Office Ministers have no role in the process.

Message Switch Systems

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by region, the sites of all new message switch systems that have been installed in local authority emergency centres.

Mr. John Patten: As at 31 December 1989, emergency centres in the following local authorities have received the equipment:

Region 2

Cleveland
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees.

Durham
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Chester-le-Street, Derwentside, Durham, Easington, Teesdale.

Humberside
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Beverley, Cleethorpes, East Yorkshire, Glanford, Great Grimsby.

North Yorkshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Scarborough, Selby.

Northumberland
County Main and the following districts: Alnwick, Tynedale.

Tyne and Wear
The following districts: North Tyneside, Sunderland.

West Yorkshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees

Region 3

Derbyshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Chesterfield, High Peak, Derbyshire Dales

Leicestershire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Blaby, Harborough, Hinckley and Bosworth, Leicester, Melton, Rutland

Lincolnshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Lincoln, North Kesteven, South Kesteven

Northamptonshire

County Main and Standby and the following districts: Daventry, Northampton, Wellingborough

Nottinghamshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark, Nottingham

Region 4
Bedfordshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Luton, Mid Bedfordshire, North Bedfordshire, South Bedfordshire

Cambridgeshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, South Cambridgeshire

Essex
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea, Tendring, Thurrock, Uttlesford

Hertfordshire
County Main and the following districts: East Hertfordshire, St. Albans

Norfolk
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Breckland, Great Yarmouth

Suffolk
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Babergh, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, St. Edmundsbury

Region 5
London
South West Group and the following boroughs: Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, City of London, Havering, Kingston upon Thames, Richmond upon Thames

Region 6
Berkshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Bracknell, Newbury, Reading, Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham

Buckinghamshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Chiltern, Milton Keynes, South Bucks, Wycombe

East Sussex
County Main and the following districts: Brighton, Hove, Lewes, Rother, Wealden

Hampshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, Eastleigh, Fareham, Hart, Havant, New Forest, Portsmouth, Rushmoor, Southampton, Test Valley, Winchester

Isle of Wight
County Main and Standby

Kent
County Main and the following districts: Dover, Gillingham, Gravesham, Medway, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale, Thanet, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells

Oxfordshire
County Main and the following districts: Cherwell, Oxford, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire

Surrey
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley, Woking

West Sussex
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Adur, Arun, Chichester, Horsham, Mid Sussex, Worthing

Region 7
Cornwall
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Caradon, North Cornwall, Penwith

Devon
County Main and Standby and the following districts: East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, Plymouth, Teignbridge, Torbay

Dorest
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Bournemouth, Christchurch, East Dorset, Poole, Purbeck, West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland

Gloucestershire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Cheltenham, Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Tewkesbury

Somerset
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Taunton Deane

Wiltshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Kennet, North Wiltshire, Salisbury, West Wiltshire

Region 8
Clwyd
County Main and Standby and the following district: Colwyn

Dyfed
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Carmarthen, Llanelli

Gwent
County Standby

Gwynedd
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Aberconwy, Ynys Môn

Powys
County Main and Standby and the following district: Brecknock

South Glamorgan
County Main and the following district: Cardiff

West Glamorgan
County Main and Standby

Region 9
Hereford and Worcester
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Leominster, Redditch, Worcester, Wyre Forest

Shropshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Shrewsbury and Atcham, South Shropshire

Staffordshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Staffordshire Moorlands

Warwickshire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Rugby, Stratford-on-Avon

West Midlands
County Main and the following districts: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Wolverhampton

Region 10
Cheshire
County Main and Standby and the following district: Vale Royal

Cumbria
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Allerdale, Barrow in Furness, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden

Lancashire
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Blackburn, Blackpool, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster, Preston, Ribble Valley, Rossendale, South Ribble, West Lancashire

Greater Manchester
County Main and Standby and the following districts: Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Stockport, Trafford

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the manufacturers which have installed message switch equipment for local authority emergency centres; and what assessment has been made of their relative merits.

Mr. John Patten: The equipment is being supplied and installed by Chernikeeff Telecommunications Ltd. Installations are subject to technical acceptance by Home Office engineering staff.

South Yorkshire Police

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of additional posts applied for by South Yorkshire police authority since 1980; how many he has approved in this period; what was the basis on which he declined to accept the totals requested; and what assessment he has made of the effects of manpower levels on *(a)* morale and *(b)* crime prevention in South Yorkshire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Applications have been made and approvals given in the years set out in the table.

Year	*Posts applied for*	*Posts approved*
1980-81	278	120
1983-84	[1]54	—
1985-86	9	—
1986-87	213	50
1987-88	52	20
1988-89	50	20
1989-90	50	27
1990-91	50	[2]20

[1] Letter from the Chief Constable rather than from the police authority.
[2] Approved subject to the police authority confirming willingness to meet its share of the cost.

Applications have been considered within the limits of the police growth which is affordable year on year, and with advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on the evidence of need and the ability to release police posts by recruiting civilian staff. We are not aware of any morale or crime prevention considerations which would justify different treatment of the police authority's manpower applications.

Refugees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to assist refugees arriving at Heathrow and Gatwick airports who are without *(a)* food and *(b)* money.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In October we agreed in principle to Home Office grant being made available to strengthen the voluntary sector assistance given to asylum seekers arriving at Heathrow and Gatwick who have no other means of support. An emergency fund to provide destitute asylum seekers with food and initial accommodation is now operated by the refugee arrivals project and the Refugee Council and the need for additional staff and strengthened reception arrangements is under consideration.

Gallows

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if gallows are still kept at any prison in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor: One set of gallows is kept at Her Majesty's prison, Wandsworth.

John McCarthy

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from or on behalf of the Friends of John McCarthy, with respect to their ineligibility for charitable status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have received no representations. I understand that in June 1988 the Charity Commission had correspondence about the question of charitable status with solicitors acting on behalf of the Friends of John McCarthy.

Betting Offices

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when and how he intends to conduct the deregulation review of the opening hours of licensed betting offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The opening hours of licensed betting offices would be likely to be among the matters considered by an inquiry into the financing of horse and greyhound racing, since the racing and betting industries are interlinked. My right hon. and learned Friend is at present considering whether or not to establish such an inquiry. If in due course it seems right to conduct separately the review of betting office opening hours, the review will itself be conducted within the Government's policy on gambling, with no prior assumption about whether or not the hours should be varied, and in consultation with outside interests, including, for example, organisations representative of off-course and on-course bookmakers, betting office employees, horse racing and greyhound racing, the betting office licensing authorities, the police, the local authorities and those concerned with the study of gambling.

Animal Procedures Committee

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make further appointments to the animal procedures committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Following his appointment as the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, the chairman of the committee, Professor David Williams, has resigned from 31 December 1989. I am pleased to be able to announce that Lord Nathan has agreed to succeed him.

I am pleased to be able to announce further that Professor Barry Bridges, of Queen's university, Belfast; Dr. Fiona Broughton-Pipkin, of the Queen's medical centre, Nottingham; Dr. Susan Iversen, of Merck Sharp and Dohme Research Laboratories; and Professor Michael Spyer, of the Royal Free Hospital medical school, London, have also accepted appointments as members of the committee.

I should like to place on record my appreciation of the excellent way in which Professor Williams has chaired the committee since its formation following the passage of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. I am grateful to Lord Nathan and the other new members for agreeing to serve on this committee.

PRIME MINISTER

National Trust Silver

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Prime Minister how much National Trust silver she has at Downing street; and when she intends to return the 20 pieces to Belton house, near Grantham, for the benefit of the nation.

The Prime Minister: There are 22 pieces of National Trust silver on loan to 10 Downing street from Belton house. This will be returned as and when requested by the National Trust.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates representations were made, and to whom, in respect of the drums of toxic waste currently in the constituency of Wentworth which are to be returned to the United States of America.

Mr. Maude: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has been in close touch on this subject with the United States Environment Protection Agency since July 1989, most recently on 3 January 1990. Similarly, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of the Environment have been in contact with the United States embassy in London and a representative of the embassy was invited to call on the FCO for talks on 22 December.

Hong Kong

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people emigrated from Hong Kong in each of the years from 1980 to date; and how many of these were heads of households.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* According to Hong Kong Government statistics, the estimated figures for emigration were as follows:

	Number
1980	22,400
1981	18,300
1982	20,300
1983	19,800
1984	22,400
1985	22,300
1986	19,000
1987	30,000
1988	45,800
1989	42,000

It is not possible to state how many emigrants were heads of household.

EMPLOYMENT

New Businesses

143. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new businesses were started over the past year.

Mr. Eggar: In 1988, the latest year for which figures have been published, the net increase in the number of VAT-registered businesses was 64,000, an average of just over 1,200 per week. This was the net result of 230,000 new registrations and 166,000 deregistrations.

ENERGY

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has received details from area boards of how many non-nuclear projects have sought to be included within the non-fossil fuel obligation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has been informed of nearly 300 such applications. This is a very encouraging response.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of the national budget in each of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries is spent on Government-funded research into renewable energy sources.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The table sets out the percentage of the national budget in each of the OECD countries spent on Government-funded research, development and demonstration into renewable energy sources in 1988, the latest year for which information is available. The information was derived from published OECD reports (Energy Policy and Programmes of IEA Countries: 1988: OECD Outlook, December 1989; and OECD Main Economic Indicators, December 1989).

Renewables expenditure as a percentage of total Government expenditure

	Percentage
Canada	0·01
United States	0·01
Japan	0·01
Austria	0·01
Belgium	0·01
Germany	0·02
Greece	0·02
Italy	0·01
Netherlands	0·02
Norway	0·01
Portugal	0·01
Spain	0·01

	Percentage
Sweden	0·02
Switzerland	0·03
United Kingdom	0·01

Note: Data on renewables expenditure are not available for Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, France, Ireland, Finland, and Turkey.

North Sea

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the extent of operations in the North sea, British section, by South African-owned or controlled companies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Two South African-owned companies hold small interests in a total of four United Kingdom offshore petroleum production licences.

Plutonium

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his policy towards the control of the transportation of plutonium *(a)* by air, and *(b)* by sea from Sellafield to its major customers in Japan and West Germany.

Mr. Baldry: The transport of plutonium is covered by stringent international regulations. Transport options for returning the plutonium arising from the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel at THORP are still under consideration. Before any decision is taken, all necessary safety and security aspects will be carefully considered.

HEALTH

Medical Instruments (Imports)

144. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of medical instruments supplied by imports.

145. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of medical instruments supplied by imports.

Mr. Freeman: About 50 per cent. The United Kingdom remains a net exporter of medical equipment.

NHS Reform

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the area health authorities where members have taken a vote to consider the proposals for opting-out by hospitals in their area; and what were the results obtained.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has not sought or recorded the results or deliberations by health authorities to date on self-governance and other NHS review issues. Formal applications for NHS trust status will not be invited until Parliament has given approval to the necessary legislation. At that time health authorities will have an opportunity to comment on individual applications for trust status as part of the formal consultation process.

Chickens

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of frozen whole chickens examined by the central public health laboratory and the percentage of them affected by salmonella in each year since 1980.

Mr. Freeman: The results of two surveys carried out by the food hygiene laboratory and division of enteric pathogens of the public health laboratory service on the frequency of salmonella in uncooked frozen chickens purchased by environmental health officers from supermarkets, butchers and other shops in north and west London are given in the table. There is no reason to believe that the samples were unrepresentative of the national picture.

Year	Number examined	Number positive	Percentage positive
1979-80	100	79	79
1987	101	65	64

Illegal Abortions

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of illegal abortions based on statistics for maternal deaths, admissions to hospital following septic abortion, prosecutions for procuring illegal abortion and cases known to the police for the periods from 1960 to 1967, 1968 to 1975, 1976 to 1983 and 1984 to the most recent date.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Not all the information is available in the form requested. No meaningful estimate of illegal abortions can be derived from the available statistics on maternal deaths or treatment in hospital for septic abortion.

The available information on maternal deaths for the period requested is as follows:

Number of deaths from criminal abortion in England and Wales

	Number
1961-63	77
1964-66	98
1967-69	74
1970-72	37
1973-75	10
1976-78	4
1979-81	1
1982-84	nil

Source: Report on Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in England and Wales.

Preliminary investigation shows no evidence of deaths for the period 1985-87.

Information on prosecutions for procuring illegal abortions and cases known to the police are matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The available information is given in the table.

	Offences recorded by the police for procuring illegal abortion	Prosecutions for procuring illegal abortion
1960	221	44
1961	245	59
1962	406	90

	Offences recorded by the police for procuring illegal abortion	Prosecutions for procuring illegal abortion
1963	239	62
1964	271	80
1965	184	77
1966	208	65
1967	314	61
1968	247	75
1969	257	57
1970	212	52
1971	80	34
1972	62	26
1973	36	11
1974	21	8
1975	14	1
1976	9	3
1977	11	4
1978	7	3
1979	3	1
1980	2	3
1981	3	—
1982	3	—
1983	5	1
1984	1	3
1985	4	2
1986	3	1
1987	3	2
1988	3	6

Self-governing Hospitals

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will describe the process by which a hospital decides to show an interest in becoming self-governing.

Mrs. Bottomley: The Government's proposals for enabling hospitals and other NHS units and services to achieve NHS trust status are set out in the NHS and Community Care Bill. The process was also described in our White Paper "Working for Patients" CM 555, and NHS review working paper 1—"Self-Governing Hospitals" published earlier last year. More details were also given in "Self-governing Hospitals: An initial guide" published last July, copies of which are available in the Library.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the annual cost to the National Health Service of treating smoking-related diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: It is not possible to estimate these costs accurately, but they may be of the order of £500 million each year. This figure relies on the proportion of mortality from different diseases attributed to smoking. These "attributability factors" are applied to the NHS expenditure on treating these diseases to derive a cost for smoking to the NHS.

Welfare Milk

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will reconsider the changes in the welfare milk scheme due to take effect on 28 January.

Mr. Freeman: No. The decision to implement the revised price structure was taken after an extensive period of negotiation, consultation and consideration. It takes account of the fact that the Department is a major buyer of liquid milk and reflects our policy of securing value for money in Government purchasing. The entitlement of beneficiaries to free welfare milk is not affected by this change.

Hospital Beds

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the various categories of hospital beds there are at present; and how many there were for the equivalent categories 10 years ago.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table.

Average daily number of available beds by sector NHS Hospitals, England, 1979 and 1988-89

	1979	1988-89
All specialties	361,670	282,937
Acute	148,725	123,484
Geriatric	55,139	51,042
Mental illness	89,045	62,999
Mental handicap	50,122	30,045
Maternity (General Practice and Obstetric)	18,640	15,367

Sources: 1979 SH3 return, 1988-89 KHO3 return.

Ambulance Dispute

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will hold further talks with National Health Service management on ways of ending the ambulance men's dispute.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Ministers meet National Health Service management regularly in order to discuss the ambulance dispute.

Hospital Grounds (Development)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital grounds have been sold for development during 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information held by the Department does not differentiate between sales of hospital grounds and sales of hospital buildings nor between property sold for development or non-development.

Total sales of NHS properties in England are as follows:

	Acres realising	£ million
1985-86	1,085	84·9
1986-87	861	149·0
1987-88	886	204·0
1988-89	1,028	273·3

All proceeds are retained by health authorities for reinvestment in the service.

Consultants

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what opportunities there will be in 1990 for district health authorities to bid for additional consultants and their associated teams.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no current plans for a further central initiative inviting district health authorities to bid for new consultant posts in 1990.

Ambulance Stations (Visits)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he last visited an ambulance station.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I opened Hexham ambulance station on 21 October 1988.

Generic Medicines

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what requirements exist for imports of generic medications to include an instruction leaflet in the English language.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Medicines (Leaflets) Regulations require that if a leaflet is supplied with any medicine it is to be in English. It is not mandatory under United Kingdom law to supply a leaflet, but European Community (EC) directive 89/341 introduces such a requirement effective in 1992, unless the necessary information is on the label. The content of leaflets to be supplied under directive 89/341 is to be laid down by a further directive which is expected to be discussed this year.

Training and Staffing

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional resources are being made available to local authorities to assist with training and staffing for the additional duties contained in the Children Act 1989 and the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We will take into account local authorities' additional responsibilities arising from these legislative changes in determining their grant entitlement for future years. We will also be making available grants for training in respect of the Children Act totalling £4 million over two years. This is in addition to the other training grants we make for staff working with the elderly, with children, and managerial personnel which will total nearly £17 million in 1990-91, all of which will have a role to play in preparing staff for new responsibilities. We have also announced our intention to introduce a further grant for local authorities from 1991-92 to assist them to develop services for the mentally ill.

NHS Maintenance

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the value of backlog maintenance for National Health Service properties in the Yorkshire regional health authority *(a)* in total and *(b)* by district health authority, for the latest available year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 10 January at columns *666-69*.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is currently taking place into myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Mr. Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in aid from this Department through the science budget, is not currently funding any research specifically into myalgic encephalomyelitis. It is, however, funding a study at the Institute of Psychiatry which is to investigate chronic fatigue in general practitioner attenders. The council also supports work in immune responses to the muscle, nerve cells and related structures which may have some relevance to the understanding and treatment of this condition. The Medical Research Council is always willing to consider soundly based scientific proposals in competition with other applications.

SCOTLAND

NHS (Savings Schemes)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of savings to the health boards from every saving scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information in the detail requested is not available centrally.

Works of Art

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list *(a)* German expressionist, *(b)* 20th century Scottish, *(c)* Piccassos, *(d)* Dutch 17th century, *(e)* Italian renaissance, and *(f)* French impressionist works of art in Scotland, owned by the state; how much was paid by the state for each painting; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the works of art produced in *(a)* 1945 to 1964, *(b)* 1965 to 1977, *(c)* 1978 to 1987 and *(d)* 1988 to 1989 owned by the state; if he will indicate which of those were produced either partly or wholly by public funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have no direct responsibility for any works of art in any of the categories listed. Information on items in these categories which may be held by non-departmental public bodies in Scotland, such as the National Galleries of Scotland, is not held centrally, but may be obtainable direct from them. Works of art held in the Government art collection are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts.

Job Creation

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the latest notes of guidance issued on *(a)* the calculation of leverage ratios as per page 48 of "Public Expenditure to 1991-92: A Commentary on the Scotland Programme", *(b)* the calculation of cost per job created or safeguarded, gross, *(c)* the calculation of cost per job created or safeguarded, net, *(d)* the estimation of job displacement, *(e)* the rules about additionality when projects are aided by European Community funds and *(f)* the public expenditure treatment of such receipts.

Mr. Lang: There are no formal guidance notes on these matters. A full examination of value for money was carried out as part of the 1987 review of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, a copy of which can be found in the Library. This covered indicators *(a)* to *(d)*. The report includes information on these indicators and the methods of calculation adopted. On item *(e)*, the relevant

European Community legislation governing the new structural funds regime, including additionality, is article 9 of regulation No. 4253/88. On item *(f)*, the principle governing the public expenditure treatment of European Community receipts is that the expected level of such receipts is taken into account by Departments when public expenditure plans are prepared. General guidance on European Community finance questions is given in chapter 4 of "Government Accounting", which is in the Library.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis of any definition or classification changes which affect comparisons between *(a)* the table for programme 15.2 and 15.3 on page 40 of "Public Expenditure to 1991-92: A Commentary on the Scotland Programme" and *(b)* the table appended to the Secretary of State's statement to the House on 6 December, *Official Report*, columns 330-33.

Mr. Lang: There are no such changes.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what circumstances permission is given by the Forestry Commission to allow the collection of money from the general public in respect of activities other than those provided by or promoted by the Forestry Commission.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Where, with the Forestry Commission's permission, organisations or individuals offer a service to visitors on commission land, charges for these services may be allowed under a variety of arrangements including leases and permits. Charitable bodies may also be given permission to make collections on commission property.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the policy of the Forestry Commission on the use of mountain bikes on Forestry Commission land; and whether any conditions are imposed restricting such use to *(a)* roads, bridleways and footpaths and *(b)* other land.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Forestry Commission places no restriction on the riding of mountain bikes on public rights of way, unless these are limited solely to pedestrian use. The commission also makes other routes available to cyclists, for use on a permissive basis.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Forestry Commission has any policy to impose prohibitions on the use of cameras or video cameras on Forestry Commission land.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Restrictions are not imposed on the use of cameras or video cameras on Forestry Commission land for private purposes unless they are used in such a manner as to cause annoyance to any other person. However, if the cameras are to be used for commercial purposes the commission will normally make a charge.

Natural Heritage Agency

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which staffing posts of the proposed Natural Heritage Agency he intends to accommodate in the Nature Conservancy Council's existing headquarters at Life terrace, Edinburgh.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is too early to decide on the headquarters location of the proposed agency or the distribution of its staff within Scotland.

Radioactive Waste Disposal

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how his Department intends to use the findings of the European Commission's PAGIS assessment of the suitability of Scottish geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal;

(2) if he will make a statement on the findings of the European Commission's PAGIS study into the suitability of Scottish geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal;

(3) what account he will take of the European Commission's PAGIS study findings in determining Government policy on the disposal of high-level radioactive waste in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 16 January at column *144* by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contribution his Department made to the European Commission's PAGIS study into the suitability of Scottish geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Development Department was not represented on the PAGIS steering committee; the United Kingdom's representatives were drawn from the Department of the Environment and the National Radiological Protection Board.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of individuals have *(a)* registered for community charge in Scotland and *(b)* paid the charge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is estimated that over 99 per cent. of people liable for registration have been registered for the community charge. Information about the number of people who have paid the community charge is not held centrally, but we estimate that in most regions 85 per cent. to 95 per cent. of those liable have made some community charge payment with a figure of 98 per cent. in one region.

Civic Government (Scotland) Act

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department has undertaken any review into the operation of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The operation of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 has been

monitored since the Act came into force and a formal review of the Act is currently under way. We intend to publish a consultation paper later this year setting out our proposals for changes to the Act.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has as to the number of shops trading on Sundays since the removal of restrictions on Sunday trading; and if he will make a statement on the effect on the Scottish economy.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It would not be possible to make such an estimate since, with a minor exception relating to hairdressers and barbers, statutory restrictions on Sunday trading such as those set out in the Shops Act 1950 did not and do not apply in Scotland.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to provide additional support for mentally ill patients recently discharged from institutions and now living at home;

(2) what plans he has to provide extra community psychiatric nurses and social workers to provide for those with serious mental illness who are to live in the community;

(3) what plans he has to supply carers to patients with serious mental illness;

(4) what steps he proposes to take to ensure that mentally ill patients who were discharged from institutions have suitable accommodation with carers or relatives.

Mr Lang *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Local authorities have statutory responsibilities both for the care and support of persons in the community who suffer from mental illness and for the aftercare of persons discharged from hospital. Health boards have similar responsibilities in relation to Health Service provision for such persons and there are well-established arrangements for co-operation between health and social work services in the community.

In such cases local authorities must decide whether help is required with accommodation needs, including supported accommodation, and what other measures of assistance may be appropriate. Where continuing care or support is deemed to be necessary for persons living on their own, the need for home care services alongside the availability of any informal carer will commonly be considered. Decisions on the nature and extent of assistance to be provided in particular cases are for authorities themselves having regard to the resources available to them.

The recently published White Paper "Caring for People" (Cmd. 849) makes clear the intention of building on existing guidance on the discharge of patients from mental illness hospitals by requiring health boards and local authorities to prepare joint care plans for such persons on the basis of a full assessment of individual needs before discharge takes place.

Staffing at professional and other levels will be an important element in the community care plans which local authorities and health boards will be required to produce by 1 April 1991. As the White Paper makes clear, there will be central monitoring of progress in the implementation of these plans.

"Inside Intelligence"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is now in a position to give the total cost of all stages of the Lord Advocate *v.* The Scotsman and others in relation to "Inside Intelligence" by Anthony Cavendish.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* My right hon. Friend is not yet in a position to give the total cost of all stages of the legal action the Lord Advocate *v.* The Scotsman Publication and others relating to the book "Inside Intelligence".

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the cost for 1989-90 and 1990-91 of the central functions of the Scottish Development Agency listed on pages 89-90 of the Scottish Development Agency's annual report for 1988;

(2) what is the cost for 1989-90 and 1990-91 of the regional functions of the Scottish Development Agency listed on pages 90-92 of the Scottish Development Agency's annual report for 1988.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* There are no agency functions for which expenditure decisions are taken exclusively in the regional offices and information has not therefore been collected on the basis of a central-regional demarcation. Details of the agency's planned expenditure by activity in 1990-91 will appear in the commentary on the Scottish programme which will be published in February.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disposable Incomes

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures detailing the disposable incomes of *(a)* single-earner married couples with two children aged under 11 years, and *(b)* lone mothers with two children aged under 11 years, assuming rent of £21·80 and rates of £9·00 in each case (i) when not in paid work and receiving income support, and (ii) when in full-time paid work earning (1) £80, (2) £100, (3) £120, (4) £140 and (5) £160 per week.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is set out in the table. The position of lone parents on housing benefit and community charge benefit will improve from October 1990 with a change in the earnings disregard from £15 to £25.

Disposable incomes (net income after housing costs) for family types at various earnings levels and on income support as at October 1989

Family type:

Single earner married couples with two children under 11 years

Net earnings (£ per week)	*Disposable incomes (£ per week)*
On income support	87·56
80	97·35
100	97·82
120	101·23
140	105·19
160	110·33

Family type:
Lone mothers with two children under 11 years

Net earnings (£ per week)	*Disposable incomes (£ per week)*
On income support	71·56
80	98·20
100	102·47
120	106·43
140	110·39
160	115·53

Notes:

1. The assumptions (including average rent and rates) and methods are those used in the Tax Benefit Model Tables, copies of which are available in the Library.

2. For earnings level £160 separate calculations have been done, but using the same assumptions and methods as in the Tax Benefit Model Tables.

Family Credit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing the family credit ceilings for one and two-parent families of different sizes, with children of different ages in April 1988 and 1989, at constant and current prices and as percentages of average male and average female manual earnings, as appropriate.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is set out in the tables.

1. Family Credit ceilings (current prices)

	April 1988	*April 1989*
Single person with one child aged 3	105·23	112·51
Single person with two children aged 4 and 6	113·88	122·93
Married couple with one child aged 3	105·23	112·51
Married couple with one child aged 14	112·87	120·51
Married couple with two children aged 4 and 6	113·88	122·93
Married couple with two children aged 13 and 16	133·87	143·86
Married couple with three children aged 3, 8 and 11	130·16	141·37
Married couple with four children aged 3, 8, 11 and 16	151·16	164·73

Source: Tax/Benefit model tables 1988 and 1989

2. Family Credit ceilings (constant 1988 prices)

	April 1988	*April 1989*
Single person with one child aged 3	105·23	104·18
Single person with two children aged 4 and 6	113·88	113·82
Married couple with one child aged 3	105·23	104·18
Married couple with one child aged 14	112·87	111·58
Married couple with two children aged 4 and 6	113·88	113·82
Married couple with two children aged 13 and 16	133·87	133·20
Married couple with three children aged 3, 8 and 11	130·16	130·90
Married couple with four children aged 3, 8, 11 and 16	151·16	152·53

(Percentage change from April 1988 to April 1989 in RPI was 8 per cent.)

3a. Family Credit ceilings as percentages of average male manual earnings

	April 1988	*April 1989*
Single person with one child aged 3	69·2	68·3
Single person with 2 children aged 4 and 6	74·9	74·9
Married couple with 1 child aged 3	69·2	68·3
Married couple with 1 child aged 14	74·2	73·1
Married couple with 2 children aged 4 and 6	74·9	74·6
Married couple with 2 children aged 13 and 16	88·0	87·3
Married couple with 3 children aged 3, 8 and 11	85·6	85·8
Married couple with 4 children aged 3, 8, 11 and 16	99·4	100·0

3b. Family Credit ceilings as percentages of average female manual earnings

	April 1988	*April 1989*
Single person with one child aged 3	103·9	102·2
Single person with 2 children aged 4 and 6	112·5	111·7
Married couple with 1 child aged 3	103·9	102·2
Married couple with 1 child aged 14	111·5	109·5
Married couple with 2 children aged 4 and 6	112·5	111·7
Married couple with 2 children aged 13 and 16	132·2	130·7
Married couple with 3 children aged 3, 8 and 11	128·5	128·4
Married couple with 4 children aged 3, 8, 11 and 16	149·3	149·7

	April 1988	*April 1989*
Average gross weekly earnings for those in manual occupations and not affected by absence:		
Males	200·60	217·80
Females	123·60	134·90
Tax threshold:	78·75	84·13
Tax deducted at rate of 25 per cent.		
Males	30·46	33·42
Females	11·21	12·69
National insurance deducted at 9 per cent.		
Males	18·05	19·64
Females	11·12	12·14
Average net weekly earnings for those in manual occupations whose pay was not affected by absence:		
Males	152·09	164·78
Females	101·27	120·07

Source: DE Employment gazette.

Income Support

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of working families with children and a mortgage, whose net incomes, adding in child benefit, family credit and rate rebates as appropriate, but deducting income tax, National Insurance contribution, local authority rates and mortgage payments are *(a)* less than they would receive after 16 weeks on income support, *(b)* less than 20 per cent. above what they would receive after 16 weeks on income support, and *(c)* less than 40 per cent. above what they would receive after 16 weeks on income support.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Low-income Families

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether low-income families who apply for community charge benefit will be assumed to be getting all the family credit to which they are entitled; and whether the families will be informed about any such assumptions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The community charge benefit regulations will allow a source of income that would be available to a claimant if he or she were to apply for it to be taken into account as a notional source of income. If a community charge benefit claimant appears to meet all the conditions for family credit but has not yet claimed that benefit, the local authority will advise them to claim it. In assessing the claim for community charge benefit, family credit will not be taken into account for 25 working days, which will allow the family credit claim to be determined. After this period family credit will be assumed to be in payment. In cases where family credit has already been claimed it will not be taken into account until actually received.

The notice of determination issued by the local authority will inform the claimant of any assumptions made about family credit and remind them of their duty to report all changes of circumstances, which include the receipt of family credit.

Benefit Claims

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce the necessary amendments to enable those persons in full-time employment, who are laid off temporarily, to claim benefit in the manner available prior to changes in regulations recently introduced; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We are monitoring the effects of recent changes to unemployment benefit rules on all those who claim. We have no plans to introduce special arrangements for this particular group.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Trade Deficit

130. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take to improve Britain's manufacturing trade deficit.

135. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take to improve Britain's manufacturing trade deficit.

137. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take to improve Britain's manufacturing trade deficit.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The manufacturing trade deficit will narrow as the Government's tight monetary and fiscal policies continue to slow domestic demand.

131. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the trade deficit.

136. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Britain's current trade deficit.

138. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Britain's current trade deficit.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest information on the United Kingdom deficit in visible trade was published on 29 December 1989 in table 1 of the monthly press notice on the current account of the balance of payments, copies of which are available in the Library.

Nationalised Industries (Subsidy)

132. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much total subsidy was paid to the 10 largest nationalised industries in 1979; and how much was paid in the last full financial year to as many of them as remain nationalised.

Mr. Lilley: The 10 largest nationalised industries received subsidies of £684 million in 1978-79. Five of these have now been privatised. The remainder received £1,013 million in subsidy in 1988-89. These figures exclude capital grants and public dividend capital which, as they are not payments for current expenditure, do not fall within the national accounts or public expenditure survey definition of subsidy.

Manufactured Goods

129. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the balance of trade in manufactured goods; and if he will make a statement.

133. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the balance of trade in manufactured goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information was published on 29 December 1989 in table 12 of the monthly press notice on the current account of the balance of payments, copies of which are available in the Library.

Interest Rates

134. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from British businesses regarding the present levels of interest rates.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of such representations.

West Germany

139. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current trade deficit with West Germany.

140. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current trade deficit with West Germany.

141. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current trade deficit with West Germany.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current trade deficit with West Germany.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information from which crude trade balances[1] may be derived can be found in the

monthly review of external trade statistics, available from the Library of the House or on the Central Statistical Office databank which may be accessed through the Library.

[1] Crude balances slightly overstate deficits (or understate surpluses) since the value of imports, but not that of exports, includes insurance and freight.

Share Ownership

142. **Sir George Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the numbers of new shareholders since 1979; and whether he intends to promote measures further to encourage the growth of individual share ownership.

Mr. Lilley: I have been asked to reply. The joint Treasury and stock exchange survey carried out in January and February 1989 estimated that approximately 9 million people own shares—20 per cent. of the adult population; a threefold increase since 1979.

Civil Servants (Living Costs)

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to assess how living costs in Sussex and the south-east affect Civil Service recruitment in those areas.

Mr. Ryder: None. Long-term pay agreements already cover over 95 per cent. of the Civil Service, and provide for variations in pay by location. Pay rates are determined in the light of the need to recruit and retain staff within what can be afforded.

Manufacturing Deficit

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures his Department is currently working on to decrease the manufacturing deficit.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The manufacturing trade deficit will narrow as the Government's tight monetary and fiscal policies continue to slow domestic demand.

Whisky

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the total tax and duty payable in the United Kingdom on a 1-litre, 40 per cent. proof bottle of *(a)* Japanese whisky or other spirit, and *(b)* Scotch whisky.

Mr. Ryder: The precise total amount of duty and tax depends on the value of the whisky. In both instances, each litre bottle bears United Kingdom excise duty of 630·8p plus value added tax at 15 per cent. of the price inclusive of all duties (equivalent to 3/23rds of the retail selling price). In the case of the Japanese products only, import duty of 12·8p per litre is charged under the common customs tariff of the European Community.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his reply dated 4 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *22*, concerning the effect on manufacturing industry of the increase in the value of £ sterling against the deutschmark, whether the figure of 38 per cent. refers to volume or value.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The figure of 38 per cent. referred to the increase in the volume of manufacturing investment between the first quarter of 1987 and the third quarter of 1989.

Taxation

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was spent by the Inland Revenue on legal fees in connection with cases in the High Court for the recovery of tax revenues in each of the last five years in respect of *(a)* successful cases, *(b)* unsuccessful cases and *(c)* in total; whether the unsuccessful cases have been reviewed in each year by the Inland Revenue with a view to promoting legislation to avoid further loss of revenue; and whether he has identified the extent of tax evasion and avoidance which is taking place through the creation of business transactions carried out solely or mainly for tax reasons by United Kingdom based trusts, companies and individuals and trusts, companies and individuals based in *(a)* Jersey, *(b)* the Isle of Man, *(c)* Guernsey, *(d)* the Netherlands Antilles, *(e)* the Cayman Islands and *(f)* Liechtenstein.

Mr. Lilley: The amounts spent on legal fees for High Court cases could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The outcome of each case is reviewed for its legal implications. Because of their nature it is not possible to estimate reliably the extent of tax evasion or avoidance.

Departmental Relocation

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress Departments have made under the Government's relocation policy.

Mr. Ryder: On 9 February 1989 the then Paymaster General informed the House that over 34,000 Civil Service posts had been reported in the 1988 public expenditure survey as under review for location or relocation away from the south-east in accordance with the policy which had been announced on 31 March 1988. This policy does not involve any central targets for the number of posts relocated nor propose specific locations. Departments have instituted systematic review programmes to cover the location of all their work, with a view to taking advantage of the value for money benefits and advantages for staff and management which relocation can bring, and the benefits for our regional and inner-city policies of relocating work away from the south-east. It was emphasised that many reviews were then still at the earliest stage and that not all the posts would move.

Since early in 1988 decisions have been taken and announced to relocate well over 16,000 posts generally over the next two or three years. These include 3,700 by Inland Revenue, 2,550 by Ministry of Defence, 1,900 by Customs and Excise, 1,850 by Department of Social Security, over 1,100 each by Department of Trade and Industry, Home Office and the Department of Employment, and 1,000 by the Department of Health. About 9,000 posts have been found to be unsuitable for relocation in the short term, and Departments have extended their reviews to include some 6,000 additional posts, leaving nearly 14,750 in the review process. Nearly all the decisions announced so far involve moving work to areas which are the focus of the Government's regional or inner-city policies. Further announcements can be expected in due course.

These figures may be compared with the 12,000 posts moved or created outside London and the south-east between 1979 and 1987, and less than 5,000 moved between 1974 and 1979.

Successful relocation requires careful planning; Departments have therefore exchanged experience and, where appropriate, co-ordinated action with other relocating Departments, found alternative posts for some staff not wishing to move, and made good use of increased flexibility in the personnel management field.

Separate Taxation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he will take to ensure that charities do not suffer a loss of income from covenants from married couples where one of the spouses is not paying income tax as a result of the introduction of separate taxation as from 1 April 1990.

Mr. Major *[holding answer 21 December 1989]:* A charity's claim to refunds of tax on payments received under covenants does not depend on whether the covenantor is, or is not, liable to pay tax on his or her own income.

A covenantor making a covenant payment to a charity deducts basic rate tax and pays over to the charity only the net amount. The charity is entitled to claim back that tax from the Inland Revenue.

If the covenantor is liable to tax on an equivalent amount of his income, he gets basic rate relief for the covenant payment by retaining the tax he has deducted from it. If he is not liable to tax on an equivalent amount of his income, he has to pay over to the Inland Revenue the tax he has deducted.

The introduction of independent taxation for married couples with effect from 6 April 1990 will mean that a husband and wife will become separate taxpayers. If one of them will not be liable to tax, the effect on his or her covenants will be no different from what happens now when a covenantor is a non-taxpayer—the payements will continue to be made net of tax to the charity, but the tax withheld will have to be paid over to the Revenue.

For the past year, Inland Revenue publicity material has drawn attention to the fact that couples who find themselves in this situation may want to review their covenant arrangements. That is a matter between covenantors and the charities that they support.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimates he has made, on the basis of latest figures of the number of companies where profits and trading surpluses are lower that the unabated uniform business rate for each standard region;

(2) what estimates he has made, on the basis of latest figures, of the impact that the uniform business rate will have on companies' profits and trading surpluses for each standard region.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him earlier today.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Salmonella

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many incidents of salmonella cultured from individual, intact eggs have occurred in the past year.

Mr. Curry: These figures are not held centrally.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of domestic refrigerators in preventing the growth of salmonella-causing bacteria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I shall make an assessment when research currently being funded by my Department has been completed. Comprehensive advice to consumers on using domestic refrigerators has already been issued in the Government's food safety booklet, a copy of which I am sending to the hon. Member.

Cetaceans

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to require drift nets to be equipped with miniature electronic devices to help protect cetacean populations.

Mr. Curry: We have no evidence that drift nets cause a threat to cetacean populations in our waters. Nevertheless the Fisheries Departments are planning a general monitoring scheme on the incidental capture of cetaceans in United Kingdom fisheries, so that we can keep the matter under closer review.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the occurrence of ghost nets in fishing waters around Britain and their implications for populations of cetaceans.

Mr. Curry: We do not keep records of the numbers of nets lost at sea. Our scientific advice is that floating nets lost soon sink and—like bottom-set nets which are lost—quickly become entangled on the sea bed. We have no evidence that such nets have any implications for the incidental capture of cetaceans or thus for their populations.

Oil Spills

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those vessels that carry or can be converted to carry oil spill dispersant which his Department operates.

Mr. Curry: Nine vessels of the Royal Navy fishery protection squadron, which carry out fishery protection duties for my Department, are equipped to spray oil dispersant. MAFF's two research vessels are not so equipped, but could transport drummed dispersant.

Knacker Industry

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the proposals he has put to the EEC on the knacker industry;

(2) what is the Government's policy on the knacker industry;

(3) what representations he has had from the United Kingdom's knackermen.

Mr. Maclean: Commission proposals for the disposal of animal waste including dead and casualty stock have recently been presented to Council. They could have serious implications for the means by which casualty animals are disposed of in the United Kingdom. I will be seeking a solution which adequately reflects both the needs of the industries concerned and the requirements of animal and public health. Organisations representing the industry have been consulted on the proposals and are being kept fully informed of developments.

Soft Fruit

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total tonnage of soft fruit imports by country to *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland in each of the past five years.

Mr. Curry: The total tonnage of soft fruit imports (mainly strawberries, raspberries and blackcurrants, both fresh and semi-processed) by country, for the United Kingdom in each of the past five years for which complete figures are available is listed in the table. No separate figures are available for Scotland.

Country	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
France	712	739	1,370	1,787	1,553
Belgium/Luxembourg	492	474	999	623	1,310
Netherlands	7,365	6,944	8,172	7,873	10,051
Federal Republic of Germany	282	148	123	238	1,047
Italy	1,721	1,890	769	760	773
Ireland	1,347	1,649	1,554	1,225	2,169
Denmark	38	188	38	40	102
Greece	—	—	—	—	105
Switzerland	—	—	—	—	42
Portugal	163	140	288	547	283
Spain	5,862	7,701	9,838	11,393	9,481
Yugoslavia	822	1,088	1,236	945	1,098
Turkey	158	350	869	1,161	1,289
Poland	2,703	3,858	5,087	6,851	5,907
Czechoslovakia	0	40	39	105	92
Hungary	188	83	175	547	682
Romania	0	0	87	95	157
Bulgaria	0	78	183	73	95
Egypt	0	1	0	17	15
Kenya	66	107	200	201	435
Uganda	—	—	—	—	1
Zambia	49	109	102	21	7
South Africa	40	84	39	48	26
United States of America	216	180	324	505	715
Canada	—	—	—	—	5
Mexico	90	21	21	65	21
Guatemala	—	—	10	—	5
Costa Rica	—	—	1	1	27
Colombia	—	—	1	1	4
Ecuador	7	36	29	0	13
Chile	19	43	40	52	492
Uruguay	—	—	—	—	1
Israel	492	331	147	150	168
United Arab Emirates	—	—	—	—	22
Sri Lanka	—	—	—	—	1
Australia	4	0	28	79	34
New Zealand	102	208	72	84	194

Source: Eurostat.

Fishermen

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what schemes exist under which fishermen who have lost employment following agreements with other countries on fishing grounds may be compensated.

Mr. Curry: None.

Food Irradiation

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to investigate further the national consequences and toxicological effects of irradiation on food prior to its introduction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No. International expert committees and our own advisory committee on irradiated and novel foods (ACINF) have advised that the irradiation of food up to an overall average dose of 10 kilograys presents no toxicological hazard and introduces no special nutritional problems. This view was reaffirmed by the ACINF in its further advice to Ministers given after considering technical representations made during consultation. However, the ACINF recommended that the consumption and nutrient content of irradiated food should be monitored. We have already made it clear that we intend to implement this recommendation.

Meat Exports

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which countries refuse to accept *(a)* imported beef or *(b)* imported cattle, respectively, from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) Japan (because of import regulations concerning foot and mouth disease) and Papua New Guinea (only fresh meat originating in Australia or New Zealand may be imported).

(b) All EC Member States in relation to cattle born before 18 July 1988, Australia, Finland, Israel, New Zealand, Sweden and the United State of America (because of concerns about Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy).

In addition, Germany has imposed restrictive certification requirements on trade in beef from the United Kingdom which I do not believe are justified by Community rules.

Simplesse

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why the low-calorie fat product Simplesse was not subject to clearance by either the committee on toxicity or the advisory committee on novel foods and processes.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

Simplesse is made from traditional food ingredients (egg and milk proteins) and as such is subject to the controls of the Food Acts. It was considered by the advisory committee on novel foods and processes at its meeting on 23 September 1989. The committee concluded that the product did not constitute a novel food since neither the raw materials nor the production process are novel. It was considered that the potential use of the product may have nutritional implications and these remain under consideration.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many copies of the United States Air Force in Europe document entitled "USAF Tactical Fighter Low-level Flying Training in the Federal Republic of Germany Data Book" of December 1988 his Department has obtained; what was their distribution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: Sufficient copies of this document are available to my Department and have been widely distributed. The contents of the document are a matter for the United States authorities.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying sorties have been carried out by *(a)* the Royal Air Force and *(b)* other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation air forces over the Don Valley constituency for the last year for which he has figures.

Mr. Neubert: Records are not kept of the number of military low-flying sorties carried out over individual constituencies.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* for Royal Air Force aircrew and *(b)* other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation air forces' aircrew, the chances of survival factors, when flying (i) under 100 ft, (ii) between 100 ft and 200 ft and (iii) over 200 ft.

Mr. Neubert: While studies into the survivability of Royal Air Force aircraft in combat have been carried out by the Ministry of Defence, the results are classified. However, it is generally accepted throughout the NATO air forces that as height decreases, survivability against hostile defence forces increases; and that survivability at very low levels is a balance between the risk from hostile defence forces and the risks arising from proximity to the ground and obstacles and that the latter risks can be reduced by adequate and realistic training to the extent possible in peacetime.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by type and mark the current jet aircraft used by the Royal Air Force in low-flying sorties.

Mr. Neubert: The strike-attack, offensive support and reconnaissance aircraft of the Royal Air Force listed in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989 Cmd. 675-I (page 59) have a primary low-level role. Other Royal Air Force jet aircraft may also need to carry out a proportion of their training at low level in peacetime.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by year since 1984 *(a)* the percentage of low flying, *(b)* the percentage of sorties and *(c)* the average flying duration time, carried out by (i) Buccaneer, (ii) Jaguar, (iii) Tornado and (iv) Harrier aircraft, used by the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Neubert: The information requested cannot be provided without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by year since 1984 the number of confirmed cases of *(a)* unlawful low flying and *(b)* flying to cause annoyance by pilots of military jet aircraft; and what action was taken in each case.

Mr. Neubert: There have been two cases since 1984, both in the Royal Air Force, of unlawful low flying and flying to cause annoyance by pilots of military jet aircraft. Both cases were dealt with by court martial; the details are given in the following table:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Section of Air Force Act*	*Charge*	*Sentence*
1985	1	51	Unlawful low flying	£300 fine and severe reprimand
		52	Flying in a manner likely to cause unnecessary annoyance	
1989	1	51	Unlawful low flying	Forfeitence of 18 months seniority and severe reprimand
		52	Flying in a manner likely to cause unnecessary annoyance	

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the strategic requirements for Royal Air Force low-flying sorties during *(a)* daytime flying and *(b)* night-time flying; and what restrictions are imposed.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to the background information on low flying training provided in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988 Cmd. 675-I (page 30).

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of low-flying missions over Northumberland for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: Records are not kept of the number of military low-flying sorties carried out over individual counties.

Hunting

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by locations the actual sites where his Department's land is used for hunting with hounds.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to him on 27 October 1989 (column *653*). Records of actual sites where Ministry of Defence land has been used for hunting with hounds are not held centrally. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

RAF Display Teams

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the programmes for the *(a)* Red Arrows display team and *(b)* other Royal Air Force display teams and aircraft during 1990.

Mr. Neubert: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member as soon as the finally agreed list is available.

Skyguard

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the service branch and units which are, and which will be, operating the Skyguard monitoring equipment.

Mr. Neubert: When the Skyguard fire control radar system is used in the low-flying monitoring role, it is operated by 2729 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment in conjunction with the RAF police. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the results of the Skyguard monitoring of low-flying military jet aircraft; what follow-up action will be taken; and how often these reports will be published.

Mr. Neubert: No. It is not the intention to publish detailed reports on individual Skyguard deployments, on which may depend disciplinary action. Each deployment will, however, be followed up and appropriate disciplinary or other action taken where appropriate. Three deployments of the Skyguard radar system in the low-flying monitoring role took place in 1989, all in conjunction with the Royal Air Force police. These deployments were at:

Knaresborough—27 to 29 June 1989
Penrith—1 to 3 August 1989
Alnwick—3 to 5 October 1989

While further analysis of the results is continuing, no evidence was found during those deployments of any deliberate or flagrant breaches of the United Kingdom low-flying regulations and they confirmed that aircrew have a healthy respect for the regulations. Information on further deployments will be made available to the House from time to time.

Airfields

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list, by location, the number of joint military/civil airfields there are in the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will list, by location, the number of joint military/civil airfields in the United Kingdom that are proposed or under consideration during the next five years;

(3) if he will make a statement, in the light of the 1992 European single market, on expanding the use of joint military and civil airfields in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Neubert: The operation of joint military/civil airfields is not possible under United Kingdom aviation regulations. However, some use of civil airfields is made by military aircraft, and civil aircraft can use military airfields, in some cases on a regular basis, subject to such flights being compatible with operational considerations. A number of proposals for additional civil use of military airfields are under consideration at present, but it is unlikely that the single European market will have a significant effect upon this activity.

Combat Body Armour

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement as to in what circumstances combat body armour will be issued to service personnel.

Mr. Neubert: Combat body armour will be issued to service men as an item of personal equipment as supplies become available.

WE177 Free-fall Bombs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the life expectancy of the United Kingdom's WE177 free-fall bombs, before they become unserviceable.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The WE177 is subject to regular inspection, maintenance and refurbishment. It will remain in service for as long as it meets requirements for safety and serviceability.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of warhead development costs it is estimated would be spent in *(a)* the United States of America, and *(b)* the United Kingdom, for (i) the Trident warhead and (ii) the warhead for a tactical air-to-surface missile to replace the WE177 free-fall bomb.

Mr. Alan Clark: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to reveal details of this nature. For a

broad indication on Trident, I refer the hon. Member to the fifth report of the Defence Committee (Session 1988-89, pages 38 and 39). On a replacement for the free-fall bomb, no decision has yet been taken.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any plans to change the current restrictions on the weight of civil aircraft using RAF Finningley.

Mr. Neubert: There are no specific weight restrictions on civil aircraft wishing to use RAF Finningley, providing they come within the pavement load classification group of the runway and aircraft manoeuvring areas. The strength of these surfaces permits the operation of most types of modern aircraft.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any plans to change the flight paths of *(a)* military and *(b)* civil aircraft (i) taking off or (ii) landing at RAF Finningley.

Mr. Neubert: No.

Nuclear Warheads

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to assess the security of long-term supply of special nuclear materials for his nuclear warhead production programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Arrangements for the supply of all special nuclear materials are kept under regular review to ensure that the requirements of defence nuclear programmes are fully met.

Mid-air Collision (Hexham)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will ensure that the findings of the board of inquiry into the mid-air collision near Hexham on 9 January will be made public; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if, in the light of the mid-air collision near Hexham, on 9 January, he will undertake a review of the training of air crews; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if, in the light of the mid-air collision near Hexham, on 9 January, he will undertake a review of the effectiveness of RAF co-ordination and information of low-flying exercises over each area at any particular time; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if, in the light of the mid-air collision near Hexham, on 9 January, he will ensure that every aircraft involved in a low-flying mission contains a device to monitor the height of the aircraft throughout the exercise, and that this is recorded for subsequent inspection; and if he will make a statement;

(5) when he expects the board of inquiry to report its findings on the mid-air collision near Hexham on 9 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: The board of inquiry into the mid-air collision near Hexham on 9 January 1990 will make its report as soon as it has completed its investigations. A summary of the board's findings will be published in the usual way. We shall take whatever action we consider necessary in the light of the board's report to minimise the risk of such an accident recurring.

Birth Defects

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information he has on the rate of birth defects among the children of *(a)* personnel who have served on board Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines and *(b)* personnel who have worked for the Atomic Weapons Establishment;

(2) what is the total number of children of service men who have served on board Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Neubert: The information is not available in the form requested.

Atomic Weapons Research Establishments

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state what the current shortfall of staff is at the atomic weapons research establishments at Burghfield, Cardiff and Foulness among *(a)* administrative, executive, and clerical staff, *(b)* specialist staff, *(c)* craft industrials and *(d)* non-craft industrials.

Mr. Neubert: The current staff shortfalls at the AWE sites at Burghfield, Cardiff and Foulness broken down by category are as follows:

	Burghfield	*Cardiff*	*Foulness*
Administrative, Executive and Clerical Grades	10	10	1
Specialist Staff	—	2	30
Craft Industrials	34	—	14
Non Craft Industrials	8	—	13

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial criteria will be used to monitor the performance of the management contractors to be appointed at the atomic weapons research establishments.

Mr. Neubert: These details have yet to be decided.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the shortfalls of staff were at each of the four atomic weapons research establishments at the end of each year since 1980 for *(a)* administrative, executive and clerical staff, *(b)* specialist staff, *(c)* craft industrials and *(d)* non-craft industrials.

Mr. Neubert: The information is as follows:

	Aldermaston	*Burghfield*	*Cardiff*	*Foulness*
1 January 1988				
Administrative, executive and clerical	100	12	5	1
Specialist	54	—	2	21
Craft industrials	29	26	—	5
Non-craft industrials	—	35	—	—
1 January 1989				

	Aldermaston	Burghfield	Cardiff	Foulness
Administrative, executive and clerical	103	14	6	1
Specialist	155	5	1	21
Craft industrials	53	33	—	11
Non-craft industrials	52	18	—	6
1 January 1990				
Administrative, executive and clerical	36	10	10	1
Specialist	135	—	2	30
Craft industrials	72	34	—	14
Non-craft industrials	60	8	—	13

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which firms have expressed an interest in bidding for the initial management contract at the atomic weapons research establishments.

Mr. Neubert: To date, expressions of interest in the initial management contract at atomic weapons establishments have been received from British Aerospace (Dynamics); British Nuclear Fuels; Brown & Root; Vickers; GEC; Hunting Engineering and Rolls-Royce.

Trident

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the atomic weapons research establishment, Aldermaston, has the capacity to undertake production of warheads for the Trident programme and for the tactical air-to-surface missile replacement for the WE177 free-fall bomb simultaneously.

Mr. Alan Clark: No decisions have yet been taken on a replacement for the existing free-fall nuclear bomb. It would not be in the national interest to discuss in detail the production capacity of the atomic weapons establishment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Confederation of British Industry

16. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry.

Mr. Ridley: I look forward to a continuation of constructive dialogue with the president of the CBI on matters relevant to the well-being of British industry.

Information Technology

17. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what training his Department offers to its staff in the applications of information technology.

42. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what training his Department offers to its staff in the applications of information technology.

Mr. Forth: A great deal of training on and about IT is available for all departmental staff. This includes general awareness, specific application skills, specialist and technical training, all of which is reinforced and supplemented by "at the desk" tuition.

64. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the United Kingdom's current balance of trade in information technology.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: According to provisional figures published by the Central Statistical Office, the United Kingdom has a crude trade deficit (i) in electronics and information technology manufactured goods (ii) of £3·0 billion for the year to June 1989.

Notes:

(i) Exports (fob) less Imports (cif)

(ii) Principal Products of Activity Headings 3301, 3302, 3441, 3442, 3443, 3444, 3453 and 3454 of the Standard Industrial Classification (Revised 1980).

61. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how he proposes to support future academic research and development in information technology.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: DTI supports industrially relevant collaborative research in IT. Academic partners in projects are eligible for DTI support on the same basis as industrial partners under the terms and conditions of the research and technology initiative. However, funding for academic IT research is usually provided through the science and engineering research council and the United Kingdom funding contribution of EC programmes. DTI has no plans to change these arrangements.

38. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to provide a more detailed analysis of the balance of trade in information technology.

118. **Mr. Allen Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to provide a more detailed analysis of the balance of trade in information technology.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government already provide a considerable amount of detailed information on trade in information technology. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) publishes details of United Kingdom exports and imports of electronics and information technology manufactured goods in the Business Monitor PQ series as well as in Business Monitors MQ10 "Overseas Trade analysed in terms of industries" and MQ12 "Import penetration and export sales ratios for manufacturing industry". More detailed information is published in Business Monitor MM20 "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom". HM Customs and Excise has appointed a number of marketing agents who can provide further detailed analyses. Export statistics for computing services, including software, are published by the CSO in Business Monitor SDQ9 "Computing Services". Information on imports of computing services is not readily available because of the inherent nature of the trade.

Manufactured Goods

18. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in manufactured goods with West Germany.

Mr. Redwood: In the first 11 months of 1989 imports of manufactures from the Federal Republic of Germany exceeded United Kingdom exports to that country by £9·0 billion.

82. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the increase in import penetration of manufactured goods from 1979 until the most recent date for which figures are available.

73. **Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the increase in import penetration of manufactured goods from 1979 until the most recent date for which figures are available.

116. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the increase in import penetration of manufactured goods from 1979 until the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: Import penetration in manufacturing industry rose from 27 per cent. in 1979 to 36 per cent. in the year ending March 1989.

22. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in imports of manufactured goods from the European Community since 1979.

77. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in imports of manufactured goods from the EEC since 1979.

78. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in imports of manufactured goods from the European Economic Community since 1979.

80. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in imports of manufactured goods from the EEC since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: Imports of manufactured goods from the European Community have risen from £16·0 billion in 1979 to £45·7 billion in 1988, an increase of £29·7 billion.

Footwear

19. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of footwear supplied by imports.

86. **Mr. Leadbitter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of footwear supplied by imports.

121. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of footwear supplied by imports.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 56 per cent. by value, in the first half of 1989.

West Midlands

21. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what interest is being shown by foreign businesses in becoming established in the west midlands.

Mr. Forth: Foreign businesses are showing great interest in the west midlands. In 1988, 66 investment decisions were recorded involving projects by foreign companies in the region. These were forecast to create 3,656 new jobs. This made the west midlands the most popular area in the country in terms of the number of new projects. Interest remains high and while statistics are not yet available for 1989 it is expected that the 1988 figure will be exceeded.

Industry and Services (North-West)

23. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for industry and service trade development in the north-west of England.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Through regional selective assistance and the consultancy and export initiatives, my Department will continue to support the development of industry and service trade in the north-west of England and throughout the United Kingdom.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

24. **Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to visit Cardiff to inspect the work of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

68. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to visit Cardiff and inspect the work of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Trade has already visited Cardiff. I intend to do so shortly.

52. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration he gave to EC requirements in reaching his decision to privatise the Export Credits Guarantee Department; if he will list them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: In arriving at its decision on ECGD's future status and organisation, referred to in the written answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) on 18 December 1989, the Government were particularly concerned by the need *(a)* for ECGD to be able to respond effectively to the business opportunities created by the single European market; and *(b)* to ensure that ECGD would be able to maintain its intra-EC business in the event that the future development of Community law made the continued provision of Government support for short-term trade credit within Europe impossible.

If ECGD's insurance services group is to maintain and continue the improvements in performance and service for customers made over the past three years, the Government believe that it must be free to compete with all other insurers in Europe and that this can best be done by converting it into a private sector company.

29. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy to ensure no loss or transfer of employment at the Insurance Service Group headquarters at Export Credits Guarantee Department ensues from the Export Credits Guarantee Department's privatisation announced on 18 December.

Mr. Ridley: I believe that the changes that I have announced offer the best prospects of securing jobs for the

future. I do not expect any significant change in the numbers employed in ECGD Cardiff as a result of the change of status. Thereafter the number of people in the organisation will depend mainly on its success in expanding its business.

27. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the future of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

75. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the future of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

111. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the future of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Ridley: In relation to the Kemp review of status options for ECGD, I have received representations from United Kingdom exporters, banks, trade associations, ECGD's staff and their representatives and other interested parties.

Petrol Retailing

25. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has considered the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report into the petrol retailing industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I am at present considering the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of petrol. I shall report to the House when it is published.

Trade Deficit (EC)

26. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which EC countries have either a trade surplus or a smaller trade deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

33. **Mr. Lambie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which EC countries have either a trade surplus or a smaller trade deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

66. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which EEC countries have either a trade surplus or a smaller trade deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

90. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which EEC countries have either a trade surplus or a smaller trade deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: All except Portugal, Greece and Spain were in one or other category in 1988, the latest year for which complete figures are available.

94. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which five industrial sectors have the most adverse balance of trade in 1989 between the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Community on the latest available figures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Defining industrial sectors as divisions of the Standard International Trade Classification Revision 3, information for the first 11 months of 1989 is:

Division		*Deficit (£ million)*
78	Road Vehicles	5,567
05	Vegetables and Fruit	1,204
65	Textile Yarn, Fabrics, Made-up Articles and Related Products	1,067
72	Machinery Specialised for Particular Industries	906
57	Plastics in Primary Forms	777

91. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the EEC countries with which the United Kingdom has a manufacturing trade deficit.

106. **Mr. Allan Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the EC countries with which the United Kingdom has a manufacturing trade deficit.

108. **Mr. Buchan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the EEC countries with which the United Kingdom has a manufacturing trade deficit.

114. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the EEC countries with which the United Kingdom has a manufacturing trade deficit.

Mr. Redwood: In the first 11 months of 1989 the United Kingdom had a manufacturing trade deficit with the following countries: France, Belgium/Luxembourg, Netherlands, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Denmark and Portugal.

Trade Deficit (OECD)

95. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries have either a trade surplus or a smaller trade deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

101. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which OECD countries have either a trade surplus or a smaller trade deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: All except Portugal, Greece and Spain were in one or other category in 1988, the latest year for which complete figures are available.

English Estates

28. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of English Estates.

46. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of English Estates.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As already announced, a consultant's study is looking at a variety of aspects of English Estates' activities.

EC Ministers

30. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet his EEC counterparts; and what subjects will be discussed.

49. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet his EC counterparts; and what subjects will be discussed.

122. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet his EEC counterparts; and what subjects will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: I continue to keep in close contact with my EC counterparts on a whole range of matters.

Single Market

31. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any new initiatives to assist British industry to prepare for 1992.

48. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any new initiatives to assist British industry to prepare for 1992.

59. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any new initiatives to assist British industry to prepare for 1992.

71. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any new initiatives to assist British industry to prepare for 1992.

Mr. Redwood: My Department's "Europe Open for Business" campaign provides the most comprehensive information service available to business anywhere in the Community, including a 24-hour telephone hotline, and extensive written and audio-visual material. This is constantly updated and expanded to take account of developments in Brussels. We also encourage business to take advantage of the growing range of specialist help and advice available from private sector sources.

125. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement regarding the deficit in the balance of payments and on the competitiveness of British industry for the single European market.

Mr. Redwood: The main reason for the balance of payments deficit has been the rapid growth in both investment and consumption in the United Kingdom. The strong growth in investment will in time produce additional capacity and enable industry to meet more of the demands placed on it. In the meantime it has been necessary to tighten monetary policy to encourage additional spending and to slow down the growth of spending. There are a number of indications that the tightening is having a significant impact.

The improved competitiveness of the United Kingdom since the 1970s can be seen in the fact that since 1980 manufacturing productivity growth in the United Kingdom has been faster than in all other major industrialised countries and since 1983 we have maintained our share of the value of world trade in manufactures after decades of decline. Further progress in liberalising financial services in Europe should help our internationally famous financial services sector gain further access to the EEC market.

97. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on merger and monopoly policy in the light of the single European market in 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The Government believe that improvement to the rules by which the European Commission examines mergers and the reduction or elimination of barriers to takeover throughout the Community are both essential aspects of the single European market programme. At the December Internal Market Council, major breakthroughs were achieved in both areas. The Council adopted the merger control regulation, which sets out Community powers to regulate large mergers with a Community dimension. The regulation will come into force in September 1990. In addition, the Commission proposed—and the Council accepted its proposal—to bring forward an action plan to tackle barriers to takeover by March 1990, which should help level the playing field for takeovers in the Community. Both developments are beneficial to United Kingdom industry and commerce, and an important step towards the completion of the single market.

British Steel (Golden Share)

32. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about his use of the golden share in British Steel.

72. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about his use of the golden share in British Steel.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

Car Imports

34. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of cars supplied by imports.

89. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of cars supplied by imports.

112. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of cars supplied by imports.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 57 per cent. by number in 1989.

Trade Deficit (Japan)

35. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current trade deficit with Japan; and how much of the deficit is accounted for by manufactured goods.

44. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current trade deficit with Japan; and how much of the deficit is accounted for by manufactured goods.

62. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current trade deficit with Japan; and how much of the deficit is accounted for by manufactured goods.

Mr. Redwood: In the first 11 months of 1989 the deficit in total visible trade was £4·6 billion. In the same period the deficit for manufactured goods was £4·7 billion.

FIMBRA

36. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on FIMBRA.

110. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on FIMBRA.

Mr. Redwood: The Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association is one of five self-regulating organisations recognised by the Securities and Investments Board under the Financial Services Act 1986. It is responsible for authorising independent investment intermediaries to conduct investment business and monitoring their compliance with the rules and regulations made under the Financial Services Act. In common with other Financial Services Act regulators, FIMBRA is in the process of reviewing certain aspects of its own rulebook in the light of changes to the Financial Services Act contained in the Companies Act 1989. Questions regarding the recognition of FIMBRA are matters for the Securities and Investments Board.

Consumer Protection

37. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to strengthen legislation on consumer protection.

51. **Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to strengthen legislation on consumer protection.

Mr. Forth: We intend to improve the protection given to consumers in a number of ways, including the introduction of an order under the Prices Act 1974, as amended, on price indications and unit pricing, and changes to other legislation affecting consumers' interests.

Rover Group

39. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement about the sale of Rover to British Aerospace.

Mr. Ridley: I have nothing to add to my statement of 30 November 1989.

Waste Management

40. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage industry to reduce the volume of its waste.

Mr. Forth: The promotion of waste minimisation is one of the objectives of my Department's environmental programme launched in May last year. This and certain other aspects of the programme are being developed by the Department's business and the environment unit (BEU), which was formed in June. A business guide to waste minimisation, entitled "Cutting Your Losses", was published by the BEU in November. To date there have been over 4,000 inquiries for the guide. A conference on waste minimisation, organised jointly by my Department, the CBI and the Department of the Environment, was also held in November and a series of regional seminars is planned for 1990. The programme of action is being developed further and I am confident that, together with the Department's work to promote the economic recycling of industrial and domestic waste materials, it will make a significant contribution to the reduction of waste in the United Kingdom.

Securities and Investments Board

41. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the SIB; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board as frequently as is necessary. I expect to meet him shortly when a range of topics concerning the regulation of financial services will be discussed.

55. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the Securities and Investments Board and its associated bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and I have received a considerable number of representations on a variety of subjects relating to the regulation of financial services.

Building Societies

4. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to limit mergers and tied insurance arrangements involving building societies.

Mr. Redwood: Mergers and proposed mergers involving building societies come within the scope of the normal competition legislation. Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, the Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to keep himself informed of merger activity and to advise the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on whether or not particular mergers should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for investigation. I have powers under the Fair Trading Act to prevent a merger only if I have referred it to the commission and the commission has concluded that the merger would operate against the public interest.

In addition, the Director General of Fair Trading has powers under the Fair Trading Act and the Competition Act 1980 to initiate investigations into complaints about abuses of monopolies and anti-competitive practices. If the hon. Member has any evidence to suggest that tied insurance arrangements involving building societies are an abuse of a monopoly or an anti-competitive practice he should bring it to the attention of the director general.

Post Offices

45. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next proposes to meet the chairman of the Post Office to discuss the Post Office network in rural areas.

Mr. Forth: I meet the chairman of the Post Office regularly to discuss a wide range of issues of mutual interest and concern.

Industries (Rural Areas)

47. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to assist industries in rural areas.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government's policies are designed to assist industry in all parts of the country. Specific measures of support to industry in rural areas are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Textiles

50. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the balance of trade in textiles in the last available quarter.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Imports of textiles (SITC division 65) exceeded exports by £372 million in the third quarter of 1989.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance he is proposing to give to support the British textile industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Firms in the United Kingdom textile and clothing industry are eligible for assistance under approved general aid schemes and, if located in assisted areas, regional aid schemes. A wide range of practical help is also available from my Department under the enterprise initiative. The European Commission has operated a ban on sectoral aid schemes for the industry since 1985.

65. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the wool textiles industry in West Yorkshire.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The industry makes a significant contribution to the prosperity of the region. Since the early 1980s the United Kingdom wool textile industry as a whole has made a good recovery, recording significant gains in productivity and achieving an excellent exports performance. United Kingdom exports reached a record £613 million in 1988, with a new record likely in 1989; the industry also enjoys a favourable balance of trade.

West Germany

53. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of United Kingdom trade with West Germany.

76. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of United Kingdom trade with West Germany.

Mr. Redwood: Imports from West Germany into the United Kingdom between January to September 1989, when compared with the same period in 1988, rose from £12·9 billion to £14·8 billion, an increase of 14·7 per cent. Total United Kingdom exports to the Federal Republic increased in the same period from £7 billion to £7·9 billion, an increase of 12·9 per cent. United Kingdom non-oil exports rose from £6·3 billion to £7·2 billion, an increase of 14·3 per cent.

93. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in manufactured goods with West Germany.

8. Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Britain's manufacturing trade balance with West Germany was at the end of 1989 or at the latest date available.

Mr. Redwood: In the first 11 months of 1989 imports of manufactures from the Federal Republic of Germany exceeded United Kingdom exports to that country by £9·0 billion.

Certification and Standards (EC)

54. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure consumer representation on committees dealing with standards and certification in Europe.

74. **Mr. Bell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure consumer representation on committees dealing with standards and certification in Europe.

81. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure consumer representation on committees dealing with standards and certification in Europe.

Mr. Forth: Such committees are made up of representatives of the national standards bodies of Europe, not interest groupings. In the case of the United Kingdom, it is therefore for the British Standards Institution (BSI) to determine the composition of the delegation, which acts in accordance with a brief previously agreed by the relevant BSI committee.

My Department provides a measure of financial support to help consumer representatives take part in BSI committee work and in European standards work, should they be selected to form part of the delegation.

Recycling

56. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps he is taking to promote the recycling of plastics, metals and paper.

92. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps he is taking to promote the recycling of plastics, metals and paper.

107. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps he is taking to promote the recycling of plastics, metals and paper.

Mr. Forth: Ministers and officials continue to encourage the economic recycling of a wide range of materials, including plastics, metals and paper, through participation in conferences, seminars and exhibitions, and by the preparation and publication of information brochures and education packs. The recycling advisory group, set up late last year, is currently deliberating upon the best means of securing significant increases in the amounts of domestic and industrial waste being recycled in the United Kingdom, and the Environmental Protection Bill now before the House also contains measures to encourage recycling.

Retailing

57. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will institute a departmental study into problems in the United Kingdom retailing sector.

Mr. Forth: No.

Retail Goods (Safety)

58. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking to monitor the safety of retail goods.

99. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking to monitor the safety of retail goods.

123. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking to monitor the safety of retail goods.

Mr. Forth: My Department works closely with the trading standards departments of local authorities, which have the statutory duty to enforce consumer safety legislation, notably in the development of modern, computer-based information systems that enable the details of hazardous products to be made available urgently throughout the country. My Department also monitors the accident statistics obtained through the home accident surveillance system (HASS).

Barlow Clowes

60. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from, or on behalf of, Barlow Clowes investors since his statement on 19 December.

Mr. Ridley: I have received a number of representations from, or on behalf of, Barlow Clowes investors since my statement on 19 December. The majority of investors have expressed their complete satisfaction with the decision that I announced.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

63. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the citizens advice bureaux to discuss their future funding requirements.

103. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the citizens advice bureaux to discuss their future funding requirements.

115. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the citizens advice bureaux to discuss their future funding requirements.

124. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the citizens advice bureaux to discuss their future funding requirements.

Mr. Forth: The funding of individual citizens advice bureaux is a matter for local decision, and my Department is not involved in those discussions. I have, however, met representatives of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and of Citizens Advice Scotland in recent months and among the topics discussed was their funding requirements.

Regional Policies

67. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to ensure that the south-west is benefiting from regional policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My Department has opened satellite offices in Dorset and Wiltshire, in addition to the offices in Avon, Cornwall and Devon, to ensure a greater and more local delivery of DTI services to the business community. In addition, the Department, in conjunction with others, has sought to maximise aid from the European Community to eligible areas in the south-west and continued to provide regional grants to businesses operating in or setting up in the assisted areas. Within Devon and Cornwall we have, with financial support, helped establish a South West Export Federation and in Avon, Devon and Dorset are providing funding for export development advisers. Both those initiatives are designed to increase the volume of exporting by south-west companies. My Department is the largest contributor to the Devon and Cornwall development bureau, supports the activities of English Estates in the south-west and,

through my regional office, promotes and supports numerous other initiatives aimed at improving the economic performance of businesses in the south-west.

105. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on regional policy.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I receive regular representations on regional policy issues.

Merchant Shipbuilding

69. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of British merchant shipbuilding capacity.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *598*.

100. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many orders for merchant vessels were placed with United Kingdom shipyards in 1989.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Complete information for 1989 is not yet available. According to departmental records, 27 new orders for merchant vessels were placed with United Kingdom shipyards in the first 10 months of 1989.

Ireland

70. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the present trends in value of imports from, and exports to, the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Redwood: Present trends indicate rising imports from Ireland and likewise rising exports to the Republic of Ireland from the United Kingdom.

In 1988 the value of United Kingdom exports to the Republic of Ireland was £4,057 million. In the first 11 months of 1989, the figure was £4,316 million.

The value of Irish exports to the United Kingdom in 1988 was £3,879 million. The figure for the first 11 months of 1989 was £3,941 million.

Over the past four years exports to Ireland have risen at a slower rate than imports, therefore the balance has contracted. Figures available for 1989, however, suggest a reversal in this trend.

Britain maintains a significant share of the Irish market —over 42 per cent. in 1988—double that of our main competitor and Ireland's second largest supplier, the United States of America. Ireland meanwhile has a 3·6 per cent. share of the United Kingdom market.

Trade with the Republic of Ireland

£

	Imports from Ireland to the United Kingdom	*Exports from the United Kingdom to Ireland*	*Balance*
1985	2,817	3,631	814
1986	3,054	3,558	504
1987	3,488	3,832	344
1988	3,879	4,057	178
[1]1988	3,560	3,697	137
[1]1989	3,941	4,316	375

[1] January to November.

Channel Tunnel

79. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to ensure that businesses in the regions of England and in Scotland and Wales benefit from the increased trade expected to result from the completion of the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Redwood: The DTI regularly receives representations from business about the importance of adequate road and rail links to the Channel tunnel if the United Kingdom is to derive full benefit from the tunnel and the single market. These are matters on which I and my colleagues make our views known to our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Science and Technology Parks

83. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to assist the development of science and technology parks.

96. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to assist the development of science and technology parks.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Science parks grew very rapidly in the 1980s. Regional development agencies and local authorities helped finance this growth, but increasingly private sector funding is being channelled into the continuing expansion and development of science parks, and I see no need for a central Government initiative.

Mining Engineering Exports

84. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of Britain's mining engineering companies to discuss assistance with their export performance.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since taking office I have not met representatives of Britain's mining equipment manufacturing companies.

Supersonic Airliners

85. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about research and development into the next generation of supersonic airliners.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I believe that it is widely accepted that a next generation supersonic transport (SST) would involve a major international collaborative effort because of the very substantial investment which would be needed. It is for industry to decide whether a new SST could be a sound commercial, environmental and technological project—and to initiate the necessary research in collaboration with international partners.

My Department has limited funds available to promote collaborative civil aeronautical research projects, and consideration could be given to their use to help United Kingdom industry take advantage of opportunities in this area. Research into the environmental implications would be of particular importance.

HOTOL

87. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on the future of HOTOL.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The future of HOTOL is a matter for the United Kingdom companies concerned. The Government remain ready to assist the companies to find suitable international collaborators.

Stock Exchange

98. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the stock exchange; and what will be discussed.

109. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the stock exchange; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the international stock exchange whenever appropriate to discuss financial services topics of mutual interest.

Washing Machines

102. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of washing machines supplied by imports.

117. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of washing machines supplied by imports.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 37 per cent. by value, in the first half of 1989.

Korea

104. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce an embargo on imports from Korea.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Trade Barriers

113. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to ensure that the EEC does not erect protectionist trade barriers.

Mr. Redwood: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave him on 6 December 1989, at column *290*.

Bankruptcies

119. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the latest figures for bankruptcies among small businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Information on the size of businesses going into bankruptcy is not available.

Industrial Investment

120. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received regarding industrial investment.

Mr. Redwood: I have received a number of recent representations on industrial performance and the Government's policies towards industry. Investment is one of the main subjects covered in most of these representations.

City Task Forces

126. **Mr. Robert Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inner-city task force projects were approved in 1989.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 611 projects designed to assist in the economic regeneration of the communities in inner-city task force areas were approved in 1989.

Research Council

127. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Community Research Council held on 15 December 1989.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I represented Her Majesty's Government at the meeting of the Community's Council of Ministers (Research) in Brussels on 15 December.

The council reached a unanimous agreement on a new framework programme for 1990-94. The total level of funding agreed was 5·7 becu (£4·2 billion), comprising 2·5 becu (£1·8 billion) for 1990-92 and 3·2 becu (£2·3 billion) for 1993-94. The programme will cover Community R and D activities in the following six main areas:

1. Information and communications technologies
2. Industrial and materials technologies
3. Environment
4. Life sciences and technologies
5. Energy
6. Human capital and mobility

Specific proposals will now be put forward by the Commission under the 15 separate programme lines that were established by the Council.

Her Majesty's Government regard this as a very satisfactory outcome of the negotiation on the new framework programme, both as regards the overall level of resources and the technical contents, for which there are clear priorities and objectives. We have also ensured that the decision will not prejudice the review of the current inter-institutional agreement on budgetary discipline.

The Council agreed that it would be logical to conduct future R and D at the Community level on the basis of interlocking rolling programmes. These would have the advantage of allowing additional flexibility in the management of specific programmes in the light of full and effective evaluation carried out as part of a mid-term review.

In addition, the Council adopted a research and technical development programme, under the current 1987-91 framework programme, in the field of management and storage of radioactive waste covering the period 1990-94. This programme has a budget of 79·6 mecu (£58 million): the objective being to develop systems for radioactive waste management which ensure the safety of the public and the protection of the environment.

Also under the 1987-91 framework programme, the Council agreed a common position on the human genome analysis programme.

The Council agreed a statement on the possibility of research co-operation with eastern Europe and invited the Commission to come forward with specific proposals.

Privatisation

128. **Mr. Neil Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies have been returned to the private sector by his Department since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 9 January [columns. *517—18*]. My Department had primary responsibility for returning seven companies to the private sector.

Exporters

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to help British exporters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office provide, through the export initiative, a wide range of help, advice and support to United Kingdom exporters at each stage of the exporting process. It is, however, for individual firms to decide whether they should export. Our role is to help them reach these decisions and to provide the services they require to help them enter export markets.

It is encouraging to see that the volume of non-oil exports in the three months to November 1989 was 13 per cent. higher than a year earlier.

Renovations

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any conveniently available figures for the *(a)* value and *(b)* size of his Department's property being renovated by the Property Services Agency and as to how much priority one Department of Trade and Industry property is not being renovated owing to shortage of funds.

Mr. Forth: *(a)* Department of Trade and Industry occupies approximately 406,000m² of the Civil Service estate, but figures are not conveniently available for the value of these occupations.

(b) Responsibility for maintenance of the civil estate, under the Property Repayment System (PRS) arrangements, is shared between PSA and Departments. On 24 May 1989, Sir Gordon Manzie, chief executive of PSA, informed the Environment Committee that, at current funding levels, it should be possible to clear the backlog of priority maintenance work on the civil estate as a whole by 1995-96. (HC 403 (1988-89) EV.p.24). There is, however, no readily available information relating the backlog to individual Department occupations.

Eastern Europe

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many United Kingdom firms have current commercial contracts with Yugoslavia; and what is his estimate of the value of those contracts in £ sterling;

(2) how many United Kingdom firms have current commercial contracts with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and what is his estimate of the value of those contracts in £ sterling;

(3) how many United Kingdom firms have current commercial contracts with Hungary; and what is his estimate of the value of those contracts in £ sterling.

(4) how many United Kingdom firms have current commercial contracts with Poland; and what is his estimate of the value of those contracts in £ sterling;

(5) how many United Kingdom firms have current commercial contracts with Czechoslovakia; and what is his estimate of the value of those contracts in £ sterling;

(6) how many United Kingdom firms have current commercial contracts with Romania; and what is his estimate of the value of those contracts in £ sterling;

(7) how many United Kingdom firms have current commercial contracts with Bulgaria; and what is his estimate of the value of those contracts in £ sterling.

Mr. Redwood: The Government do not have comprehensive information about the number or value of commercial contracts with the east European countries listed by the hon. Member. Such information as my Department receives about individual contracts is commercially confidential and cannot, therefore, be revealed.

Missile Technology Control

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all companies in the United Kingdom producing components or information which came under the terms of the missile technology control regime.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. G. J. Mulcahy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the positions currently held by Mr. G. J. Mulcahy who has served as a Government-appointed director on British Telecom plc from 19 October 1988.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Details of the current directorships of all of the directors of British Telecom plc are publicly available from the register of directors maintained by the company in accordance with section 288 of the Companies Act 1985. Details are also publicly available from the Register of Companies. Any other positions currently held by Mr. Mulcahy are a matter for him.

Manufacturing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in manufacturing output less food, since 1973 and 1979, respectively, and the increase in the volume of manufactured imports.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested on manufacturing output, less food cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost. Volume indices of manufactured imports can be found on the CSO databank, which is accessible through the House of Commons Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 January 1990

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Bishops (Retirement)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the names of suffragan bishops and *(b)* the names of all assistant bishops, appointed since 20 February 1986, with date of appointment and diocese to which attached and *(c)* the names of suffragan and assistant bishops who have retired since 20 February 1986 with their date of retirement.

Mr. Alison: The information is as follows:

(a) Suffragan bishops

Diocese and bishop	*Suffragan see*
Bath and Wells	
The Right Revd. N. McCulloch	Taunton
Birmingham	
Vacant	Aston
Blackburn	
The Right Revd. R. J. Milner	Burnley
The Revd. Canon J. Nicholls[1]	Lancaster
Bristol	
The Right Revd. P. J. Firth	Malmesbury
Canterbury	
The Right Revd. R. H. M. Third	Dover
The Right Revd. D. Smith	Maidstone
Carlisle	
The Right Revd. G. L. Hacker	Penrith
Chelmsford	
The Right Revd. J. W. Roxburgh	Barking
The Right Revd. M. Vickers	Colchester
The Right Revd. C. D. Bond	Bradwell
Chester	
The Right Revd. R. Brown	Birkenhead
The Right Revd. F. P. Sargeant	Stockport
Chichester	
The Right Revd. I. C. Docker	Horsham
The Right Revd. P. J. Ball	Lewes
Coventry	
The Right Revd. K. A. Arnold	Warwick
Derby	
The Right Revd. F. Richmond	Repton
Durham	
The Right Revd. M. T. Ball	Jarrow
Ely	
The Right Revd. W. G. Roe	Huntingdon
Exeter	
The Right Revd. P. E. Coleman	Crediton
The Right Revd. R. S. Hawkins	Plymouth
Gloucester	
The Right Revd. G. Walsh	Tewkesbury
Guildford	
The Right Revd. D. P. Wilcox	Dorking
Hereford	
The Right Revd. I. Griggs	Ludlow
Lichfield	
The Right Revd. J. Davies	Shrewsbury
The Right Revd. M. C. Scott-Joynt	Stafford
The Right Revd. C. J. Mayfield	Wolverhampton
Lincoln	
The Right Revd. W. Ind	Grantham
The Right Revd. D. Tustin	Grimsby
Liverpool	
The Right Revd. M. Henshall	Warrington
London	
The Right Revd. C. J. Klyberg	Fulham
The Right Revd. J. Hughes	Kensington
The Right Revd. J. Thompson	Stepney
The Right Revd. T. Butler	Willesden
The Right Revd. B. Masters	Edmonton
Manchester	
The Right Revd. C. J. F. Scott	Hulme
The Right Revd. D. G. Galliford	Bolton
The Right Revd. D. Tytler	Middleton
Norwich	
The Right Revd. D. Bentley	Lynn
The Right Revd. T. Dudley-Smith	Thetford
Oxford	
The Right Revd. S. Burrows	Buckingham
The Right Revd. A. J. Russell	Dorchester
The Right Revd. J. F. E. Bone	Reading
Peterborough	
The Right Revd. P. E. Barber	Brixworth
Ripon	
The Right Revd. M. J. Menin	Knaresborough
Rochester	
The Right Revd. D. Bartleet	Tonbridge
St. Albans	
The Right Revd. D. J. Farmborough	Bedford
The Revd. Canon R. J. N. Smith[1]	Hertford
St. E. and I.	
The Right Revd. E. Devenport	Dunwich
Salisbury	
The Right Revd. P. Vaughan	Ramsbury
The Right Revd. J. Kirkham	Sherborne
Sheffield	
The Right Revd. W. Persson	Doncaster
Southwark	
The Right Revd. W. Wood	Croydon
The Right Revd. P. Selby	Kingston
The Right Revd. A. P. Hall	Woolwich
Southwell	
The Right Revd. A. W. Morgan	Sherwood
Truro	
The Right Revd. J. R. A. Llewellin	St. Germans
Wakefield	
The Right Revd. T. R. Hare	Pontefract

Diocese and bishop	Suffragan see
Winchester	
The Right Revd. M. J. R. Manktelow	Basingstoke
The Right Revd. J. F. Perry	Southampton
Worcester	
The Right Revd. A. C. Dumper	Dudley
York	
The Right Revd. D. G. Snelgrove	Hull
The Right Revd. C. C. Barker	Selby
The Right Revd. G. Bates	Whitby
Europe	
The Right Revd. E. Holland	Bishop in Europe

[1] Designate.

(b) Assistant bishops appointed since 20 February 1986[1]

Diocese and bishop	Appointed
Leicester	
The Right Revd. G. W. E. C. Ashby	1 July 1988
Bradford	
The Right Revd. D. R. J. Evans	1 October 1988

[1] This list includes only full-time stipendiary Assistant Bishops for whose stipends the Commissioners have a responsibility.

(c) Suffragan bishops who have retired since 20 February 1986

Suffragan see and bishop	Date
Europe	
The Right Revd. A. W. M. Weekes	1 April 1986
Shrewsbury	
The Right Revd. L. L. Rees	30 September 1986
Colchester	
The Right Revd. R. N. Coote	31 May 1987
Grantham	
The Right Revd. D. G. Hawker	4 July 1987
Ludlow	
The Right Revd. S. M. Wood	31 July 1987
Dorchester	
The Right Revd. C. J. E. Meyer	31 October 1987
Burnley	
The Right Revd. R. C. C. Watson	30 November 1987
Plymouth	
The Right Revd. K. A. Newing	30 April 1988
Southampton	
The Right Revd. E. D. Cartwright	31 October 1988
Sherwood	
The Right Revd. H. R. Darby	28 February 1989
Reading	
The Right Revd. R. G. G. Foley	30 June 1989
Hertford	
The Right Revd. K. H. Pillar	15 November 1989

(d) Assistant bishops who have retired since 20 February 1986[1]

Diocese and bishop	Date
(i) FULL-TIME	
Peterborough	
The Right Revd. W. A. Franklin	31 August 1986
(ii) PART-TIME	
London	
The Right Revd. D. S. Arden	14 April 1986
Southwark/Europe	
The Right Revd. E. M. H. Capper	1 June 1986
London/Southwark	
The Right Revd. E. G. Knapp-Fisher	31 December 1986 31 January 1987
Leicester	
The Right Revd. J. E. L. Mort	2 October 1988
Derby	
The Right Revd. C. A. Warren	25 February 1989

[1] This list includes only those Assistant Bishops for whose stipends at sometime the Commissioners had a responsibility in whole or in part.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Single Market

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list which of the 300 steps necessary for the achievement of the single market in 1993 have been transported into legal form in all member states; and which have yet to be dealt with.

Mr. Redwood: I have been asked to reply.

Commission Communication (Section (89) 2098 on 4 December 1989) presented to the Internal Market Council on 21 December identified the following 10 directives that have been implemented in all member states. They include a number of measures which have time derogations in limited member states. For a more detailed picture of the state of play on implementation, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of Tuesday 9 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell).

Various Controls

1. Duty free fuel contained in fuel tanks of commercial motor vehicles Directive 85/347.

Veterinary and phytosanitary controls

2. Hormone growth promoters Directive 85/358.

3. Antibiotic residues Directive 86/469.
—control of residues Directive 469.

4. Control of foot and mouth disease Directive 85/511.

5. Amendments to Directive 77/93 (plant health) Directive 85/547.

6. Amendment of Directive 79/117 (ethylene oxide) Directive 86/355.

Pharmaceuticals and high-technology medicines

7. Amendment to Directive 65/65 concerning medical specialities Directive 87/21.

Food Law

8. Sampling and methods of analysis Directive 85/591.

Capital Movements

9. Operations such as transactions in securities, admission of securities and long-term commercial credits Directive 86/566.

10. Units in collective investment undertakings for transferable securities Directive 85/583.

Romania

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence the Government have about food supplies in Romania; what amount of food and medical aid has been sent to Romania since the revolution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We do not yet have any reliable statistics on food supplies in Romania. The Romanian authorities have requested several hundred thousand tonnes of food from western countries. A European Commission team examined these needs in Bucharest on 15 and 16 January and we expect proposals for a food aid package soon.

Substantial quantities of urgent medical aid have already been sent to Romania from both public and private sources. The United Kingdom is providing immediate help in the form of medical equipment and literature, but figures for the total quantity are not yet available. We are now considering how best we can, in co-operation with other donors, respond to Romania's longer-term needs.

China

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Chinese Government about the lifting of martial law in China and the continuation of martial law in Tibet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have suspended normal ministerial contacts with the Chinese Government in line with the declaration on China at the Madrid European Council. We welcome the lifting of martial law in Peking as a positive move in the right direction. We hope the Chinese Government will now take further steps to strengthen the protection of human rights throughout China, including the lifting of martial law in Tibet.

Eastern Europe

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice his Department is giving to those people considering travel to East European countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department's general advice to those who inquire is that there is no reason not to visit eastern European countries but that visitors should if possible avoid demonstrations and large crowds. Petrol may be in short supply.

The Department has published a warning to travellers considering visiting Romania that many facilities, in particular medical facilities, are stretched and may not be readily available.

Hong Kong

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has entered a reservation to CITES on behalf of Hong Kong to allow the current ivory stockpile in the Crown Colony to be placed on the market.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House on 17 January.

TRANSPORT

Traffic Congestion

65. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the costs to business of traffic congestion in the south-east.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the costs to business of traffic congestion in the south-east.

64. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the costs to business of traffic congestion in the south-east.

63. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the costs to business of traffic congestion in the south-east.

Mr. Atkins: There is no way of making accurate overall estimates of the cost to business of traffic congestion in the south-east.

Vehicles (Energy Consumption)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what percentage of total energy consumed by transport in the United Kingdom was accounted for by commercial goods vehicles and vehicles other than private cars annually, for 1985 to 1989 inclusive;

(2) what percentage of total energy consumed by transport in the United Kingdom was accounted for by private cars annually for 1985 to 1989 inclusive.

Mr. Atkins: Data for 1989 are not yet available. Estimates for 1985 to 1988 are as follows:

Estimates of energy used by road vehicles as a percentage of all energy used in transport in the United Kingdom

Percentage

Vehicle	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Cars	50·4	51·0	51·3	51·4
Goods vehicles	22·7	22·7	23·1	23·7
Other vehicles	6·2	5·9	5·4	4·7

Locomotives

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of total energy consumed by transport in the United Kingdom was accounted for by *(a)* electrically powered locomotives and *(b)* diesel-powered locomotives annually, for 1985 to 1989 inclusive.

Mr. Portillo: Data for 1989 are not yet available. Estimates for 1985 to 1988 are as follows:

Energy used by rail as percentage of all energy used in transport in the United Kingdom

Percentage

Energy	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Electricity	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·6
Petroleum	2·2	2·0	1·8	1·7

Note: These figures will include some energy which was not used for powering locomotives.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what percentage of the total rail freight traffic was hauled annually by *(a)* electrically powered locomotives and *(b)* diesel-powered locomotives for 1985 to 1989 inclusive;

(2) what percentage of total rail passenger traffic was hauled annually by *(a)* electrically powered locomotives and *(b)* by diesel-powered locomotives for 1985 to 1989 inclusive.

Mr. Portillo: This information is obtainable from table 3.7 on page 137 of the "1978-88 Transport Statistics Great Britain", a copy of which is held in the Library.

Domestic Flights

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of total energy consumed by transport in the United Kingdom was accounted for by United Kingdom domestic flights annually for 1985 to 1989 inclusive.

Mr. McLoughlin: This information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Rail

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the objectives of his policy for the future of British Rail.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend set out the Government's objectives for British Rail in his statement to the House on 19 December.

Road Improvements

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the trunk road improvement schemes which are due to start in England in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: It is too soon to provide a list. The composition of the new starts programme will depend on the completion of outstanding procedures on individual schemes and on price movements over the coming months.

Scottish Lowland Airports

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what considerations of policy he has taken into account in deciding the timing of his forthcoming announcement of the results of his review of Scottish lowland airports policy; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to announce his decision on the review of Scottish lowland airports policy.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend has said that he expects to be able to announce his decision on future policy for the Scottish lowland airports early this year. That remains the position. We recognise the need to end uncertainty over the policy, but we shall not be reaching a decision until the views expressed in the over 1,100 responses received during the consultation have been carefully considered. My right hon. Friend has written to my hon. Friend to stress that there is no question of external considerations being allowed to affect either the decision itself or its timing.

Household Refuse

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider requiring special licences for the transportation by road or rail of partly decomposed household refuse from controlled local authority tips.

Mr. Atkins: There are no specific guidelines. The road transport of dangerous goods, including wastes, is governed by national regulations and related approved codes of practice. All goods carried by rail are subject to BRS conditions of carriage and conditions of acceptance, which include specific conditions for dangerous goods, including wastes. The Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 will require the registration of any person, unless exempted by regulation, carrying controlled waste, including household waste, in the course of his business.

Railway Lines

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consult outside interested parties on his proposed terms of reference for his departmental committee to establish a noise standard for new railway lines.

Mr. Portillo: No. The object will be to establish the standard at a level which equitably relates to the standard set by regulation for new highways.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will include outside members on his departmental committee to set a noise standard for railway lines; and whether the committee will consult outside interested parties before reaching its conclusions.

Mr. Portillo: Outside members will be included and there will be consultation. It will be for the committee to decide at what stage to consult outside interested parties.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why he has decided that his Department's new noise standard for railway lines should relate to the standard set for new highways, and what account he has taken of the particular characteristics and pattern of noise from railway lines.

Mr. Portillo: I consider it right to aim for a noise insulation standard for new railway lines which is comparable with the standard currently set by regulation for new highways in order to be even-handed. It would not be right to discriminate in favour of or against people living near new railway lines as opposed to people living near new roads. It will be for the departmental committee to consider and take account of the characteristics and pattern of noise from railway lines.

Test Bores, Eccles

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what purpose test bores 2069, 2070 and 2071 were carried out on land at Grange farm, Eccles, under section 290(3) of the Highways Act 1980.

Mr. Atkins: Preliminary investigations associated with the proposed widening of the M62 between junctions 12 and 18 prior to the White Paper "Roads for Prosperity".

Greater Manchester Relief Road

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many route options were produced by consultants in respect of the M6 to M56 section of the proposed Greater Manchester western and northern relief road.

Mr. Atkins: Five. All but one were eventually rejected for environmental reasons.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total length of new motorway envisaged in each section of the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road, M6 to M56, M56 to M62 and M62 to M66.

Mr. Atkins: The information is as follows:
M6 to M56—6 miles
M56 to M62; M62 to M66—It is too early in the planning process to say what lengths of new motorways are envisaged.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total length of road widening to existing roads envisaged in each section of the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road, M6 to M56, M56 to M62 and M62 to M66.

Mr. Atkins: The information is as follows:
M6 to M56—None
M56 to M62; M62 to M66—It is too early in planning process to quantify the total length of existing roads to be widened.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the consultants' brief in respect of the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road includes consideration of a new motorway crossing of the Manchester ship canal.

Mr. Atkins: Yes.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the road widening of the M62 between junctions 12 and 18 is regarded as part of the proposed Greater Manchester western and northern relief road.

Mr. Atkins: We expect there to be a need for a new route on the north side of Manchester.

Oil Spills

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline what research is being undertaken in respect of new methods to deal with oil spills; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine pollution control unit (MPCU) of the Department of Transport undertakes a continuing programme of counter-pollution research including new or improved methods of dealing with oil slicks. Research is currently being undertaken into the use of demulsifiers as a means of inhibiting formation of emulsions and promoting natural dispersion of oil; satellite remote sensing for the detection of oil slicks; techniques for cleaning oil from shingle beaches; the resources and methods required to clean different types of beach; and possible methods of cleaning contaminated salt marshes and mud flats.

These projects are part of the wider overall programme of progressive research into methods of dealing with oil and chemical spills which the MPCU has been undertaking for a number of years at an annual cost of about £1 million. This has resulted in the successful development and introduction into service of aerial dispersant spraying techniques; a mechanical recovery system; increased identification and refinement of the correct techniques to apply in dealing with oil pollution at sea and on various types of shoreline; detailed knowledge of the behaviour of oil at sea; a straw baler machine which produces straw booms for use in protecting sensitive areas of coastline; aerial surveillance; and various information systems and manuals.

The results of the research are made available to relevant authorities in the United Kingdom and abroad as part of the United Kingdom's contribution to interna tional co-operation in counter-pollution.

Taxis

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will fund research on the personal security of passengers travelling in private hire cars and taxis.

Mr. Portillo: The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is commissioning research into the actual and perceived risks to personal security of travelling in minicabs in London which are not licensed, compared with taxis in London which are licensed: and whether minicab licensing, as practised outside London, alters the position.

The trust has sought a contribution from the Government towards funding and I have agreed that the Department of Transport will provide half the cost of the research, up to a ceiling of £20,500. I understand that the other half of the funding will come from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and the Police Foundation which are jointly seeking additional funds from the private sector for that purpose; and that the research should be completed in about a year's time.

Hazardous Chemicals

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will take steps to end the practice of allowing barrels of hazardous chemicals to be carried on open-sided lorries;

(2) what steps he has taken to assess the implications for regulations relating to the transport by road of hazardous wastes of the recent accident at Burton-upon-Trent in which sodium cyanide was spilt in a residential area from an open lorry.

Mr. Atkins: The Health and Safety Executive has been made aware of details of the incident. It will consider any change to the procedures as part of the practice of regularly reviewing the relevant regulations.

River Thames

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any further consideration has been given to a comprehensive set of regulations governing navigation in the tidal Thames following the Marchioness disaster.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Port of London Authority has already incorporated within its general direction for navigation the main navigational measures recommended by the interim report of the marine accident investigation

branch. It is considering, with the Department the further recommendation with respect to the segregation of commercial and passenger traffic on the river.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Examination Results

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all local education authorities in England in rank order of expenditure per secondary pupil per year, starting with the highest spending authority, together with their position in the table of examination results for school leavers achieving grades A to C at GCSE in 1988 and 1989.

Mrs. Rumbold: The table gives the net institutional expenditure per secondary school pupil in the financial year 1987-88, and averaged examination results for the three years 1985-86 to 1987-88. The purpose of averaging is to reduce sampling error within the derived percentages. Comparable information is not yet available for 1988-89.

Secondary schools in England: net institutional expenditure per pupil and examination achievements at GCSE[1]

	Net expenditure per pupil (£ cash)[2,3]	*Numbers of leavers with five or more GCSE results at grades A to C*[4,5] *As percentage of all school leavers*	*Rank*
Local education authorities			
ILEA	2,610	16·1	88
Waltham Forest	2,345	11·3	95
Brent	2,195	19·1	75
Newham	1,880	14·3	93
Croydon	1,825	22·7	57
Manchester	1,785	15·9	90
Harrow	1,775	38·2	2
Barking	1,745	11·8	94
Knowsley	1,735	10·0	96
Liverpool	1,730	17·9	81
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,725	17·4	84
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,720	34·2	5
Coventry	1,705	20·7	68
Barnet	1,675	41·5	1
Hillingdon	1,675	20·0	70
Hounslow	1,675	21·5	63
Wigan	1,675	29·4	15
Havering	1,670	23·3	53
North Tyneside	1,660	23·2	54
Rochdale	1,650	18·7	78
Bromley	1,645	32·0	9
Walsall	1,645	20·9	67
Sandwell	1,630	14·6	92
Salford	1,625	21·8	62
Bury	1,615	26·4	31
Redbridge	1,600	26·6	28
South Tyneside	1,585	18·3	79
Enfield	1,580	24·7	45
Wolverhampton	1,575	17·8	82
Dudley	1,570	22·3	61
Leicestershire	1,565	23·4	51
Gateshead	1,560	19·8	72
Oxfordshire	1,560	26·2	34
Cleveland	1,545	27·1	26
Nottinghamshire	1,540	21·6	59
Bexley	1,530	27·9	20
Derbyshire	1,530	22·5	60
Tameside	1,525	24·7	44
Trafford	1,525	31·1	10
Cumbria	1,510	26·9	27
St. Helens	1,505	23·3	52
Sunderland	1,505	18·8	77
Buckinghamshire	1,505	33·4	6
Stockport	1,500	24·9	43
Doncaster	1,500	18·8	76
Wakefield	1,495	17·6	83
Birmingham	1,490	18·3	80
Hertfordshire	1,490	30·3	12
Wirral	1,480	25·9	39
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,475	29·6	14
Merton	1,470	23·5	49
Barnsley	1,470	17·0	87
Salop	1,470	27·7	22
Sefton	1,460	26·3	32
Humberside	1,460	21·5	64
Bedfordshire	1,455	26·0	38
Solihull	1,450	30·8	11
Lancashire	1,450	25·7	40
Rotherham	1,440	19·5	73
Calderdale	1,440	20·0	71
Avon	1,435	26·1	35
Bolton	1,425	26·1	37
Sutton	1,420	34·9	4
Essex	1,420	26·3	33
Staffordshire	1,420	23·4	50
Kirklees	1,415	25·1	42
Surrey	1,415	36·4	3
Bradford	1,410	16·1	89
Durham	1,405	21·0	66
Hampshire	1,405	27·7	21
Warwickshire	1,400	26·6	29
Oldham	1,395	15·5	91
Cheshire	1,390	28·3	19
Northumberland	1,390	29·8	13
East Sussex	1,385	27·4	23
Gloucestershire	1,385	29·1	17
Norfolk	1,385	22·8	55
Devon	1,380	24·4	47
North Yorkshire	1,375	32·8	7
Northamptonshire	1,375	22·7	58
Leeds	1,370	21·3	65
West Sussex	1,360	32·6	8
Somerset	1,355	24·5	46
Isle of Wight	1,350	17·0	86
Wiltshire	1,350	24·0	48
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1,350	27·3	24
Hereford and Worcester	1,330	28·5	18
Dorset	1,320	27·2	25
Cambridgeshire	1,315	26·1	36
Suffolk	1,305	22·7	56
Kent	1,290	26·5	30
Lincolnshire	1,280	25·3	41
Ealing	n/a	19·1	74
Haringey	n/a	17·3	85
Sheffield	n/a	20·2	69
Berkshire	n/a	29·4	16

[1] The figures in the table have not been adjusted to take account of variations in LEA's socio-economic circumstances.

[2] Net institutional expenditure includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises, and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

[3] The unit spending figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to the Department of the Environment for the financial year 1987-88, and pupil number returns to DES. Data for four authorities are not available.

[4] The examination data are aggregated from the results of a sample survey for the academic years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88. The survey is based on a 10 per cent. sample of pupils in maintained and independent schools (excluding special schools) who have reached the minimum school leaving age. The percentages quoted do not reflect the achievements of pupils at O-level, CSE or GCSE after leaving school; nor their attainments in examinations leading to vocational or other qualifications at school or elsewhere.

[5] Includes grades A-C at O-level and CSE grade 1.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of children sitting *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* A-level examinations in each local education authority in England as a percentage of the total number in the relevant year groups for 1988; and if he will list by each local education authority in England the number of children achieving (i) GCSE grades A to C, (ii) GCSE grades C to F and (iii) A-level grades A and E as a percentage of the total number of pupils in the relevant year in 1988 and 1989.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is not readily available in the form requested. The table gives sampled examination results for school leavers, averaged over the academic years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88. The purpose of averaging is to reduce sampling error within the derived percentages. Comparable information is not yet available for 1988-89.

School leavers in England: aggregated examination attempts and graded results for the academic years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88
Percentage of school leavers

Local education authorities	One or more examination attempts		One or more examination results		
	GCSE[1]	A-level[2]	GCSE grades A-C[3]	GCSE grades D-G[4]	A-level grades A-E
Barking	82·9	10·6	42·3	39·2	8·3
Barnet	92·0	33·8	66·6	24·9	30·7
Bexley	90·5	19·5	54·6	35·0	17·0
Brent	90·0	16·7	51·6	6·3	13·1
Bromley	93·7	23·0	59·1	34·2	20·3
Croydon	90·0	14·6	54·0	35·1	13·6
Ealing	88·8	15·1	48·6	36·2	12·9
Enfield	92·0	21·3	53·6	36·9	17·7
Haringey	86·1	14·4	46·3	37·8	12·4
Harrow	95·3	16·9	69·3	25·5	15·4
Havering	91·1	15·7	54·7	34·9	13·6
Hillingdon	92·9	15·7	54·0	38·5	13·3
Hounslow	87·3	16·4	50·9	34·2	13·1
Kingston-upon-Thames	91·3	23·2	61·1	29·5	20·1
Merton	86·0	15·2	51·2	34·5	13·9
Newham	81·0	11·8	47·2	30·8	9·0
Redbridge	89·1	21·8	53·1	34·2	19·7
Richmond-upon-Thames	92·8	0·2	61·1	30·7	0·0
Sutton	94·0	26·8	61·0	32·8	25·3
Waltham Forest	86·7	10·3	41·6	40·8	8·2
Birmingham	86·1	13·2	46·0	39·0	11·1
Coventry	90·3	14·9	50·2	39·4	12·1
Dudley	91·3	11·0	51·9	38·8	10·4
Sandwell	85·3	8·2	39·2	45·5	7·3
Solihull	96·9	21·4	60·5	36·1	19·7
Walsall	86·4	16·0	49·6	36·4	14·3
Wolverhampton	87·0	12·1	43·5	42·0	9·5
Knowsley	77·5	5·9	34·2	40·7	4·8
Liverpool	79·9	14·7	41·6	34·8	12·7
St. Helens	86·9	15·9	50·1	35·6	14·6
Sefton	90·6	19·8	55·6	33·5	17·4
Wirral	90·9	19·9	52·6	36·0	17·8
Bolton	90·8	17·0	55·9	34·1	15·2
Bury	92·0	15·1	60·7	30·0	14·1
Manchester	80·4	15·9	44·0	33·2	13·8
Oldham	87·2	10·5	43·2	42·5	9·3
Rochdale	85·3	15·0	49·7	33·8	11·6
Salford	88·4	14·2	47·9	38·5	12·6
Stockport	92·2	19·7	58·9	30·7	16·8
Tameside	92·2	13·3	52·4	38·7	11·3
Trafford	95·9	17·5	62·0	31·6	16·4
Wigan	94·1	16·0	59·6	33·3	14·5
Barnsley	88·2	10·6	38·5	48·8	10·0
Doncaster	88·1	15·1	44·5	42·3	12·9
Rotherham	89·6	14·8	44·4	43·8	13·5
Sheffield	90·2	12·7	49·7	38·7	11·1
Bradford	83·6	12·6	42·5	39·2	10·6
Calderdale	89·9	16·0	46·6	41·1	12·9
Kirklees	89·9	17·3	50·1	38·7	15·0
Leeds	89·0	13·6	48·7	39·2	12·5
Wakefield	87·0	8·5	44·6	41·4	6·9
Gateshead	84·2	13·1	45·2	38·0	10·8
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	84·5	13·4	41·8	41·5	10·8
North Tyneside	91·3	16·1	50·9	39·7	14·0
South Tyneside	93·6	11·8	45·9	47·0	10·0
Sunderland	91·3	10·1	47·7	43·5	8·1
ILEA	80·3	12·7	44·8	33·5	11·0
Avon	93·9	16·6	55·6	37·1	14·9
Bedfordshire	94·7	18·2	55·9	37·1	16·1
Berkshire	95·7	21·9	57·4	37·0	20·3
Buckinghamshire	94·1	23·7	63·7	29·5	22·4
Cambridgeshire	94·5	14·7	56·5	36·7	13·2
Cheshire	93·2	18·2	56·2	35·7	16·4
Cleveland	89·1	16·2	49·8	38·5	14·8
Cornwall	92·7	16·0	58·5	33·4	14·6
Cumbria	92·6	17·5	56·1	35·5	16·0
Derbyshire	92·9	12·9	50·7	41·1	11·3
Devon	95·3	12·8	55·5	38·5	11·8
Dorset	96·1	14·7	59·9	35·4	13·3
Durham	90·3	11·9	51·4	37·9	10·1
East Sussex	91·4	20·5	56·0	34·8	18·2
Essex	92·7	16·1	57·4	33·9	14·5
Gloucestershire	94·7	18·9	58·6	35·2	16·9
Hampshire	94·6	14·7	58·6	35·6	13·2
Hereford and Worcester	92·5	19·6	57·5	33·7	18·0
Hertfordshire	93·2	21·1	61·0	31·2	19·1
Humberside	90·3	14·4	48·4	40·8	12·9
Isle of Wight	92·8	15·7	47·4	43·0	13·4
Kent	92·7	18·4	53·9	38·2	16·9
Lancashire	90·6	10·9	54·0	35·0	9·9
Leicestershire	89·4	19·7	48·3	39·6	17·1
Lincolnshire	93·3	16·5	53·5	38·0	14·7
Norfolk	87·8	11·3	52·1	34·7	10·5
North Yorkshire	93·4	21·0	59·3	33·0	19·4
Northamptonshire	91·7	15·5	51·3	39·0	13·7
Northumberland	93·4	20·8	60·0	32·9	19·3
Nottinghamshire	92·4	14·3	46·1	45·5	12·7
Oxfordshire	94·8	17·4	57·7	36·1	15·4
Shropshire	92·8	17·2	56·5	35·9	15·3
Somerset	95·5	9·3	54·2	40·3	8·2
Staffordshire	89·4	14·0	51·9	36·8	12·7
Suffolk	93·3	15·6	51·3	40·2	14·0
Surrey	95·0	26·4	64·3	30·0	24·0
Warwickshire	93·1	18·6	56·8	35·8	16·9
West Sussex	95·4	22·0	62·8	32·0	20·2
Wiltshire	94·7	12·3	52·9	40·0	11·3

[1] Including attempts at O-level and CSE.
[2] Including a small number of leavers with no O-level or CSE attainments recorded.
[3] Including O-level grades A-C and CSE grade 1.
[4] Including O-level grades D-E and CSE grades 2-5.

Council of National Academic Awards

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the terms of reference of the departmental review of the role of the Council for National Academic Awards; when he expects it to be completed; and whether he will publish the findings and any recommendations.

Mr. Jackson: The terms of reference are to review the justification, role and functions of the council. My right hon. Friend expects to receive the report by the summer, and to publish it.

Student Loans

66. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide further details of the costs of the Government's proposals on top-up loans for students announced in his Autumn Statement.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide further details of the costs of the Government's proposals on top-up loans for students announced in his Autumn Statement.

67. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide further details of the costs of the Government's proposals on top-up loans for students announced in his Autumn Statement.

68. **Mr. Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide further details of the costs of the Government's proposals on top-up loans for students announced in his Autumn Statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Government's spending plans include £109 million in 1990-91, £179 million in 1991-92 and £204 million in 1992-93 for the introduction of the top-up loans scheme from September 1990, subject to the passage of the necessary legislation. Provision for the administration costs of the loans scheme will be added when the figures are available. The loan rates will be as set out in the White Paper "Top-up loans for Students". (Cm. 520).

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money will be allocated to Durham education authority for student loans in 1990.

Mr. Jackson: Student Loans Company Ltd. will provide loans directly to students. The funds will not be allocated to or through local education authorities.

Polytechnics (North-East)

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many members of the governing bodies of *(a)* Newcastle polytechnic, *(b)* Sunderland polytechnic and *(c)* Teesside polytechnic receive remuneration for their position; what is the amount of that remuneration: and what criteria are used to determine that remuneration.

Mr. Jackson: Information is not collected centrally on these matters which are within the discretion of individual higher education corporations under schedule 7 to the Education Reform Act.

Education Support Grant

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what allocations will be made to local education authorities under the education support grants programme for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: My Department is today writing to all local education authorities in England to inform them of the level of expenditure which I have approved for each activity in the education support grants (ESG) programme for 1990-91. The programme is summarised in the following table.

The expenditure supported by ESGs in 1990-91 will total £141 million. This is over £15 million higher than the 1989-90 programme. Of the £141 million total, £50 million will support new activities and the extension of existing activities, while £91 million will support the continuation of projects begun in earlier rounds.

As in previous years, there has been great interest in the education support grants programme, with LEAs submitting a wide range of bids. I am pleased to say that all LEAs in England will be participating in the 1990-91 programme, which is the largest so far.

The activities targeted on implementing the Education Reform Act include major programmes to support local management of schools (LMS) and the national curriculum. We will be supporting over £36 million of spending on LMS, helping local authorities to install management information systems in schools, to train staff for their new responsibilities, and to provide central support.

A range of other activities will help schools get the national curriculum into place, including those on information technology in schools, English language, primary science, and mathematics, as well as the activity on the basic curriculum and assessment. Together, these activities will support some £55 million of spending.

We shall also be allocating grant for a range of other priorities, including schemes to recruit former teachers and mature entrants into teaching, and to help schools cope better with their most difficult pupils.

This ESG programme represents a substantial package of assistance for schools, colleges and LEAs. It will help target resources where they are most needed, and particularly on the implementation of the Education Reform Act. In total, ESGs will support over £110 million of spending in 1990-91 on activities related to the ERA.

For the future, I want to see the ESG programme focus even more closely on our key priorities. I shall wish in particular to concentrate future support on the implementation of our main ERA reforms, especially in the areas relating to the national curriculum and local management of schools. I shall also wish to consider what more can be done to help authorities to recruit teachers in the light of experience of the programme I am announcing today. The bids for the teacher recruitment activity showed that many authorities have some way to go in developing strategies for stimulating recruitment.

Education support grants programme 1990-91

£1 million

	New expenditure and extensions	*Committed and continuing expenditure*	*Total*
Activities related to the implementation of the Education Reform Act			
1. Local management of schools	11·2	25·0	36·2
2. Management information systems for FE	4·0	7·1	11·1
3. Training for school governors	1·0	4·2	5·2
4. Training for FE college governors	1·9	—	1·9
5. Planning and delegation to colleges	[1]0·1	1·2	1·3
6. Basic curriculum and assessment	9·3	10·0	19·3
7. LEA inspection[2]	—	3·0	3·0
8. IT in schools	9·0	4·8	13·8
9. English language in the curriculum	—	8·2	8·2

	New expenditure and extensions	Committed and continuing expenditure	Total
10. Primary science and technology	—	7·4	7·4
11. Maths in schools	—	3·2	3·2
Other priorities			
12. Difficult pupils	2·3	—	2·3
13. Improving school attendance	2·3	—	2·3
14. Combating vandalism and arson	2·0	—	2·0
15. Health education	4·0	—	4·0
16. Teacher recruitment	2·0	—	2·0
17. Workers educational association[3]	1·0	—	1·0
18. Youth leaders in inner cities	—	4·0	4·0
19. Learning by achievement	—	2·3	2·3
20. Adult literacy	—	1·7	1·7
21. Open learning	—	2·0	2·0
22. Educational guidance	—	1·2	1·2
23. Education for a multi-ethnic society	—	2·2	2·2
24. Portage (support for SEN children under five)	—	1·4	1·4
25. Social responsibility	—	1·3	1·3
26. Rural primary schools	—	0·7	0·7
Total	50·1	90·9	141·0
Grant[4]			83·6

[1] New expenditure under this activity is being allocated to the inner London boroughs only.

[2] The second tranche of support for LEA inspection is included in the basic curriculum and assessment activity.

[3] The activity to support provision made by the Workers' Educational Association was a late addition to the 1990-91 ESG programme. The distribution between LEAs of the funds for this activity will be decided in due course.

[4] Grant will be paid at 60 per cent. on all activities except: Science and technology in primary schools and maths in schools, where committed expenditure will continue to be paid at the 1989-90 rate of 50 per cent.; and the Workers Educational Association, which will be paid at 70 per cent.

Teacher Shortages

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what action has been taken by his Department to improve teacher recruitment;

(2) what action his Department has taken to improve teacher numbers in shortage subjects.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Since 1986 the Department has undertaken a range of measures to improve teacher supply. These include new initial and in-service training courses; the establishment of the teaching as a career unit to undertake national advertising and publicity; taster courses for those considering a career change; support for local initiatives to attract mature new entrants and former serving teachers; and the licensed and articled teacher schemes.

The measures have also included bursaries for initial teacher training students, and retraining courses, which have concentrated on the shortage subject areas.

Action programme on teacher shortage

The table shows the principal measures taken since the introduction of our action programme on teacher shortages in 1986, and their costs to date.

Measures	Total Cost £ million
(i) Bursary scheme for trainee teachers in maths, physics, CDT	6·381
(ii) Support for LEAs in-service training in shortage subjects in order to upgrade teachers' skills and conversion of teachers in other subjects to maths, physics and CDT	35·500
(iii) Support for new initiatives in higher education institutions and the Open University for new types of initial and in-service training provision, including distance learning packs and more flexible training arrangements	6·730
(iv) TASC (Teaching as a Career) Unit to promote teaching as a career and improve recruitment practices among local education authorities and initial teacher training institutions	0·725
(v) TASC advertising and publicity campaigns	1·179
(vi) Production of video teaching programmes by the BBC, Thames TV and Yorkshire TV for in-service use	0·435
(vii) Pump priming support for local initiatives to improve supply in shortage subjects	0·050
(viii) Taster courses for mature people and others to encourage entry or return to teaching	0·040
(ix) Regional conferences with the Scientific Technology Regional Organisation (SATRO) on how industry can help to alleviate shortages	0·010

NATIONAL FINANCE

Household Incomes

15. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the average household income is devoted to national and local taxation; and what was the comparable percentage in 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A married man with two children on average male earnings will pay approximately 36 per cent. of his earnings in taxes in 1989-90, about one percentage point more than in 1978-79. Over the same period he has enjoyed an increase in real take-home pay of 32 per cent.

Business Investment

16. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures indicating the share of gross domestic product taken by business investment.

Mr. Major: Business investment as a proportion of gross domestic product was 14·6 per cent. in 1988. The Industry Act forecast projected total business investment to grow by 9¼ per cent. in 1989. As a share of GDP, in 1989 business investment is likely to be one of the highest since the war.

54. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures indicating the share of gross domestic product taken by business investment.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce).

Taxation

17. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the composite rate of tax for 1990-91.

Mr. Lilley: The composite rate of tax for 1990-91 is 22 per cent.

32. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it remains his policy to achieve lower rates of direct taxation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter).

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, he will list those reasons which are known to the Inland Revenue other than for the sole or main purpose of avoiding or evading United Kingdom taxation, that United Kingdom-based individuals, companies and trusts enter into transactions with persons or organisations based in tax havens; and whether he will carry out studies with a view to estimating the current loss of revenue through business transactions involving tax havens.

Mr. Lilley: The Inland Revenue does not make judgments as to the motives of individuals, companies or trusts entering into transactions with persons or organisations based in tax havens. There is no reliable means of estimating the tax loss through avoidance and evasion in connection with tax haven transactions.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any proposals to prevent tax avoidance and tax evasion by satellite television companies entering into business transactions with connected or associated companies, individuals and trusts based in *(a)* Jersey, *(b)* the Isle of Man, *(c)* Guernsey, *(d)* the Netherlands Antilles, *(e)* the Cayman Islands and *(f)* Liechtenstein for the sole purpose of avoiding or evading the payment of taxation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: If my hon. Friend has evidence of tax avoidance or evasion in this field perhaps he will write to me.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect on the total revenue received of abolishing the upper income tax bands.

Mr. Lilley: The 1988 financial statement and budget report estimated the cost of abolishing higher rates above 40 per cent. at £965 million in 1988-89 and £2,070 million in 1989-90. These estimates did not include behavioural effects.

Homelessness

18. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials in his Department are employed to advise him on the resources needed to tackle homelessness.

Mr. Ryder: Nine.

Balance of Trade

19. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the United Kingdom visible balance of trade.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the United Kingdom visible balance of trade.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the three months to November 1989, there was a deficit on visible trade of £5·2 billion, the smallest deficit since the three months to June 1988.

Investment

20. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Treasury's forecast for the growth of total investment.

Mr. Major: The Autumn Statement forecast projected investment to rise by 5¼ per cent. in 1989 and 1¼ per cent. in 1990. This comes after an average growth of 7¼ per cent. a year between 1983 and 1988.

59. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the growth in total investment since 1983.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Total investment grew by 42 per cent. between 1983 and 1988, an annual average increase of 7¼ per cent. This is far higher than the growth range recorded under the last Labour Government, which averaged ¼ per cent. per year.

Manufacturing Output

21. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of manufacturing output in the three months to October 1989; and what it was in the preceding three months.

Mr. Ryder: Manufacturing output in the three months to October 1989 was unchanged from the previous three months at its highest-ever level.

European Monetary Union

22. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take in preparation for the proposed intergovernmental conference on European economic and monetary union at the end of the year.

60. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take in preparation for the proposed intergovernmental conference on European economic and monetary union at the end of the year.

Mr. Lilley: We will be working through Ecofin to advance our proposals.

50. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on European economic and monetary union.

Mr. Lilley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day).

Growth

23. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for growth in 1990.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest forecast for GDP growth in 1990 is 1¼ per cent., as published in the Autumn Statement.

33. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to revise *(a)* his forecast of growth made in the Autumn Statement, and *(b)* the assumption upon which he then worked.

48. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to revise *(a)* his forecast of growth made in the Autumn Statement, and *(b)* the assumption upon which he then worked.

53. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to revise *(a)* his forecast of growth made in the Autumn Statement, and *(b)* the assumption upon which he then worked.

57. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to revise *(a)* his forecast of growth made in the Autumn Statement, and *(b)* the assumption upon which he then worked.

Mr. Norman Lamont: An updated forecast of growth and the assumptions on which it is based will be published with the 1990 Budget.

Interest Rates

24. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer wht is the current level of United Kingdom short-term interest rates; and what is the level in West Germany.

Mr. Ryder: On 17 January, three-month money market rates in the United Kingdom were 15·4 per cent., compared with 8·1 per cent. in West Germany.

28. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has received any representation from the Confederation of British Industry on interest rates.

Mr. Ryder: Yes.

44. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of interest rates.

55. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on the current level of interest rates.

Mr. Ryder: Bank base rates are 15 per cent.

46. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last discussed with other EEC Finance Ministers matters affecting domestic interest rate policies.

Mr. Ryder: The Ecofin Council met in Brussels on 18 December 1989. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer represented the United Kingdom. The Council discussed a range of issues of mutual interest including economic and monetary matters.

61. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the effect of high interest rates on small businesses.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of such representations.

Balance of Payments

25. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the balance of payments *(a)* for visibles and *(b)* for invisibles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the three months to November 1989, the visible trade deficit was £5·2 billion, the smallest deficit since the three months to June 1988. Preliminary estimates for invisibles for the third quarter of 1989, the latest period for which figures are available, show a surplus of £0·2 billion.

Inflation

26. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many European countries have higher inflation rates than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ryder: Four EC countries have higher inflation rates than the United Kingdom when estimates of owner-occupier housing costs are excluded so as to bring the published figures on to a more comparable basis.

30. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest figure that he has for inflation in the United Kingdom; and what is the average inflation rate for countries that are full members of the European monetary system.

Mr. Ryder: Excluding mortgage interest payments United Kingdom inflation was 6·1 per cent. in November 1989. The latest, more comparable, inflation rate for members of the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS was 4·4 per cent. in October 1989.

67. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the growth of average earnings over the last six months on the rate of inflation.

Mr. Major: Excessive pay settlements primarily threaten job prospects. The Government will not bail out employers who do not control their costs.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest inflation figure.

Mr. Ryder: The all-items RPI annual inflation rate in November was 7·7 per cent. The underlying rate of inflation, as measured by the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments, was 6·1 per cent.

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest forecast for inflation for the last quarter of 1990.

Mr. Ryder: The Autumn Statement forecast is for RPI annual inflation to fall to 5¼ per cent. by the fourth quarter of 1990.

Medical Insurance

27. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the cost of private medical insurance in a full year.

Mr. Lilley: About £40 million in 1990-91.

VAT

29. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the value added tax unit for small businesses.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to extend the headquarters unit in Customs and

Excise dealing directly with VAT policy for small businesses. It continues to seek ways of minimising the effects of VAT on small businesses.

Autumn Statement

31. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on his Autumn Statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend will respond to the Committee's report in due course.

European Community Banking

34. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what work he envisages being undertaken by the joint committee and associated secretariat of central banks of the member nations of the European Community now being established.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett).

G7

35. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Finance Ministers of the G7 countries; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Ryder: The last meeting of Finance Ministers of the Group of Seven countries was in Washington on 23 September before the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. A wide range of topics was discussed.

Capital Gains Tax

36. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the future of capital gains tax.

Mr. Lilley: The Government have received a number of different representations, which will be borne in mind in the run-up to the Budget.

Share Ownership

37. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the number of shareholders in the United Kingdom has increased during the 1980s.

Mr. Lilley: The joint Treasury and stock exchange survey carried out in January and February 1989 estimated that approximately 9 million people own shares —20 per cent. of the adult population. This represents a threefold increase since 1979.

41. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to introduce any measures to boost participation in share ownership by the small investor.

Mr. Lilley: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Privatisation

38. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total number of revenues realised from the privatisation of nationalised industries and other public bodies over the past seven years.

Mr. Lilley: The net proceeds from privatisation over the last seven years, that is from April 1983 to date, amount to some £26 billion.

Corporation Tax

39. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Exchequer if a nil rate corporation band was introduced on the first £5,000 of a company's profits, limited to companies registered for value added tax for less than five years and for non-registered companies.

Mr. Lilley: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the corporation tax rate in the United Kingdom and other OECD countries.

Mr. Lilley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) earlier today.

Inward Investment

60. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the United Kingdom economy has benefited from inward investment over the past 10 years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The United Kingdom economy has benefited from direct and portfolio investment inflows of £94 billion over the past 10 years. Inflows of £52 billion have occurred within the last three years, reflecting the confidence that overseas investors have in our economic policies.

Savings (Taxation)

42. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for reforming the taxation of savings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Energy Conservation

43. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider providing tax relief for investment in energy-saving equipment.

Mr. Lilley: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Bank of England

45. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Governor of the Bank of England; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend meets the Governor of the Bank of England from time to time to discuss a variety of matters.

Self-Employment

47. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any further plans to encourage self-employment.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Self-employment has increased by over 60 per cent. since 1979 as a result of the Government's policies to encourage enterprise. These policies will ensure continued growth in the future.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to amend the definition of self-employed for taxation purposes.

Mr. Lilley: No. The Government have reviewed on a number of occasions whether there should be a statutory definition of self-employment. The existing criteria laid down by the courts seek essentially to answer the question "Are you in business on your own account?" We believe this is the right approach.

Northern Ireland

49. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last made representations to the European Commission to have the restrictions on the movement of Irish shoppers into Northern Ireland removed.

Mr. Major: I assume that the right hon. Member is referring to the Irish Government's withdrawal in March 1987 of travellers' allowances from persons who have been out of the Republic for less than 48 hours. Her Majesty's Government made it clear at the time both to the European Commission and to the Irish Government that they believed these restrictions to be contrary to EC law. The United Kingdom has intervened accordingly in support of the proceedings instituted by the Commission against Ireland in the European Court of Justice. The hearing is due to take place in February.

North-East

51. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the present state of the economy in the north-east of England.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Government's economic policies have created the conditions for greatly increased prosperity in the north-east. The fall in the unemployment rate over the last year has been one of the fastest in the United Kingdom.

Stamp Duty

52. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the level of property values on which stamp duty is payable.

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to abolish stamp duty on home and share purchase.

Mr. Lilley: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Debt Repayment

56. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the saving in debt interest costs of the public sector debt repayment over the last three years.

Mr. Ryder: In the three years to 1989-90 the Government are expected to make a net public sector debt repayment of £30·4 billion, saving nearly £3 billion a year in debt interest costs.

European Monetary System

58. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average inflation rate of countries participating in the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

Mr. Ryder: On a more comparable basis, the average inflation rate of members of the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS was 4·4 per cent. in October 1989.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was invested in manufacturing industry in the 10 years to January 1979 and the 10 years since, net of capital consumption and expressed in terms of 1985 prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the decade to the end of 1978, gross domestic fixed capital formation by the manufacturing industries is estimated to have been £95 billion at 1985 prices. In the following decade it is estimated to have been £83 billion. These figures exclude capital goods leased from financial sector lessors. Including leased assets, gross domestic fixed capital formation was £94 billion in the decade to the end of 1988. Estimates including leased assets are not available for the preceding decade, when leasing was a less important feature of investment. Estimates of net domestic fixed capital formation must be interpreted with some caution, since they depend on estimates of capital consumption, which are not directly observable and so are based on a series of assumptions. On this basis, net domestic fixed capital formation by the manufacturing industries is estimated to have been £26 billion in the decade to the end of 1978 and for the following decade, including leased assets, £3 billion (minus £2 billion excluding leased assets).

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the increase in private non-residential fixed investment in the period 1987 to 1989 was accounted for by investment in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Major: 1988 is the last full year for which data are available. The data for 1987 and 1988 may be found in the "United Kingdom National Accounts" 1989 edition (CSO Blue Book).

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross domestic product manufacturing investment represented in *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* 1988.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Manufacturing investment, in current prices, as a proportion of gross domestic product at factor cost was 4·1 per cent. in 1978 and 3·2 per cent. in 1988.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a forecast of the impact on the rate of inflation of the uniform business rate and revaluation for each of the standard regions.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave my hon. Friend on 12 January 1990 at column *767*.

Population and the Economy

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned into the interactions between the structure of the population and the state of the economy.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Research commissioned into the state of the economy attempts to allow for all relevant influences, including demographic factors where appropriate.

Incomes

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will recalculate the figures given in his reply to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 2 November 1989 *Official Report* column *282* to show percentage annual changes in average real net incomes of *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* married men with two children, and *(c)* single non-retired people, taking into account increases in local authority rates, local authority and other rents, and mortgage costs.

Mr. Major *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* The changes in average real net incomes given in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 2 November take account of price increases as measured by the retail prices index. This includes increases in housing costs.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the £ sterling has moved against *(a)* the yen, *(b)* the US dollar and *(c)* the deutschmark over the last 10 years.

Mr. Major: I refer the right hon. Member to table 13.1 of the Central Statistical Office's "Financial Statistics".

Money Supply

Mr. Denzil Davies To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual percentage increase of broad money, M4, over the last 10 years.

Mr. Major: The average annual percentage increases in M4 over the last 10 years are given in the following table:

M4: Average annual percentage growth rate[1]

	Per cent.
1980	15·5
1981	16·2
1982	12·6
1983	13·5
1984	17·8
1985	13·2
1986	15·1
1987	14·7
1988	17·0
[2]1989	17·8

[1] Average of quarterly annual growth rates to end Q4 1983, and monthly annual growth rates to end November 1989.
[2] To end November 1989.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product was accounted for in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1988 by manufacturers in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) the Federal Republic of Germany, (iii) France and (iv) Italy.

Mr. Major: GDP/GNP by kind of activity is published for Germany, France and Italy by the OECD in "National Accounts" volume II, 1975-87. For the United Kingdom, data are published by the CSO in "United Kingdom National Accounts" 1989 edition.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of net domestic product was accounted for by wages and salaries in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the latest available year.

Mr. Major: In 1979 wages and salaries accounted for 67 per cent. of net domestic product at factor cost. During 1988, the latest period for which the percentage can be calculated, the proportion was 64·6 per cent.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what, for the latest available year and expressed in deutschmarks, was the per capita gross domestic product of *(a)* the Federal Republic of Germany, *(b)* France, *(c)* Italy and *(d)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Major: Following is the information requested.

GDP/GNP per capita at purchasing power parities, 1988

	Deutschmarks
United Kingdom	23,656
Germany	24,919
France	24,080
Italy	22,831

Source: OECD, IMF.

Endangered Species

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *28*, if he will make a statement on his Department's assessment of the consequences of being required to move from London to Southend on the retention in the Customs and Excise of those officers in the animals and birds, tropical fish and reptiles importation unit, who have accumulated the greatest expertise in discerning what creatures coming into London airport are covered by CITES regulations.

Mr. Ryder: The relocation review team, set up by the Board of Customs and Excise to establish those areas of headquarters work which should be moved out of London, carefully considered all the implications of their proposals, including the possibility that some experienced officers might elect not to move with their existing work. Those who wish to do so will be able to remain in London within the Customs and Excise.

The position of those HQ staff dealing with endangered species controls has been reviewed in the light of a number of representations. However, we remain satisfied that any necessary staffing changes as a result of relocation can be managed without impairing Customs' enforcement of the CITES controls.

Government Expenditure

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown of Government expenditure *(a)* within the standard regions of England and *(b)* in Scotland during the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Apart from expenditure which is the responsibility of territorial Departments, all

Government expenditure is both planned and controlled on a national basis. Information on expenditure broken down by standard regions within England is thus not available on a consistent basis. For figures giving Government expenditure by territory in 1988-89, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 19 December at column *179-90* to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs).

Living Standards

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much living standards rose during the 1980s.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Living standards in the 1980s have risen to their highest-ever levels. For example, the real take-home pay of a married man—with two children—on average male earnings has gone up by over 26 per cent. since 1979-80.

Weekly Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in real weekly earnings of full-time adult male manual workers in manufacturing industry in the decade ending April 1989, and the best estimate he can make for non-manuals employed in the private sector; and if he will provide similar figures for females.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 13 December 1989 (*Official Report*, columns *658-59*) for the figures for male and female manual employees in manufacturing. The figures for male and female non-manuals in the private sector are 43 per cent. and 48 per cent. respectively.

Wage Increases

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the industry and occupational groups which have been awarded wage increases exceeding 10 per cent. in the year ended April 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

Pay is a matter for employers and employees to determine. My Department does not hold comprehensive information about pay settlement levels.

Business Rates

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the actual percentage increase in business rates payable will be for businesses with rateable values of *(a)* over £15,000 and *(b)* under £15,000 for 1990-91 over 1989-90.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the form requested. However, for properties with new rateable values of £15,000 or more in Greater London and £10,000 or more elsewhere (the thresholds defining large properties under the business rate transitional scheme) the average percentage increase in rates bills in 1990-91 over 1989-90 is expected to be 8·8 per cent. The equivalent percentage for properties with rateable values below those thresholds is 4·4 per cent. Both these figures allow for the effect of inflation between the two years.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Eastern Europe

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial aid is being provided to *(a)* Poland, *(b)* Czechoslovakia, *(c)* Hungary, *(d)* Bulgaria, *(e)* Romania and *(f)* other central and east European countries.

Mrs. Chalker: We have established a £50 million know-how fund for Poland, and a £25 million fund for Hungary. We are also providing additional assistance for Poland: £15 million is being made available for a project in the agricultural sector, and a £64 million contribution has been made to the international stabilisation fund for Poland. We are also making a substantial contribution to the European Community and multilateral programmes for Poland and Hungary. Bilateral financial assistance is not available for other eastern European countries, but we hope they will qualify for such help in due course.

Central America

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on overseas aid for central America.

Mrs. Chalker: We have technical co-operation programmes for all central American countries apart from Nicaragua. In addition we are providing financial aid to Belize and Honduras. The Commonwealth Development Corporation invests in Belize, Costa Rica and Honduras. Project support can be provided from the aid and trade provision in appropriate cases. Relief aid can and has been provided in response to natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes. We of course also contribute a share of the funds provided to the region through a variety of multilateral programmes including those of the United Nations agencies, the World Bank, the Inter American Development bank and the European Community.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Contempt of Court

Mr. Bob Cryer: To ask the Attorney-General if he will introduce legislation to provide compensation for persons sent to prison for contempt who successfully appeal against the decision; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Government have no plans to do so.

Legal Aid

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General approximately how long applicants for legal aid have to wait for an appeal hearing and decisions against the original refusal of the application.

The Attorney-General: The average time between the receipt of a legal aid applicant's appeal against refusal and the appeal hearing in England and Wales is 28 working days. It takes, on average, a further three working days for the result of the appeal to be sent to the applicant.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Rights of Way

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will consider advising district councils to display clear signs at or close to public rights of way so as to ensure that the public are aware of their existence; and if he will arrange for the publication of a rights of way map for the whole of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The signposting of public paths is an important aspect of the creation of public access to the countryside. Under the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 the responsibility for asserting and creating public footpaths lies with district councils.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland encourages councils to undertake this work by offering advice and substantial grant aid not only towards the cost of creating public footpaths but also towards the cost of erecting signs and providing information to the public.

The legislation requires councils to compile and preserve maps of public rights of way. The Department has no present plans to produce a map showing public rights of way for the whole of Northern Ireland.

Replacement Dwellings

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make it his policy in relation to the granting of planning permission for a replacement dwelling to take action to ensure that the new dwelling is not placed closer to the sea shore or to a river or inland lough than the dwelling which it is intended to replace.

Mr. Needham: No. Each application for planning permission is determined on its merits and the Department of the Environment's policy is that the replacement should be located as close as possible to the site of the original building. Factors such as siting, location and design, particularly where the site is close to natural features, are taken fully into consideration.

Green Currency

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what action has been taken as a result of the meeting with a deputation from the Ulster Farmers Union to discuss the devaluation of the green pound in order to improve support levels and alleviate the disparity in green currency rates between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland;

(2) what discussions have taken place about the devaluation of the green pound in order to improve support levels and alleviate the disparity in green currency rates between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is usual for discussions on green rate changes to be included in the European Communities' price fixing process. That process will start at the January meeting of European Community Agriculture Ministers.

We maintain close links with the Ulster Farmers Union and have regular discussions on green currency rates and other issues of concern.

European Single Market

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance is being given to industries, firms and entrepreneurs in South Down to help them take advantage of the internal market in 1992.

Mr. Needham: The Government fully recognise that the advent of the single European market will present both opportunities and threats to businesses in Northern Ireland. The Department of Economic Development, together with the Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit, have undertaken a campaign to raise awareness of 1992 throughout the business community in Northern Ireland. In addition, a range of specific initiatives has been developed and LEDU, in co-operation with the IDB and the industrial science division of the Department of Economic Development has recently launched a European information centre which will assist and advise businesses about a range of EC activities. Businesses and individuals in South Down have benefited to no lesser degree than elsewhere from this campaign.

Departmental Relocation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to decentralise Government Departments to the constituency of South Down.

Mr. Cope: There are currently no such plans.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by the Department of Economic Development actively to encourage industries to reduce the use of CFC gases.

Mr. Needham: The industrial science division of the Department has been working with Northern Ireland companies wishing to replace CFC gases in their products and processes in evaluating suitable alternatives. In addition, any company seeking the advice of health and safety inspectors and fire officers concerning the use of CFCs or plant or equipment using CFCs, is encouraged to use a more environmentally acceptable alternative.

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce closer monitoring of the welfare of residents in private nursing and residential homes.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* We plan to bring forward proposals for a registered homes order later this year to consolidate and update the existing Northern Ireland legislation on the registration and inspection of private and voluntary residential and nursing homes. A policy paper on care in the community to be issued shortly by the Department of Health and Social Services will also address improvements in monitoring the quality of community care services, including those provided by the private sector.

Firearms (Certificates)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* murders, *(b)* other deaths, *(c)* muggings, *(d)* woundings and *(e)* attacks on the security forces in which firearms were used have occurred in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years where the firearms (i) were being used by the person legally holding them, and (ii) were stolen from civilians.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* Statistics are not collated in the form requested, and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Audit Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how, and in consultation with what bodies, he formulates audit policy;

(2) if he will list the governmental, non-governmental bodies, committees or institutes which make the audit policy in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: The audit of company accounts is carried out under the Companies Act 1985 which is to be amended by the Companies Act 1989 to reflect both European Community obligations and certain domestic considerations. Significant changes to this legislative framework are usually the subject of wide consultation. In addition, audit standards and guidelines are promulgated by the members of the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies on the basis of proposals developed by its auditing practices committee. The professional accountancy bodies also issue technical guidance to their members.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, at any time since June 1979, he has communicated concerns about the standards of auditing to any leader of the accountancy profession.

Mr. Redwood: As I explained in the reply I gave on 11 December at column *461* to a question by the hon. Member, my Department normally refers specific complaints about auditors' conduct of statutory audit to the relevant professional body. Last year my Department also took up with the accountancy bodies a number of general issues about the conduct of audit which had come to our notice.

Inspectors' Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the unpublished inspectors' reports which, since June 1979, his Department has given to outside private interest organisations.

Mr. Redwood: No. Unpublished reports have been disclosed where appropriate under the Companies Act 1948 (as amended), under part XIV of the Companies Act 1985 and under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Accountancy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what actions he takes to promote the accountancy profession.

Mr. Redwood: My Department seeks to promote all United Kingdom business, including accountancy, by fostering a climate of enterprise and prosperity in which business and commerce can flourish.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers he has to regulate the accountancy profession.

Mr. Redwood: I have no powers to regulate the accountancy profession as such, although there are statutory provisions for the regulation of certain types of accountancy work, for example company audit, insolvency and the provision of investment advice.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ask the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate whether major accountancy firms indulge in price fixing.

Mr. Redwood: No, I have no reason to make such a request. If the hon. Member has evidence to cause concern, he should provide it directly to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Peat Marwick McLintock

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in light of the banning of a Peat Marwick McLintock partner from practising by the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States of America, he has any plans to examine the firm's standards of work in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Batteries and Accumulators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many alkaline manganese batteries containing more than 0·10 per cent. of mercury by weight were sold in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years.

Mr. Forth: Sales of alkaline manganese batteries in the United Kingdom during the last three years have averaged 200 million units per year (based on an estimate for 1989). The mercury content of such batteries is being reduced in accordance with a European battery industry reduction programme which began in 1986:

1986 from 1 per cent. to 0·5 per cent.
1988 from 0·5 per cent. to 0·3 per cent.
1990 from 0·3 per cent. to 0·1 per cent.
1992 from 0·1 per cent. to 0·025 per cent.

During 1987 and 1988 all these batteries contained more than 0·1 per cent. of mercury by weight but during 1989 batteries containing less than 0·1 per cent. were introduced to the United Kingdom market and by the end of 1990 all alkaline manganese batteries supplied to the trade are expected to be below this level.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the percentage of batteries and accumulators sold within the United Kingdom that are marked to indicate whether the battery or accumulator must be disposed of separately, can be recycled, or may be disposed of with household refuse.

Mr. Forth: The information is not available. There is at present no requirement for batteries and accumulators to

be so marked, but a modified draft directive covering certain of these products and containing proposals for their labelling has recently been published by the European Commission. Negotiations have yet to begin on the final form of the directive.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has undertaken to promote the marketing of batteries and accumulators containing smaller quantities of dangerous substances or less polluting substances.

Mr. Forth: Encouraging the production of batteries and accumulators containing lower levels of substances such as lead, mercury and cadmium is one of the objectives of a modified draft directive recently published by the European Commission. Negotiations have yet to begin on the final form of the directive, but it would not be sensible for the Government to act independently and in advance of its completion. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom primary battery industry has made good progress in voluntarily reducing the levels of mercury in many of its products.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that consumers are fully informed about the dangers of uncontrolled disposal of spent batteries and accumulators;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that consumers are fully informed about the dangers of uncontrolled disposal of spent batteries and accumulators.

Mr. Forth: Consumer information programmes are proposed in a modified draft directive on batteries and accumulators containing dangerous substances recently published by the European Commission. Negotiations have yet to begin on the final form of the directive, but it would not be sensible for the Government to act independently in advance of its completion.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to inform consumers of the method of removing batteries and accumulators which are built into appliances.

Mr. Forth: The removability of batteries from appliances is one of the issues covered in a modified draft directive on batteries and accumulators containing dangerous substances recently published by the European Commission. Negotiations have yet to begin on the final form of the directive, but it would not be sensible for the Government to act independently in advance of its completion.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to set up a deposit system for batteries and accumulators.

Mr. Forth: None. Deposit systems are mooted as a possible means of encouraging the return, for recycling or controlled disposal, of spent batteries and accumulators containing dangerous substances in a modified draft directive recently published by the European Commission. Negotiations have yet to begin on the final form of the directive.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department has taken to reduce the heavy metal content in batteries and accumulators.

Mr. Forth: Reductions in heavy metal content are among the objectives of a modified draft directive on batteries and accumulators containing dangerous substances recently published by the European Commission. Negotiations have yet to begin on the final form of the directive, the environmental aims of which the Government welcome.

South African Offshore Industry

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the British Government have ever given grants or loans to enable South Africa to study the potential growth of the South African offshore industry.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the overall extent of Export Credits Guarantee Department insured credit in pounds sterling supporting United Kingdom exports for the Mossel Bay oil from gas project in South Africa and for how long does Exports Credits Guarantee Department cover last.

Mr. Redwood: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to disclose information about ECGD support for individual cases unless the buyer and exporter wish it to be public.

British Shipbuilders

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on British Shipbuilders' external financing limit for 1989-90.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British Shipbuilders' external finance limit for 1989-90 was provisionally set at £3 million as recorded in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1989-90 to 1991-92" published in January 1989. I have now set a revised external finance limit for 1989-90 of £35 million to meet the costs associated with the disposal and closure of British Shipbuilders' subsidiaries over this year. This increase is being charged to the Reserve and is within the estimate for the planning total in the Autumn Statement.

Post Office

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial and efficiency targets he has set for the Post Office in 1990.

Mr. Forth: The Secretary of State, in agreement with the Treasury, has set the Post Office a target to achieve an annual average 6·4 per cent. return on mean capital employed over the three years 1989-90 to 1991-92. The profit used when calculating the return will be struck after interest (excluding interest on past surpluses) but before tax. The Post Office, in agreement with the Secretary of State, has set corresponding targets of 6·4 per cent. for the letters business, 5·8 per cent. for the parcels business and 7 per cent. for the counters business.

At the Post Office's request, the form of the target has been changed from a return on turnover to a return on capital employed, in line with usual practice in the private sector.

The targets are calculated from the following expected returns in each of the three years:

	1989-90 per cent.	*1990-91 per cent.*	*1991-92 per cent.*
Post Office	2·4	6·3	10·6
Letters	1·0	6·3	11·8
Parcels	2·5	5·0	10·0
Counters	6·0	7·0	8·0

The returns in the last year of the period are approximately equivalent to the real rate of return of 8 per cent. of capital employed which the Government announced in March 1989 that public sector industries should aim to achieve on their investment. The Government accept that the Post Office should work up to profitability consistent with the new rate of return over the target period.

The Secretary of State has agreed that the Post Office does not need to set an efficiency target for parcels, which operates in a competitive market, although he will monitor published tariffs for parcels sent between private people, a market in which parcels is dominant. The Post Office, in agreement with the Secretary of State, has sent the following real unit cost (RUC) targets for the letters and counters businesses.

Cumulative reduction by 1991-2 over 1988-9
Letters—1 per cent.
Counters—2 per cent.

The financial and efficiency targets for the counters business are set for the business as a whole in accordance with the principles of the 1978 White Paper on the nationalised industries (Cmnd. 7131). They are not intended to set a level for prices charged by counters to its individual clients, which are subject to agreements achieved through bilateral commercial negotiations by the parties concerned in the light of the particular circumstances.

Vietnam

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the number of contracts between British and Vietnamese companies for which export credits guarantee cover has *(a)* been applied and *(b)* granted during each of the last three years.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Since 1982 Export Credits Guarantee Department cover for business with Vietnam has been available only for contracts where payment is to be made on terms of cash against documents out of an irrevocable letter of credit confirmed before shipment by a bank in the United Kingdom. On this basis exports insured in 1987 totalled £30,000 and in 1988, £20,000. No business was covered in 1989.

During the past three years only one inquiry for cover on a potential contract on extended credit terms has resulted in a formal application being submitted to ECGD. The United Kingdom company concerned has been advised that ECGD is not prepared to offer cover.

ENVIRONMENT

Pollution (Rivers Don and Rother)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what fines were levied on companies and individuals responsible for polluting *(a)* the river Don and *(b)* the river Rother, over the last 10 years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Detailed information on prosecutions and fines for water pollution offences is not held centrally. However, I understand from the National Rivers Authority (NRA) that prosecutions it has brought since its formation on 1 September 1989 in respect of polluting discharges to the Don and Rother systems have resulted in the following fine:

Name of offender: Yorkshire Water plc
Watercourse: Ewden Brook
Fine Imposed: £1,000

Prior to 1 September last year, the regional water authorities were primarily responsible for enforcement of water pollution controls. From the records kept by the Yorkshire Water Authority (YWA) the NRA has been able to provide the following details of prosecutions brought by the YWA in respect of pollution of the Don and Rother systems:

(a) Prosecutions for Pollution of the Don and its Tributaries (brought by the former Yorkshire Water Authority)

Name of offender	*Date of offence*	*Watercourse*	*Fine(s) imposed (£s)*
National Coal Board	8 June 1979	Went Beck	100
Doncaster Coalite	10 June 1979	Thistle Goit Dyke	300
HSB Fuel Recovery Services	24 March 1980	Owston Common Drain	500
Prosper DeMulder	4 August 1980	River Don	550
National Coal Board	25 February 1981	River Don	200
A. Ogden and Sons	5 October 1981	River Dearne	200
McErlaine Plant	20 October 1980	River Dearne	250
National Coal Board	22 February 1982	Knoll Beck	200
British Tissues	14 May 1982	River Don	1,500
Hatfield Aggregates	25 June 1984	Tributary of River Dearne	500
Eaton and Booth	16 May 1984	River Loxley	50
Coatlite Fuels and Chemicals	19 August 1984	Grimethorpe Dike	1,200
D. C. Cook	20 July 1984	Knoll Beck	400
Rigby Metals	24 July 1985	River Dearne	500
D. C. Cook	9 October 1985	Tributary of River Dearne	250
	23 October 1985	Tributary of River Dearne	750
Firma Chrome	11 February 1986	River Sheaf	500
National Coal Board	8 July 1987	Howell Beck	250
S. H. Brook	4 February 1987	Tributary of River Dearne	200
	9 December 1986	Tributary of River Dearne	200
	16 November 1986	Tributary of River Dearne	200
R. E. Dyson	3 June 1988	Load Brook	250
	4 June 1988	Load Brook	150
Dale Farm Dairy Products	16 August 1988	Roundwood Brook	500
	17 August 1988	Roundwood Brook	500
G. R. Stein Refractories	10 May 1989	River Loxley	500
British Coal	26 May 1989	River Dearne	1,000
South Yorkshire County Council	13 March 1979	Firsby Brook	200
National Coal Board	28 February 1980	Blackingmill Dike	200
British Coal	1 June 1989	Woodlands Lake	600
Dale Farm Dairy Products	26 August 1988	Roundwood Brook	500
	9 September 1988	Roundwood Brook	500
	7 September 1988	Roundwood Brook	500
	5 September 1988	Roundwood Brook	500

(b) Prosecutions for Pollution of the Rother and its Tributaries (brought by the former Yorkshire Water Authority):

Name of offender	*Date of offence*	*Watercourse*	*Fine(s) imposed (£s)*
British Steel Orgreave	15 April 1981	River Rother	200
	8 May 1981	River Rother	200
	8 June 1981	River Rother	200
Glass Bulbs Ltd.	4 November 1981	River Rother	150
J. M. Whitaker/W. Rogers	7 June 1982	River Drone	300
	14 July 1982	River Drone	300
Northern Mining Strip	28 March 1983	River Rother	125
Bradway Farms	20 September 1984	River Drone	750
	1 November 1985	River Drone	1,000
	15 November 1985	River Drone	1,000
	25 June 1987	River Drone	1,500
Transorganics Ltd.	28 February 1985	Hooton Brook	[1]800
Raymin Northern Ltd.	31 July 1986	River Drone	200
Chesterfield Cylinders	16 August 1988	River Rother	1,000
	23 August 1988	River Rother	1,000
British Steel Orgreave	5 July 1988	Handsworth Brook	1,000
Coalite Fuels and Chemicals	3 April 1989	River Doe Lea	1,500

[1] 2 offences

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the companies currently given deemed consent to pollute *(a)* the river Don and *(b)* the river Rother, stating what pollutants they are empowered to discharge; and on what scale.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand from the National Rivers Authority that the following two companies have deemed consents originally issued under the terms of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, to discharge minewater:

(a) into the river Don and its tributaries—British Coal Corporation.

(b) into the river Rother and its tributaries—British Coal Corporation; Moorside Mining Company Limited.

Deemed consents were issued under transitional provisions for bringing many discharges which had not required consent under earlier legislation into the regulatory control system for the first time. As they are progressively reviewed by the National Rivers Authority, deemed consents are being revoked and where appropriate, replaced by a full, conditional consent granted under the Water Act 1989.

The particulars of these consents are held on the register maintained by the Yorkshire region of the National Rivers Authority which is available for inspection by the public during normal office hours.

Nuclear Waste Disposal

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the findings of the European Commission's PAGIS study into the suitability of British geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal for the search by Nirex to establish a deep disposal facility for intermediate-level and low-level radioactive wastes.

Mr. Trippier: Nirex is not responsible for heat generating or high-level radioactive waste. However, it takes note of the results of studies such as PAGIS. The PAGIS report pointed out the long-term containment benefits that would stem from excavating a repository in hard rock with sedimentary cover as advocated by Nirex.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects Nirex to report on the results of its site investigation work at Dounreay and Sellafield.

Mr. Trippier: At present Nirex is awaiting the result of planning applications for the drilling of boreholes at both Dounreay and Sellafield. If permission is granted, Nirex will need to carry out a drilling programme of 18 months, alongside other detailed site investigation work, before any report is expected.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish an outline timetable relating to the commissioning of a repository for radioactive waste.

Mr. Trippier: I understand that Nirex has a target date of 2005 for the commissioning of a deep repository. This assumes some eight years to excavate and contruct the repository. Therefore between 1990 and 1997 Nirex will have to undertake the necessary site investigations and obtain planning permission to construct a repository. There will be a public inquiry.

Council Homes, Corby

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many council house properties were sold by *(a)* Corby district council and *(b)* the New Towns Commission in the Corby district since April 1979;

(2) which local authorities have sold 30 per cent. or more of their council house stock since April 1979.

Mr. Chope: Between April 1979 and June 1989 Corby district council has reported the sale of 5,338 dwellings and the New Towns Commission sales of 12 dwellings in Corby. Corby district council has not yet submitted the return for September 1989.

In England 61 authorities have reported sales of 30 per cent. or more of their council house stock between April 1979 and September 1989. These authorities are listed below. In addition three authorities have recently transferred their complete stock to housing associations: Chiltern (in December 1988), Sevenoaks (March 1989) and Newbury (December 1989).

I have today laid a table in the Library giving available information on local authority sales up to September 1989. It shows year-by-year information for each authority since 1984-85 together with cumulative figures since April 1979 and the proportion of their stock sold since April 1979.

Authorities reporting sales of 30 per cent. or more of their stock between April 1979 and September 1989

Arun
Aylesbury Vale
Bournemouth
Bracknell Forest
Breckland
Bromley
Bromsgrove
Broxbourne
Broxtowe
Castle Point
Cherwell
City of London
Corby
Crawley
Dacorum
Daventry
Dover
East Hampshire
East Hertfordshire
Eastleigh
Eden
Epping Forest
Fareham
Fenland
Forest Heath
Fylde
Gelding
Havant
Havering
Huntingdonshire
Kingswood
Knowsley
Melton
Mendip
Poole
Ribble Valley
Rochester upon Medway
Rochford
Rushcliffe
Sedgemoor
South Herefordshire
South Lakeland
South Northamptonshire
Spelthorne
Surrey Heath
Tandridge
Teignbridge
Test Valley
Torbay
Torridge
Wandsworth
Wansdyke
Wealden
Welwyn Hatfield
West Devon
West Oxfordshire
Weymouth and Portland
Woking
Woodspring
Wychavon
Wycombe

Housing for Teachers

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to increase the supply of affordable housing for teachers.

Mr. Chope: Government policy aims to ensure that decent housing is within the reach of those in greatest need

irrespective of their background or employment. It is open to local authorities to provide help for key workers who have difficulty in finding such accommodation.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the estimates of the distributional impact of the community charge on household finance using the figures he published on 6 November 1989.

Mr. Chope: I will publish estimates based on the assumed community charges announced on 11 January shortly.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his best estimate of the number of local authorities which he estimates will set poll tax at a level of £278; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* If authorities spend in line with our assumptions, the community charge will be at or below £278 in 238 out of 366 areas in England.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of grant loss results from the revised standard spending assessment for the London borough of Hillingdon; and on what basis the figures have changed since the assessment made by his Department in November 1989.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* The standard spending assessment (SSA) for Hillingdon published on 11 January is lower overall than that published on 6 November 1989 primarily because of reductions in its highway maintenance and capital financing SSA elements.

The reduction in the estimated revenue support grant entitlement for Hillingdon for 1990-91 (before safety net adjustments) flowing from the reports laid on 11 January as compared with our 6 November proposals is £2·638 million. This is attributable to changes in our figures for adult population as well as to changes in SSA.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the level of the community charge for the London borough of Hillingdon based on the figures published by him on 11 January with the benefit of the safety net; by how much this figure exceeds the Government's estimate of £278 for a standard level of service; what is his estimate of overspending by Hillingdon per adult; what he expects the final level of community charge will be; and if he will make a statement on the basis on which the above figures were calculated.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* The figures placed in the Library on 11 January show an assumed 1990-91 community charge of £359 in Hillingdon. Hillingdon's assumed spending is £121 per community charge payer higher than its standard spending assessment.

The final level of community charges will depend on budget decisions made by local authorities. The spending assumptions underlying the 11 January figures are set out in the transition report (England) laid on that date.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the main factors which determine the levels of community charge to be raised by different authorities spending at their SSA level.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* Revenue support grant is distributed so that if each notifiable authority were to spend at the level of its standard spending assessment then, subject to qualifications set out in the distribution report (England), all charging authorities could set the same personal community charge —the community charge for standard spending.

The community charge for standard spending in 1990-91 will be £277·94.

Waste Paper (Recycling)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements currently exist for the recycling of waste paper disposed of by Government and parliamentary offices.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Each Government Department makes its own arrangements for the disposal of waste in the light of local circumstances and security and other considerations. The Government are currently reviewing the arrangements made for the disposal of waste by Departments with a view to maximising the proportion of waste which is recycled. In the case of Department of the Environment headquarters buildings in Westminster and Lambeth, waste paper and cardboard are collected for recycling by contractors.

English House Condition Survey

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish by *(a)* tenure, *(b)* income and *(c)* age of head of household, the following information gathered for the English house condition survey: the number of homes with rising damp, penetrating damp, slight mould growth, serious mould growth; excessive draughts, the number of houses with seriously defective, defective, just acceptable, satisfactory and unknown dampness and provide written material used in instructing surveyors on how to interpret these categories and on how to decide whether a dwelling was unfit for human habitation under the Housing Act 1955 for reason of dampness or other reason and to tabulate slight and serious mould growth by main types of exterior wall;

(2) if he will publish by *(a)* tenure, *(b)* income, *(c)* age of head of household, *(d)* employment status, *(e)* age of dwelling, *(f)* type of heating system and *(g)* main fuel type, where applicable, the following information gathered in the interview survey for the English house condition survey (i) questions 19a, 19c, 19d, 19f, (ii) questions 21 to 23c, (iii) questions 24 to 26b, (iv) questions 28 to 42, (v) question 44 and (vi) question 48.

Mr. Chope: Information on these topics will be included in a supplementary report on the English house condition survey which will be published later this year.

Rented Accommodation

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he intends to take to establish a free market in rented accommodation.

Mr. Chope: Part I of the Housing Act 1988 deregulated new lettings by private landlords as from 15 January 1989. We shall be evaluating its impact in due course, but initial indications are encouraging—in particular the estimated 7,000 extra homes for rent being provided under the business expansion scheme. At this stage we see no case for further measures.

Housing Act Ballot

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the ballot held under part IV of the Housing Act 1988 by the Milton Keynes development corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I understand from the Milton Keynes development corporation that no ballot has taken place under part IV of the Housing Act 1988.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many scientists are employed by the Nature Conservancy Council in England, Scotland and Wales and by individual location.

Mr. Trippier: I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that the following number of scientific staff were employed on 16 January in scientific posts at the following locations:

	Permanent	*Limited period appointments*	*Totals*
England			
Peterborough	67	66	133
Wye	12	11	23
Newbury	11	4	15
Taunton	13	9	22
Norwich	12	8	20
Shrewsbury	16	5	21
Newcastle	12	7	19
Bowness-on-Windermere	12	9	21
TOTAL			274
Scotland			
Edinburgh	23·5	26	49·5
Balloch	12	5	17
Aberdeen	10	11	21
Inverness	14	12	26
TOTAL			113·5
Wales			
Bangor	13	10	23
Aberystwyth	8	9	17
Cardiff	6	5	11
TOTAL			51
OVERALL TOTALS	241·5	197	438·5

These figures include officers based at sub-regional offices. Staff with scientific backgrounds also occupy some administrative and other non-scientific posts.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of research projects and related expenditure undertaken by the Nature Conservancy Council into the effects on the marine ecology of British waters of commercial fish farming, broken down into England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Trippier: The Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) has commissioned the following research projects related to the effects on marine ecology of commercial fish farming. All were carried out in Scottish waters.

Financial year and title of project	*NCC expenditure*[1] *£*
1982-83	
Impact of marine fish farming in Scotland	4,981
1983-84	
Survey of Mariculture sites in the Western Isles	8,710
1987-88	
The reduction of the impact of fish farming on the nature marine environment	8,955
1987-88	
Impact of fish farmed salmon on native stocks	3,900

In addition, the NCC contributed to the following projects, funded by other bodies in Scotland:

Financial year/title and other contributors	*NCC expenditure*[1] *£*
1985-89	
Highlands and Islands Development Board Study on 'Impact of Fish Farming'	15,000
1986-88	
Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Salmon Producers' Association 'Shetland Fish-Farming impact survey'	29,630

[1] These figures exclude project management costs (permanent staff salaries and related expenses).

Homelessness

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the new money for homelessness will go to the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Chope: The Government have invited bids from local authorities in London and the south-east, including the borough of Newham, and after assessment appropriate supplementary credit approvals will be given.

Right to Buy

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses have been sold by each local authority in Kent under right-to-buy legislation for each year since 1979; and what proportion of total local authority stock in percentage terms these represent.

Mr. Chope: A table giving the latest reported information for each local authority based on returns to September 1989 was placed in the Library on 18 January 1990. This gives sales for each year from 1985-86 to 1988-89 and for the first six months of 1989-90. A table giving figures for 1979-80 to 1984-85 was placed in the Library on 15 May 1987.

CFCs

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities operate schemes and facilities to recover chlorofluorocarbon gas from abandoned or dumped refrigerators; what steps he intends to take to encourage the provision of facilities to recover chlorofluorocarbon gas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: A number of local authorities have pilot schemes for the removal and recycling of the chlorofluorocarbons from the coolant systems of refrigeration equipment that has been delivered to them for disposal. My Department will shortly be conducting a survey of the recycling activities of local authorities and this should establish the full extent of such work. An intensive study of the problems associated with the use and disposal of CFCs has been commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry from Coopers and Lybrand; decisions on the need for further Government action will be taken in the light of this study.

Water

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures are being taken to ensure improvement in standards of equipment for monitoring water quality; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand that the National Rivers Authority and certain water undertakers have committed significant funds to support research and development of equipment for monitoring water quality. The work, which is co-ordinated by the Water Research Centre, involves the specification of performance standards for monitoring equipment as well as the development of new monitoring systems.

Nuclear Discharges

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on discharges into the sea and into the air as a result of nuclear power generation.

Mr. Trippier: Radioactive waste may be discharged from nuclear power stations only if an authorisation has been issued under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 jointly by Her Majesty's inspectors of pollution and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Authorisations impose strict conditions and activity limits and are issued only after careful assessment is made of the environmental impact of proposed disposals to ensure that doses to the public are below the maximum permissible limits as recommended by the International Committee on Radiological Protection. Operators are required to use best practicable means to limit discharges of radioactivity. They are also required to monitor discharges, details of which are published annually both by the generating industry and this Department. The premises concerned are subject to scrutiny by inspectors to ensure compliance with the terms of the authorisation.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will take action to extend to council tenants the grants payable for energy efficiency under the Local Government and Housing Act.

Mr. Michael Spicer: There are no plans to extend the private sector home renovation grant provisions in the 1989 Act to council tenants. Local authorities are able to fund energy efficiency measures for their own stock from within their housing investment programme allocations. In addition, the Secretary of State for Energy has introduced provisions in the Social Security Bill for a grant scheme to assist low income households in the council and private sectors with basic insulation measures through community insulation services.

QEII Conference Centre Agency

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific financial, efficiency and quality of service targets he has approved for the QEII Conference Centre Agency for the current year and for the longer term.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Financial targets presently approved for the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre are to achieve an operating surplus of £53,000 in 1989-90, £200,000 in 1990-91 and £320,000 in 1991-92 before interest, depreciation and rate charges are levied. Targets covering the period up to 1994-95 will be set when the five-year corporate plan is approved later this year.

The centre's efficiency will be measured broadly by the extent of increases in its occupancy level. This currently stands at 56 per cent. and specific targets will be set within the corporate plan.

No specific quality of service target has yet been set but one of the centre's fundamental objectives is continually to improve the standards of service offered to clients. These are monitored through analysis of both client/delegate questionnaires and the volume of bookings, particularly those representing repeat business.

National Housing Forum

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he plans to discuss with the National Housing Forum its statement about the need to build 3 million homes by the end of the century.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* My right hon. Friend has not received any request to meet the National Housing Forum.

Landfill Gas

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to promote energy from landfill gas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Government policy is that all renewable energy sources should be exploited where economically and environmentally acceptable. The Government through the Department of Energy are funding a major programme of research into landfill gas with a contract value over £1 million. This includes work to optimise the extraction of gas from landfill sites and increase the understanding of the biological processes which generate gas. There are 30 such schemes currently operating in the United Kingdom and over 30 at the construction or planning stage.

Water

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current strength of the new drinking water inspectorate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The chief inspector of the drinking water inspectorate has been appointed and seven other professional and administrative staff are already in post. A number of professional posts are being advertised.

WALES

Economic Activity (North Wales)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what studies he has made of changes in the levels of economic activity in north Wales over the period 1979-89.

Mr. Peter Walker: Since 1979 Ministers at the Welsh Office have taken, and will continue to take, a close personal interest in the economic development of all areas of north Wales, working with the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Wales Tourist Board. The most recent exercise aimed at sustaining the improvement in the economy of north Wales resulted in the publication on 6 December 1989 of the document "A55—The Road to Opportunity".

Health Provision (South Glamorgan)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next proposes to meet the South Glamorgan county council to discuss health provision.

Mr. Grist: We have no plans at present to meet the South Glamorgan county council to discuss health provision.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest unadjusted figures for unemployment in *(a)* Newport, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; and if he will give the equivalent figures for 1979 on the most nearly comparable basis.

Mr. Peter Walker: On 14 December 1989, the numbers of unemployment claimants in the Newport district, Gwent and Wales were 4,604, 13,475, 87,161 respectively. Unadjusted figures for 1979 are not available on a basis that enables a valid comparison to be made.

The hon. Gentleman may like to note, however, that since he first asked me this question on 6 July 1987 the unadjusted unemployment figures for the Newport district, Gwent and Wales have fallen by 47 per cent., 47 per cent. and 43 per cent. respectively.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage by volume of drinking water in Wales that is treated by adding *(a)* chlorine and *(b)* ozone.

Mr. Grist: I am informed by Dwr Cymru that the information is as follows: *(a)* over 99 per cent.; *(b)* none.

Education Authorities

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all local education authorities in Wales in rank order of expenditure per secondary pupil per year, starting with the highest spending authority, together with their position in the table of examination results for school leavers achieving grades A to C at GCSE in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information in respect of 1987-88 is shown in the following table:

	Expenditure per secondary school pupil (£) (1987-88 financial year)	*Examination result position (1987-88 academic year)*[1]
West Glamorgan	1,713	6
Gwent	1,535	7
Powys	1,534	1
Dyfed	1,470	5
Gwynedd	1,469	2
Clwyd	1,431	3
Mid Glamorgan	1,426	8
South Glamorgan	1,402	4

Examination information for 1988-89 is not yet available.

[1] Ranked in order of the percentage of the 1988 school leavers achieving one or more grades A-C at GCSE, A-C at 'O' level or CSE grade 1.

Examinations

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of children sitting *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* A-level examinations in each local education authority in Wales as a percentage of the total number in the relevant year groups for 1988; and if he will list by each local education authority in Wales the total number of children achieving (i) GCSE grades A to C, (ii) GCSE grades C to F and (iii) A-level grades A to E as a percentage of the total number of pupils in the relevant year in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Household Refuse Tips

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what guidelines he has issued to Welsh district councils on the treatment of methane seepage from household refuse tips;

(2) what guidelines he has issued to Welsh district councils on the minimum distance required between new housebuilding areas and existing methane-generating household refuse tips *(a)* with and *(b)* without methane collection;

(3) what guidelines he has issued to Welsh district councils on the minimum time lapse required before building can be allowed in safety on household refuse tips;

(4) what guidelines he has issued to Welsh local authorities on the extraction of methane from household refuse tips.

Mr. Grist: Technical guidelines on the monitoring and control of landfill gas are provided in waste management paper No. 27, "The Control of Landfill Gas", which was published by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in 1989, and Welsh Office circular 38/39 which gives advice to local planning authorities about the use of their planning

powers in relation to landfill sites which may be generating harmful gases. While not specifying a particular time-lapse before development may commence in safety, circular 38/89 advises local planning authorities to exercise due caution in granting permission for development or redevelopment on or near landfill sites. It advises that planning permission should not be granted unless reliable arrangements can be made to overcome the danger of migrating gas.

The circular also refers to the provisions of article 18 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 which requires a local planning authority to consult the waste disposal authority before granting planning permission for development within 250 m of land which is (or has been at any time in the 30 years before the relevant application) used for the deposit of waste, and which has been notified to the planning authority by the waste disposal authority. Copies of the circular 38/39 and waste management paper No. 27 have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what guidelines he has issued to Welsh district councils on the environmental and public safety parameters for the removal of the contents of 10 to 20-year-old household refuse tips;

(2) whether he will ask Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to review the guidelines for the safe excavation and transportation of decayed household refuse tip material of five to 20 years' vintage.

Mr. Grist: No guidelines have been issued by my right hon. Friend. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is available to provide waste disposal authorities with advice.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last reviewed the guidelines on the good management of large household refuse landfill tips.

Mr. Grist: Guidance on landfill practice was given in waste management paper No. 26, published in 1986. Guidance on licensing waste disposal facilities, first published in waste management paper No. 4 in 1976, was revised in a new edition of this paper published in 1988. Copies are in the Library of the House.

Traffic (Pembroke)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning traffic on St. Daniel's Hill, Pembroke; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None. This is a matter for Dyfed county council as the local highway authority.

A44 (Cardiganshire)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the major improvement scheme on the Cardiganshire section of the A44 trunk road from Aberystwyth to Eisteddfa Curig is due to begin.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: A scheme costing nearly £1 million is programmed to start at Capel Bangor in the summer.

Classrooms

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state in total, and by education authority for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools (i) the number of demountable classrooms in use and (ii) their average age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information on the number and age of demountable classrooms in use in primary and secondary schools in Wales is not held centrally.

Business Rates

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *725*, what is the total amount payable under the new uniform business rate in each case.

Mr. Peter Walker: The amount payable for each hereditament depends upon both the non-domestic rating multiplier and its rateable value, subject in each case to the operation of the transitional arrangements for non-domestic ratepayers. Rateable values for individual hereditaments are contained in local non-domestic rating lists—they are not held centrally. The calculation of 1990-91 rates bills, having regard to rateable values, the multiplier, the transitional arrangements, and 1989-90 rates bills, is a matter for the relevant charging authority.

PCBs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the safety of the open hearth incinerator at the Rechem plant at Pontypool as a method of toxic waste disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer Monday 15 January]:* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has monitored the operation of the Rechem plant since it began operating. Independent assessments of the efficiency of destruction of one of the most stable groups of organic chemicals handled at the site, the PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), indicate that a minimum efficiency of 99·9999 per cent. was, and continues to be, achieved. No other toxic waste disposal site is known which exceeds this performance.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details in parts per billion of the polychlorinated biphenyl levels in foliage readings taken close to the Rechem incinerator at Pontypool from 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* PCBs were detected in samples taken from the New Inn area as follows, values in parts per billion:

1986—Her Majesty's industrial air pollution inspectorate
Five samples—11·1, 14·8, 19·0, 9·4 and 13·0.
1989—Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution
Two samples—221 and 68.
1989—Welsh Office
One sample—15

For the results of sampling commissioned by other agencies, in particular Torfaen borough council and Rechem plc, the hon. Gentleman should approach the organisations concerned.

ENERGY

Wind Energy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what studies his Department has commissioned to identify suitable sites within the United Kingdom for harnessing wind energy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department has commissioned two studies to estimate the potential number of sites. One study covers the whole of the United Kingdom and the other is making a detailed examination of the north of Scotland where the wind conditions are particularly attractive.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when the next review of priorities renewable energy research and development will take place.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Energy Paper No. 55, "Renewable Energy in the UK: The Way Forward", published in June 1988, laid out proposals for the development of renewable energy technologies. These are reviewed annually.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the contribution that may be made by electricity generated from methane from household refuse landfill sites to the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Baldry: How they meet their respective obligations under the non-fossil fuel obligation will be a matter for the public electricity suppliers, subject to their duty under the Electricity Act 1989 to satisfy the Secretary of State or the Director General of Electricity Supply that they have made appropriate arrangements.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last reviewed the use of methane from household refuse tips as a source of energy.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department is supporting a wide range of R and D with a contract value of over £1 million for work on methane from landfill sites. This includes work to optimise the extraction of gas from landfill sites and increase our understanding of the processes that lead to methane generation. We last reviewed our estimates of the contribution that such methane could make to United Kingdom energy supplies in October 1989. The figures, which are necessarily subject to considerable uncertainty, are given in the United Kingdom study for the intergovernmental panel on climate change. This report, "An Evaluation of Energy Related Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Measures to Ameliorate Them", was lodged in the Library of the House last November and will be published shortly as an energy paper.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *117*, to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) if he will give the number of projects of the building research energy conservation unit which are *(a)* completed and *(b)* under way for the domestic sector alone.

Mr. Wakeham: The numbers of projects under the energy efficiency demonstration and R and D schemes in the domestic sector which were managed by the building research establishment unit since 1979 are as follows:

(a) Projects completed—37
(b) Projects under way—27

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *310*, if he will give details of the initiative taken with the building societies in pursuit of a voluntary approach to energy audits.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced an initiative on 9 June 1988 between the Energy Efficiency Office (EEO) and the Building Societies Association to help building societies promote energy efficiency to their customers. A letter giving details was sent at that time to all hon. Members.

The initiative involved the publication of a leaflet by the EEO and the Building Societies Association for building societies to make available to their borrowers. The leaflet gives basic information on energy efficiency measures and finance, and invites recipients to send for "Your Home Energy Survey", a detailed information pack from the EEO which includes a home energy checklist to assist householders in carrying out a simple audit of energy efficiency measures in their homes.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give for the nine month periods ended September 1987, September 1988 and September 1989, for each region, the numbers of *(a)* community insulation projects or schemes, *(b)* draught-proofing jobs completed under community insulation, *(c)* loft insulation jobs completed under community insulation and *(d)* trainees and participant workers.

Mr. Wakeham: The following table gives the information that is available in respect of community insulation projects for the periods requested:

	Number of projects at end of September each year			*Number of draughtproofing jobs completed in January to September period each year*			*Number of loft insulation jobs completed in January to September period each year*			*Number of participant workers/trainees at end of September each year*		
	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
East Midlands	35	35	28	7,054	[1]—	7,884	351	[1]—	50	505	520	271
London	34	33	12	5,562	[1]—	941	501	[1]—	39	617	610	31
North East	25	26	18	11,365	[1]—	7,789	509	[1]—	202	493	508	253
North West	48	55	45	12,082	[1]—	16,770	467	[1]—	148	1,051	1,240	672
Scotland	61	73	71	22,125	[1]—	26,785	3,061	[1]—	1,374	978	1,122	755
South East	47	48	23	4,934	[1]—	3,910	954	[1]—	192	566	523	121
South West	34	29	16	7,640	[1]—	3,303	1,274	[1]—	372	534	461	190

	Number of projects at end of September each year			Number of draughtproofing jobs completed in January to September period each year			Number of loft insulation jobs completed in January to September period each year			Number of participant workers/trainees at end of September each year		
	1987	1988	1989	1987	1988	1989	1987	1988	1989	1987	1988	1989
Wales	47	46	35	11,201	[1]—	10,328	675	[1]—	139	1,047	1,001	338
West Midlands	50	56	26	8,822	[1]—	8,723	812	[1]—	178	775	875	314
Yorkshire and Humberside	34	36	24	12,668	[1]—	10,951	1,216	[1]—	585	679	724	351
Total	415	437	298	103,453	127,428	97,384	9,820	11,429	3,279	7,245	7,584	3,296

[1] Data could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

PowerGen

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current status of PowerGen.

Mr. Baldry: PowerGen is currently a division of the Central Electricity Generating Board.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Pornography

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the production and distribution of child pornography; what action is being taken to provide extra resources to police forces to deal with this problem; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have received a number of representations drawing attention to the abhorrent trade in child pornography. The deployment of police resources to particular tasks is an operational matter for chief officers. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has increased the obscene publications branch from 12 to 18 officers specifically to deal with child pornography. Other officers of the Metropolitan police and other forces also deal with it in the course of other duties.

The Protection of Children Act 1978 (as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1988) makes it an offence to produce, possess or show indecent photographs, films or video recordings of children under 16, or to advertise their distribution or showing. The police can obtain warrants to enter and search premises and remove any indecent material. Maximum penalties for child pornography range up to three years' imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both.

There are already strong measures against child pornography, but we are ready to consider proposals for making them more effective.

War Crimes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce the Government's intentions in respect of legislation to enable the prosecution of alleged Nazi war criminals living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 16 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) at column *171*.

Emergency Control Centres

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of local authorities that do not currently meet guidelines laid down in his Department's circulars for emergency control centres.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from him on 18 December 1989 at columns *18-19*.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has a target date for all local authorities to comply with his Department's emergency plans, including the provision of emergency control centres.

Mr. John Patten: No. The requirements for local authorities to make plans and to establish emergency control centres for civil defence purposes are contained in the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations which came into force in 1983. Progress in meeting these statutory requirements is monitored through the Government's planned programme for implementation of the regulations. As part of this monitoring scheme, targets for related activities are agreed annually with individual local authorities, taking into account the state of their preparedness at the time; priorities which are set on a national basis after consultation with the local authority associations; and the financial provision made centrally for grant in support of the civil defence functions. A report on progress up to October 1988 was published in January 1989 and a copy is in the Library. Advances on the position shown in that report are now being considered in the light of more recent information provided by local authorities.

Blundeston Prison

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the disturbances which occurred inside Blundeston prison, Suffolk, on 11 and 12 January.

Mr. Mellor: During the evening of 11 January a demonstration by prisoners in one wing spread quickly to two other wings. Damage was caused to fittings, furniture and windows and prison officers had to withdraw from two wings and the upper part of the third wing for a time, for their own safety. Police were deployed outside the prison, the other emergency services attended and staff from other prisons were sent in support in accordance with contingency plans and were held in readiness but not deployed. No inmates escaped. Prison staff regained

control of two wings in about two hours and complete control had been restored by midnight, without injury to staff or inmates or structural damage.

The regional director for the south-east region of the prison service is examining the cause of this demonstration, which is not immediately evident. Meanwhile, although no accommodation was lost, 24 inmates have been transferred to other prisons in the region for control reasons and work is almost complete on repairing the damage.

This was an unpleasant incident and I should like to pay tribute to the professional way in which it was handled by local management and staff and to the other services concerned for their full and ready assistance.

Risley

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the Dunbar report into the Risley incident; if he will place a copy of the report or a summary of findings in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: A summary including the list of recommendations resulting from the inquiry has already been placed in the Library, and action taken as indicated in the reply of my right hon. Friend the Member for Whitney (Mr. Hurd) to a question from the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) on 25 July 1989 at columns *607-08*.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his most up-to-date information on which police authorities are involved in providing ambulance services; and what is the number of man hours provided by each police authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The readily available information is that up to 12 January police forces had provided approximately the number of man hours shown in the table in assisting the ambulance service in their areas. Derbyshire ceased providing assistance on 3 January.

Approximate number of man hours

	Man hours
Bedfordshire	23,900
Cheshire	1,500
Derbyshire	7,000
Dorset	14,800
Essex	2,000
Hampshire	8,500
Hertfordshire	40,000
Lincolnshire	2,900
Northumbria	27,600
South Yorkshire	38,500
Staffordshire	9,800
Surrey	1,700
Thames Valley	1,000
Warwickshire	1,300
West Mercia	14,500
West Midlands	54,500
West Yorkshire	29,200

I understand that in the Metropolitan police district about 460 officers are usually employed in each 24-hour period assisting the ambulance service.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the acting chief constable of the West Midlands as to the cost per police man hour of deploying the police on ambulance duties within the West Midlands police district.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that in the West Midlands the basic cost per officer per hour is about £16·60. Additionally charges for vehicle running costs, accommodation and overheads will be made.

Street Lighting

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the recommended types of street lighting for use in areas of social stress in cities.

Mr. John Patten: No. It is for highway authorities to satisfy themselves as to the adequacy of street lighting in their areas. However, we are anxious to know more about the link between street lighting and crime, and with the fear of crime, which is why we have contracted Southampton university to conduct a major study into these links in Wandsworth. Interim results from this study are expected to be available during April.

Nottinghamshire Police

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will grant the latest request for Nottinghamshire county police authority for extra numbers of policemen.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 23 November 1989 at column *12* that he had approved 26 of the 63 police posts for which the Nottinghamshire police authority applied with effect from 1 April 1990.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed this case with the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Shops Act

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to issue new guidelines to local authorities on the Shops Act.

Mr. Mellor: No.

National Television Licence Record Office

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate the work of the national television licence record office at Bristol; and why a letter sent to the centre on 20 November by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish was still not replied to by 11 January.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that NTVLRO dispatched a reply to the hon. Member on 9 January, and told him this when he telephoned on 10 January. The break for Christmas and the new year did cause some delay in

responding, and NTVLRO regrets that the customary interim reply had not been sent in this instance. Its procedures are being reviewed to deal with this.

Immigrants

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the payment made in each year since the Act was brought into effect to local authorities in Wales under sectoion 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 relating to expenditure for Commonwealth immigrants by local authorities.

Mr. John Patten: The amount of grant paid to local authorities in Wales from the financial year 1983-84 onwards (the first year in which grant was claimed) is given in the table. The figures represent 75 per cent. of total section 11 expenditure in each year, the remainder being paid by the local authorities.

Financial Year	*Grant (£)*
1983-84	63,551
1984-85	118,702
1985-86	156,583
1986-87	210,200
1987-88	227,039
1988-89	252,802

Police Efficiency

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss improvements in police efficiency.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Improvements in police efficiency is a subject which underlies all my right hon. and learned Friend's discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers, but he has no plans for a meeting on that subject specifically.

Crime, London

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what factors he ascribes the fall in the overall London crime rate and the rise in the London borough of Newham crime rate.

Mr. John Patten: Comparing the 12 months ending September 1989—the latest period for which figures are available—with the 12 months ending September 1988, shows an 0·8 per cent. increase in all recorded crime for London and a 1·6 per cent. increase for Newham. Only in respect of household burglary do the figures for the London borough of Newham show a notable increase while those for the rest of London show a fall.

Car Phones

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers have been prosecuted for using hand-held car phones while driving in each year since such phones have been available.

Mr. John Patten: The available information relates to proceedings at magistrates' courts for all offences of careless driving and so on and is published annually in table 5 of "Offences relating to motor vehicles, England and Wales Supplementary tables". Information is not collected centrally about the circumstances of these alleged offences.

Police Authority Land, South Yorkshire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the locations of the proposed deals with supermarket chains to build on sites owned by the South Yorkshire police authority, in return for providing a free police station.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that no such schemes have been agreed. South Yorkshire police authority has, however, discussed informally with property developers in Sheffield and Doncaster the possibility of providing, at the developers' expense, a small amount of accommodation for police use.

Firearms

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for the most convenient recent period for which figures are available, the source of firearms recovered after their use in criminal activities, showing those *(a)* stolen from legitimate United Kingdom licence holders, *(b)* obtained abroad and illegally imported, *(c)* stolen from the armed services, *(d)* unlicensed weapons kept as war souvenirs, and *(e)* firearms legitimately owned by the criminal who possessed a firearms certificate or shotgun certificate relating to the weapon.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not collected centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Canada

Q.87. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to pay an official visit to Canada.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to visit Canada.

AIDS

Q208. **Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the contribution of the Department of Social Security to the Government's strategy against AIDS and HIV.

The Prime Minister: Ministers in the Department of Social Security have carefully considered the implications of AIDS and HIV for the relevant benefits in consultation with the Department of Health.

AIDS sufferers will benefit from the large number of measures recently announced as part of a package of benefit changes intended to improve the help available to disabled people. In particular, many who are in the advanced stages of the illness will benefit from the removal of the six-month qualifying period for attendance allowance for people with terminal illness. This also means that the income support disability premium may be paid sooner. This premium provides extra help to long-term sick or disabled people, currently £13·70 and increasing above normal uprating to £15·40 in April.

In addition to these measures, AIDS sufferers benefit particularly from the special disregard of payments from the Macfarlane Trust.

Whales

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister if she discussed the killing of whales in the Antarctic by the Japanese at her recent meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: The Japanese Government are well aware of the feelings of the British people about Japan's whaling activities, as was evident from my talks with Prime Minister Kaifu on 12 January.

Japan

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: On 12 January I had talks with the Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Kaifu, followed by a working lunch. We discussed bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and Japan, which are excellent, and a range of international issues, including East-West affairs, western assistance to eastern Europe, and developments in China and elsewhere in Asia.

Noise

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received in relation to noise pollution.

The Prime Minister: During the last 12 months I have received a number of letters concerning noise. In the main these have been concerned with noisy neighbours, noisy parties, construction noise and the use of motorcycles off the public highway.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister whether an ability to understand and speak the Welsh language is a factor taken into consideration before any recommendation is made for appointment of Lord Lieutenants for the Welsh-speaking counties of Wales.

The Prime Minister: Yes, among other factors.

Trinity college, Cambridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what considerations she will take into account before making recommendations for the post of Master of Trinity college, Cambridge; what consultations she proposes to undertake; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Recommendations made to the Crown for this appointment, as in other cases, will take account of a range of qualities including intellect, experience and personality, following widely based and confidential consultations.

Ministers (Commercial Interests)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will publish the advice given to Ministers of the Crown on their private commercial and business interests.

The Prime Minister: The general principle was set out by the then Secretary of the Cabinet in a memorandum to the royal commission on standards of conduct in public life in 1975, a copy of which is in the Library.

EH101 Helicopter

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister if the progress of the anti-submarine warfare version of the EH101 helicopter programme is under regular review by and reporting to the Cabinet Office efficiency unit.

The Prime Minister: No. The efficiency unit works with all Departments to help secure improvements in the management of the public service, but individual programmes and projects are the responsibility of departmental Ministers.

Engagements

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

Mr. French: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Government Achievements

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the achievements of Her Majesty's Government during 1989.

The Prime Minister: Economic growth has continued, although at a slower pace than recently, as domestic demand growth has slowed. The actions taken by the Government to reduce the growth of domestic demand and to bear down on inflation are clearly having their intended effect. Investment continued to rise. Business investment, in particular, grew strongly and reached a new record level as a share of GDP. Net start-ups of new businesses—as measured by VAT registrations—set a new record.

The economy has continued to create new jobs; unemployment has continued to fall and is now around two thirds of the average EC level.

The Government have maintained sound public finances and by the end of the current financial year will have repaid £30 billion of debt in just three years, saving nearly £3 billion a year in interest payments.

The Government have increased spending on priority programmes while maintaining a downward trend over time in the ratio of public spending to GDP. In 1988-89, the ratio was under 40 per cent. for the first time in over 20 years.

The Government have made further progress in the drive to improve value for money in public expenditure —for example, in the Civil Service, implementing the next steps initiative.

The Government have continued the programme of tax reform whose aim has been to create a climate in which businesses thrive and individual initiative is rewarded. The 1989 Budget increased incentives for share ownership, reformed the life assurance tax regime and simplified that for pensions. Employees' national insurance contributions were reformed and reduced. The differential between leaded and unleaded petrol was increased, encouraging the use of unleaded petrol whose market share has grown to nearly 30 per cent., compared with under 2 per cent. a year ago.

The privatisation programme has continued with the successful sale of the water industry. As a result of this policy and tax reliefs designed to encourage shareholding, 22 per cent. of the adult population own shares.

The new employment service brings together benefit payment and job placement functions. It has helped hundreds of thousands of unemployed people into training and jobs.

Employment training is now offering high-quality training for employment to over 210,000 previously unemployed people. The new youth training programme has been launched as a locally delivered high-quality training programme to equip our young people for the challenges of the 1990s and beyond. Compacts between schools and local employers are being established throughout the country. The Training Agency was established to be responsible for the implementation of these and other training and enterprise programmes.

Training and enterprise councils (TECs) will give local employers responsibility for the design and delivery of training to meet the needs of local industry and commerce. Alredy 50 TECs, covering more than half the working population, have been established and are receiving development funding.

The Dock Work Act 1989 has removed from the statute book the 40-year-old dock labour scheme which has sustained restrictive practices and surplus labour in our ports, thus reducing their efficiency and discouraging investment.

The Employment Act 1989 promotes equality of opportunity for women in employment, removes unnecessary restrictions on young people at work, and paves the way for the removal of the weight of industrial training board bureaucracy from major sectors of British industry.

The enterprise initiative continues to attract strong interest from small and medium-sized businesses. A total of 40,000 applications have been received since January 1988, with demands spread throughout the United Kingdom and across both manufacturing and service sectors.

The Government have continued to promote innovation in industry. The market for telecommunications has been liberalised further, notably by the decision to license three consortia to operate personal communications networks, a new form of mobile telephone service that will be based on radio technology.

The Companies Act 1989 has introduced a number of improvements to the regulation of and law on companies, financial services, merger control and insolvency.

The White Paper, "Opening Markets: New Policy on Restrictive Trade Practices" set out the Government's plans for dealing more effectively with anti-competitive agreements.

The DTI environmental programme was launched in May to provide information, advice and encouragement to business to help it successfully address emerging environmental challenges and opportunities.

The Electricity Act 1989 provides for the reorganisation and privatisation of the electricity supply industry in England, Wales and Scotland. Substantial progress has been made in reorganising the industry and the Government intend that the CEGB and the area boards will be reconstructed as Companies Act companies at the end of March 1990.

Government policies on taxation and licensing have ensured that 1989 was another successful year for the United Kingdom continental shelf. Drilling activity in 1989 matched the record levels in 1988.

The Energy Efficiency Office's programme secures recurrent annual savings now worth over £500 million per year. In 1989 it introduced a major best practice programme, to advance and spread good practice in energy efficiency. The Electricity Act 1989 will give further impetus to energy efficiency, both from competition in generation and from the requirement on suppliers to provide customers with specific guidance on this subject.

The Government have acted to ensure that Britain's growing transport needs are met safely, efficiently and with proper respect for the environment.

Agreement in principle has been achieved on key elements of a liberalised internal market in aviation in the European Community. The Government have intensified aviation security, and have brought forward the Aviation and Marine Security Bill. The Government have approved investment by the Civil Aviation Authority in a new en-route air traffic control centre that will greatly increase capacity.

The Government have agreed external financing limits which will allow British Rail to undertake 75 per cent. more investment in real terms over the next three years than in the previous three years, and London Regional Transport 70 per cent. more. The go-ahead was announced for the extension of the Jubilee line into docklands.

The White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" announced plans to more than double the road programme in England to over £12 billion. The emphasis will be on widening existing routes so as to deliver extra capacity quickly and with minimum environmental effect. Planned investment in road construction over the next three years is 50 per cent. higher in real terms than in the previous three years. "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s" set out the major investment programme for Welsh roads. In Scotland it has been announced that provision for new construction and improvements of motorways and

trunk roads will by 1992-93 be substantially above the current level, while expenditure on maintenance and construction together will also be significantly higher.

The Green Paper "New Roads by New Means" set out proposals for the private financing of new roads additional to the publicly financed road programme. The Government have announced a range of proposals for tackling traffic congestion in London.

The Government have taken important steps to improve transport safety, through the publication of the White Paper "The Road User and the Law", hard-hitting campaigns to improve road safety and the establishment of the marine accident investigation branch.

The Government have responded promptly and introduced comprehensive measures to deal with several outbreaks of food-borne illness and contamination incidents in order to protect consumers throughout the country. A Food Safety Bill has now been introduced in Parliament to ensure that our food safety laws keep pace with the revolution that is taking place in the way in which food is produced, stored and prepared.

The Government have made further progress in achieving a better balance between agricultural production and the environment notably through new powers to introduce nitrate sensitive areas and the introduction of new capital grants favouring the environment.

At the EC Council of Fisheries Ministers in December, the Government secured the best possible deal under the common fisheries policy for British fishermen consistent with conservation.

The outcome of the European Community's farm price review fully reflected the decision taken on stabilisers during the previous year leading to further downward pressure on prices and expenditure. The Community also reached agreement on the reviews of its regimes for beef and sheepmeat and of the provisions for farm structures.

The Government have maintained and reinforced our commitment to environmental protection both at the national and international level. Internationally, the Government have taken a leading part in efforts to respond to global problems such as ozone depletion and climate change. On 8 November at the United Nations I announced that £100 million of aid has been earmarked over the next three years to help preserve tropical forests. The Government's agreement with Brazil to provide help, especially for the rain forests was the first ever of its kind. Domestically, the Environmental Protection Bill has been introduced which provides for a system of integrated pollution control, reform of the law relating to the regulation of waste disposal, measures to deal with litter, and improvement of the existing system of air pollution control operated by local authorities.

The Water Act 1989 paved the way for the separation of the service and supply functions from the regulatory responsibilities within the water industry. A strong new environmental and economic regulatory framework is provided by two new public sector bodies—the National Rivers Authority and the Directorate General of Water Services. Privatisation has brought the prospect of a better-organised, more efficient industry and will enable the 10 new water service companies to use private sector resources to tackle their essential tasks. The Water Act, for the first time, makes it a specific criminal offence to supply water which is unfit for human consumption. Regulations set strict new standards for drinking water quality which include, and in some cases go further than, the standards required by the EC drinking water directive.

The main provisions of the Housing Act 1988 were implemented during 1989; new private lettings were deregulated, housing association finance has been reformed to allow increased use of private money, powers had been provided to create housing action trusts, and council tenants have been given the right to choose a new landlord.

The Government established Scottish Homes as a vehicle for improving choice and quality in Scottish housing. Housing for Wales became fully operational in April. In both Wales and Scotland the Government launched the flexi-ownership scheme on an experimental basis to allow tenants to buy their homes at about the same outlay as their rent.

The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 reforms the law on local government capital and housing finance and permits improved targeting of public expenditure on the renovation of the housing stock in the public and private sectors. The Act also reinforces the rules on conduct of local authority business, gives local authorities new powers to promote economic development, and regulates their interests in companies.

During the year substantial progress was made in regenerating the inner cities. The Bristol development corporation was established at the start of the year. Private investment in all urban development corporation areas in 1989 exceeded £7·3 billion and city grant has attracted a further £1 billion to inner-city areas. The total Government commitment to the Action for Cities programmes, launched in March 1988, will be nearly £3·5 billion this financial year.

The Football Spectators Act 1989 was passed. It will provide the means to counter the menace of football hooliganism both at home and abroad. The new national football intelligence unit has been established.

The Government's commitment to the National Health Service has been firmly maintained. Resources have continued to expand. An additional £2·6 billion will be made available for 1990-91 representing a real terms increase of 5·5 per cent. More doctors and more nurses are working in the National Health Service and the number of patient treatments has continued to rise. The Government seek to use these resources more effectively and provide patients with even better services with the widest possible choice. Proposals have been put to Parliament for improving the management of health services and also to allow the growing numbers of elderly and physically and mentally disabled people to live in the community with appropriate support. Legislation was introduced to respond to scientific advance in embryology and the treatment of infertility.

In addition to launching the European Year of Information on Cancer last January, the Government have given support to a number of health promotion and prevention schemes. The Human Organ and Transplant Act 1989 prohibits commercial dealing with human organs for transplants and regulates the transplant of organs between persons who are not genetically related.

The Children Act 1989 provides a comprehensive reform of the law and court jurisdiction on the care and upbringing of children, family services and the protection of children from abuse.

The Government have continued to commit greater resources than ever before to social security. In 1989-90 spending will have been 3·2 per cent. higher in real terms than in the previous year, and over one third higher than in 1978-79. We have announced further increases in benefit rates from April 1990 which will bring expenditure on social security to over £1 billion a week for the first time ever, and give greater help to less well-off families, disabled people and carers.

The DSS computerisation programme—one of the largest in the world—is now being steadily introduced into local offices. This, together with the reform and simplification of benefits themselves, is bringing about important improvements in the service the DSS provides to the public. For example, clearance times for income support claims in 1988-89 were on average 22 per cent. better than those for its predecessor, supplementary benefit, in 1987-88.

The Government have continued to implement policies to improve all aspects of the education system in England and Wales and have made important progress in carrying through the provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988. In particular, the national curriculum has begun to be introduced together with arrangements for examinations and assessment in support of it. In higher education the new funding arrangements are beginning to promote greater efficiency and relevance to economic success.

The Government are continuing to create a climate in which the arts will flourish, supported by both the public and private sectors. The Government's three-year programme of funding has been reviewed and increased by 24 per cent. in the next three years. Commercial and individual sponsorship of the arts has continued to rise.

The number of police posts in England and Wales increased by 1,136 during the year, bringing the total to 126,574. The number of civilians supporting the police increased by around 1,300 to 43,600. These increases have been accompanied by action to ensure that the police use their resources effectively.

The Government introduced the Courts and Legal Services Bill to extend choice and improve services to the individual. It will help clients more often to have the advocate of their choice and it will hasten the conveyancing process.

The Government have given high priority to tackling drug misuse through measures to reduce both the supply of and the demand for drugs. Reciprocal agreements or arrangements to trace, freeze and confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking have been concluded with eight further countries and we have introduced legislation to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the United Nations convention against the illicit traffic in drugs.

Legislation has been passed to strengthen the country's defences against terrorism, to reform section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 and to place the Security Service on a statutory footing. New laws to enhance the controls over the use of firearms have been brought into force. The number of safer cities projects has increased from one to 12. Over £850,000 in grant aid has been approved to fund a number of crime prevention initiatives.

In 1989, work began on six new prison establishments which will provide over 3,000 additional places. Nearly £100 million was spent on major building work at existing establishments, including work on 11 new house blocks which will provide 1,100 new places early in 1990. A new prison for 350 inmates at Banstead in Surrey was brought into use in only 18 months. Work also began on a seven-year programme which will provide integral sanitation in over 6,500 cells in existing establishments.

In Wales, the economy has continued to grow strongly. Inward investment has continued at a very high level with a number of major projects secured in 1989, including Toyota's £140 million engine plant at Deeside, and Bosch's £100 million project at Miskin. Output of the production and construction industries rose by 4·1 per cent. in the year to the second quarter of 1989. The Welsh Development Agency's budget for 1989-90 is the highest ever in real terms, enabling massive programmes of land reclamation and factory building. We have also announced a two-year extension of the highly successful valleys programme. All this has helped to bring about a fall in unemployment in the year to November 1989 of 30,500 (to 86,400) and 2·4 percentage points (to 6·9 per cent.).

Inward investment in Scotland continued strongly. Major investments in 1989 include an expansion by Compaq at Erskine and Stirling, Seiko Instrument's announcement to establish a manufacturing facility in Livingston and the development by Russell Corporation of its Livingston production centre.

In Northern Ireland the Government have continued their efforts to find an agreed basis on which greater responsibility can be devolved to the elected representatives of the people of the Province.

The security forces have continued with dedication and professionalism to combat terrorism in Northern Ireland within the rule of law. The Government have successfully completed a review of the workings of the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Conference.

A new Fair Employment Act was approved by Parliament and with it was established a Fair Employment Commission and a new Fair Employment Tribunal. The strong new powers now in force will ensure the basic right of all those in employment or seeking work to be treated fairly irrespective of the community from which they come.

Short Brothers and Harland and Wolff have been returned to the private sector.

The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, which was recently approved by Parliament, provides for reform of the education system to improve standards and promote integrated education.

The Government announced their decision to support a new Northern Ireland Community Relations Council. This independent body will encourage and support those organisations working to improve relations between the different communities in Northern Ireland.

In foreign affairs, the historic changes now taking place in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe vindicate the policies of sure defence and strong support for human rights which the Government have consistently maintained. The Government have provided substantial financial and practical help for economic and political reform in eastern Europe, both bilaterally and through the European Community and have indeed taken a leading part in formulating Europe's response to these developments. The Government have also continued to give support to the reform policies of President Gorbachev, who paid a very successful visit to the United Kingdom in the course of the year.

At the same time, the Government have continued to assure Britain's sound defence, by maintaining the strength of our conventional forces and providing for the

modernisation of our independent nuclear deterrent with Trident. The Government played a full part in devising NATO's comprehensive concept for arms control and defence which was agreed at the NATO summit in May. We have also taken an active and constructive part in the negotiations for reductions in conventional forces in Europe and the elimination of chemical weapons.

Within the European Community, the Government have ensured that Britain remains a leading proponent of completion of the European single market by 1992, as well as being foremost among member states in implementing agreed single market directives.

Significant measures agreed in 1989 included the second banking directive and agreement on a merger control regulation. At the same time the Government have given enthusiastic support to implementation of the first phase of the Delors report on economic and monetary union, while representing strongly the concern felt in all parts of the House about some of the proposals for stages two and three, which would undermine the powers of national Parliaments.

The Government have taken an active part, too, in resolving international disputes. In particular we have contributed to the successful implementation of the United Nations plan for Namibia. We have used our influence to encourage peaceful change in South Africa, welcoming the steps which have already been taken by President De Klerk. The Government declared their full support for the action taken by the United States to enable the democratically elected Government of Panama to take office.

The Government have announced measures to reassure the people of Hong Kong about their future and to give them confidence to remain there. The Government have also worked for a durable and humane solution to the problem of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong, which recognises that for those who are not genuine refugees, there is no alternative to repatriation to Vietnam.

The Government have maintained a substantial and effective aid programme geared to the promotion of economic and social progress and the alleviation of poverty in developing countries. The Government have provided swift and generous humanitarian assistance and taken the lead in trying to resolve and respond to Ethiopia's problems. We have continued to provide widespread support for countries undergoing economic policy reform, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, including $100 million for programme aid in Nigeria. We have played a major role in the successful outcome of the ninth replenishment of the International Development Association and the Lomé IV renegotiation. We will be providing nearly £620 million for the former and some £1·3 billion for the latter, Britain's largest-ever single aid commitment.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners (Merseyside)

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people over pensionable age on Merseyside are reliant on state pension alone; and what percentage this represents of all Merseysiders over pensionable age.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that information is not available on a geographical basis in the form requested. Few individuals are reliant solely on their state pension as the majority of people in that situation would be entitled to income support and housing benefit.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people over pensionable age on Merseyside receive disability-related benefits; which benefits they receive; and what percentage of all Merseysiders over pensionable age receive disability-related benefits.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that information is not available in the form requested.

Fraud Staff

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual amount of expenses paid to his Department's fraud staff; and if he will break down the figure into payments for car allowance, overnight accommodation and other categories.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Central records are maintained of expenses paid to all departmental staff but do not identify those staff employed on fraud work. I regret that the required information could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what surveillance equipment is used by his Department's fraud staff; and in which areas such equipment is held.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Equipment comprising binoculars, radios, cameras and video cameras is held by teams of fraud investigators employed in the Department's headquarters and regional offices who investigate serious organised fraud against social security payments systems. Radios, photographic cameras and binoculars are sometimes used in the investigation of benefit fraud, but limited to occasions where they are necessary effectively to conduct a fraud drive.

Benefit Rules

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the claimants affected by the introduction on 10 December of the new benefits rule on claimants earning more than £43 a week he estimates are *(a)* married/cohabiting women, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* disabled, *(d)* men aged 50 to 54 years, *(e)* men aged 55 to 59 years, *(f)* women aged 50 to 54 years, *(g)* women aged 55 to 59 years, *(h)* claimants with intermittent work patterns due to chronic illness or disability and *(i)* claimants from ethnic minorities.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that this information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what grounds he rejected the recommendations of the Social Security Advisory Committee which opposed the introduction of the new benefit rules for claimants earning more than £43 in a week.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The report of the Social Security Advisory Committee on the regulations which brought

this measure into effect was presented to Parliament on 17 November 1989, prior to the regulations coming into force. The response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was published with the report (Cm. 923), which is available in the Library.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to raise the de minimis figure of £12 weekly, following his introduction on 10 December of the new benefit rule on claimants earning more than £43 a week.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The £12 de minimis level was first introduced on 10 December 1989. It is too early to assess its effects and we have no plans to raise the level at present.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of persons on income support who have debts in excess of £100; and if he will indicate what proportion of the debts of income support claimants is on average down to (i) rent arrears, (ii) fuel debts, and (iii) other specified causes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he has any plans to introduce a de minimis level on the application for the full extent normal rule for unemployment benefit; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he has any plans to introduce an upper weekly earnings limit for unemployment benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Both these measures were introduced with effect from 10 December 1989 by the Social Security (Unemployment, Sickness and Invalidity Benefit) Amendment No. 3 Regulations 1989 (SI 1989/2122), and the Social Security (Computation of Earnings) Amendment Regulations 1989 (SI 1989-2123), which were laid before Parliament on 17 November 1989. Copies of these instruments are available in the Library.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17-year-olds are currently denied benefit for not taking up YTS training in the Durham area.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 18 December at column 69.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Clubs

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for each region and for Great Britain as a whole how many people *(a)* were members of job clubs on 1 April 1989, *(b)* have joined job clubs since 1 April 1989 to the latest possible date and *(c)* have left job clubs since 1 April 1989 to the latest possible date; what were their destinations showing how many entered jobs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Eggar: On 1 April 1989, 26,773 people were members of job clubs. The other figures requested and the required breakdowns are given in the following table.

I am very encouraged by the continuing success of job clubs. Over 350,000 people have participated in the programme since it started five years ago. More than 200,000 people have found jobs and over 50,000 have achieved other positive outcomes.

The programme will continue to have an important role in helping longer-term unemployed people and we are taking steps to strengthen it further by introducing pilot projects to establish ways of providing effective help to people not at present able to benefit from job clubs, notably those with severe literacy or language problems.

	Northern	*Yorkshire and Humberside*	*East Midlands*	*London and South East*	*South West*	*Wales*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Scotland*	*National*
(a) Total in job club at 1 April 1989	1,938	2,444	2,133	5,527	1,420	1,653	2,461	4,667	4,530	26,773
(b) Total number joining job club 1 April 1989 to 24 November 1989	6,956	8,990	7,902	21,176	4,569	5,429	8,545	16,037	13,762	93,366
(c) Total number leaving job club 1 April 1989 to 24 November 1989	6,887	8,632	7,445	20,196	4,376	5,354	8,266	15,561	13,994	90,711
(d) Job entries	3,488	5,113	4,573	9,140	2,495	3,134	4,418	8,615	8,050	49,026
(e) Employment training	702	903	782	1,835	412	584	925	1,289	1,318	8,750
(f) Other positive outcomes[1]	258	329	444	1,360	241	168	405	882	641	4,728
(g) Total positive outcomes[2]	4,448	6,345	5,799	12,335	3,148	3,886	5,748	10,786	10,009	62,504

[1] Other positive outcomes include training other than employment training, full-time education and self employment.
[2] Total positive outcomes is the total of lines *(d)*, *(e)* and *(f)*.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *661*, what percentage of Health and Safety Executive staff, in the years specified, were trainees.

Mr. Nicholls: Only two grades of staff in the Health and Safety Executive are designated as training grades: factory inspectors class II (for their first two years) and assistant agricultural inspectors (first three years). The number of "trainee" inspectors in these grades expressed as a percentage of the total number of factory and agricultural inspectors in post in HSE are as follows (1 April figures):

	Per cent.
1984	0·0
1985	6·4
1986	11·8
1987	14·9
1988	12·0

	Per cent.
1989	12·7
[1]1990	14·9

[1]January.

Apart from this a wide range of training is provided (internally or externally) both for new recruits and for more experienced staff, in the various occupational groups employed by HSE.

Unofficial Strikes

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how statistics are kept on the number of days lost through unofficial strikes.

Mr. Nicholls: Separate statistics on unofficial strikes ceased to be published as a regular series in 1981. However, a limited amount of information from a special exercise was included in the Government's Green Paper "Unofficial Action and the Law", a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Jobcentres, Basingstoke and St. Albans

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the highest and lowest rates of pay for jobs advertised in jobcentres at *(a)* Basingstoke and *(b)* St. Albans, listing the number of vacancies advertised in each office.

Mr. Eggar: On 11 January the highest rate of pay for a job displayed at the Basingstoke jobcentre was £250 per week and the lowest £76 per week. There were 925 full-time and 260 part-time job vacancy cards displayed. The highest rate of pay for jobs displayed at the St. Albans jobcentre was £187 per week and the lowest £97 per week. There were 277 full-time job and 68 part-time vacancy cards displayed.

Trade Union Members

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many copies of the booklets "Guide for Trade Union Members" and "Short Guide for Trade Union Members" have been printed by the office of the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members; and to whom they have been distributed.

Mr. Nicholls: I am advised by the independent Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members that 55,000 copies of the "Guide for Trade Union Members" have been printed and 50,510 have been distributed to date, while 260,000 copies of the "Short Guide for Trade Union Members" have been printed and 237,400 have been distributed to date. Copies have been distributed to various members of the public, trade unions, law centre offices, colleges of further education, universities, Conservative trade unionists, solicitors, citizens advice bureaux, libraries (including House of Commons), and Department of Employment group offices and journalists. In addition, copies have been distributed to the French and German embassies, Industrial Society, Labour Relations Agency (Northern Ireland), Conservative party central office, Social and Liberal Democratic party Whips' office, Institute of Personnel Management and the Newspaper Society.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff are employed at the office of the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members; and what are their salaries.

Mr. Nicholls: I am advised by the independent Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members that four staff are employed at her office; their respective salaries are £21,098, £14,549, £10,747, and £8,305.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of providing accommodation for the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members; and if the accommodation is leasehold or freehold.

Mr. Nicholls: I am advised by the independent Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members that the initial cost of providing accommodation for the commissioner was £9,073·50. The accommodation is leasehold.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of providing office furniture and equipment for the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members.

Mr. Nicholls: I am advised by the independent Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members that the initial cost of furnishing and equipping the commissioner's office was £13,122·00

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the increase in output per head in *(a)* the manufacturing and *(b)* the non-manufacturing sectors since June 1979 together with percentage increases between April 1979 and April 1989 in the real earnings of (i) full-time adult male workers in manufacturing and (ii) full-time adult male non-manual workers in the private sector, less manufacturing.

Mr. Nicholls: The increases in output per head in manufacturing and non-manufacturing between the second quarter of 1979 and the second quarter of 1989 were 48 per cent. and 12 per cent. respectively.

The real increase in the weekly earnings of full-time adult males in manufacturing between April 1979 and April 1989 was 23 per cent. Figures are not readily available for the private sector less manufacturing and would involve disproportionate cost to compile.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his written reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, dated 11 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *467-68*, concerning increases in weekly and hourly earnings of certain full-time adult male workers, whether he will provide similar information for *(a)* public sector manual workers, *(b)* public sector non-manual workers, *(c)* manufacturing non-manual workers and *(d)* other private sector non-manual workers.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information is provided in the following table. Figures for item *(d)* are not readily available and would involve disproportionate cost to compile. The "public sector" and "manufacturing" are not mutually exclusive groupings and are thus not directly comparable.

Percentage increase in weekly and hourly earnings of full-time adult male employees[1]

per cent.

	Manual		*Non-manual*			
	Public sector		*Public sector*		*Manufacturing*	
April of each year	*Weekly earnings*	*Hourly earnings*	*Weekly earnings*	*Hourly earnings*	*Weekly earnings*	*Hourly earnings*
1980[2]	23·2	26·1	27·2	27·4	23·0	23·3
1981[2]	11·0	13·2	17·5	16·9	11·7	13·7
1982[2]	9·4	9·4	8·6	10·2	12·1	11·2
1983[3]	6·8	8·9	7·8	8·3	8·2	8·4
1984	5·9	5·4	6·7	6·3	10·7	10·4
1985	5·1	4·8	5·6	5·4	8·7	8·2
1986	7·3	6·9	8·0	8·0	10·2	10·1
1987	4·5	4·6	6·7	6·3	7·0	6·7
1988	8·5	7·8	9·2	9·3	9·8	8·9
1989	4·9	4·7	8·3	8·7	10·3	10·3

[1] Average gross weekly and hourly earnings, not affected by absence for those on adult rates; manufacturing as defined in the 1980 SIC (but see notes [2] and [3].

[2] *Males aged 21 and over on all rates; 1968 SIC definition of manufacturing.*

[3] *Males aged 21 and over on all rates; 1980 SIC definition of manufacturing.*

Disabled Young People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will make a statement on the Government's plans for ensuring that young people with disabilities are not placed in unsuitable employment or training once the protection of section 119a of the Factories Act 1961 has been removed;

(2) when he will bring into effect, by commencement order, the repeal of the requirement under section 119a of the Factories Act 1961 to notify the careers service when employing a young person.

Mr. Nicholls: Following publication of a consultation paper a working group has been set up to consider responses and propose new arrangements to ensure that all young people with disabilities, including those not covered by the Factories Act, are not placed in unsuitable employment or training. The commencement order to repeal the requirement under section 119a of the Factories Act 1961 to notify the careers service when employing a young person will be brought in when alternative arrangements have been made.

Mines and Quarries

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions, improvement notices, or prohibition notices relating to the control of noise at work in the years 1981 to 1989 have been initiated by the mines and quarries inspectorate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the honourable member to the answers given to him on 26 October 1989 *(Official Report columns 597 to 599)*.

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what expenditure levels were reached in the application of the sheltered placement scheme for each year since the scheme started; what is the budget for 1990-91 and what change, in cash, real and percentage terms it reflects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available in the form requested. Claims for expenditure are made for the combined expenditure on workshops and sheltered placements. This expenditure, together with an estimate for the current year, is shown in the table. These figures do not include the grants and loans to Remploy Ltd. I will write to the hon. Member when the budget for 1990-91 has been settled.

Year	*Cash prices (£000s)*
1985-86	21,488
1986-87	24,679
1987-88	27,670
1988-89	29,599
[1]1989-90	35,451

[1] Estimate.

Tourism

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount of his Department's investment in tourism over each of the past 10 years by year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Responsibility for tourism matters in England and Great Britain as a whole passed from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the Secretary of State for Employment in 1985. The totals of the grant-in-aid paid to the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourist Board over the period were as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	23·1
1980-81	25·7
1981-82	28·9
1982-83	33·1
1983-84	31·9
1984-85	34·9
1985-86	33·8
1986-87	40·2
1987-88	45·3
1988-89	49·5

Job Interview Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many agreements have been made with employers to operate the job interview guarantee scheme in each of the 20 pilot areas; how many unemployed

people have taken part in the scheme in each area; and, of these, how many secured full-time employment with their sponsoring employer.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 10 January 1990 [*Official Report*, column *675-76*.].

Local Offices

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobcentres and how many unemployment benefit offices are earmarked for closure under his plan to transfer the employment service to agency status; how many jobs are likely to be lost and at what grades; and what targets the new agency will be required to achieve.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) on 1 December 1989 (*Official Report*, columns 461-62). It is the intention that the employment service (ES) should be launched as an executive agency in April 1990, and will establish a new network of offices, bringing together the full range of employment service activities under one roof wherever possible.

Plans are being developed for this new network and when decisions have been taken the local Member of Parliament will be informed.

Targets for the employment service in 1990-91 have not yet been finalised and will be published later.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that the new and remodelled employment service offices will be fully accessible to people with disabilities, following the launch of the employment service as an executive agency in April.

Mr. Nicholls: The employment service continually reviews its obligations under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 which requires buildings to which the public are admitted to be provided with facilities that meet the needs of disabled members of the public.

All new and remodelled employment service offices will be planned to a nationally agreed framework and standards. The design guide will include a section specifically on the requirements of people with disabilities. This will be based on the provisions for people with disabilities already in operation throughout the employment service and will carry forward the recommendations of a recent working group report on employment service local office design. These included:

- single reception point for all visitors that is fully accessible to people with disabilities;
- signs to be easily visible to all (eg. people in wheelchairs);
- hearing loops to be considered where necessary with the signs for these facilities prominently displayed;
- the need to provide appropriate seating for people with disabilities is also to be considered.

Trials at three pilot employment service offices include new vacancy display boards designed to be more accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Jobstart

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have participated in the 50-plus jobstart scheme in each of the pilot areas; what was the average hourly pay earned by participants, excluding their £20 a week allowance; what was the average amount of hours worked per week by participants; and how many participants remained in employment after the allowance had ceased.

Mr. Eggar: Between the start of the 50-plus jobstart pilots on 26 June 1989 and 12 January 1990 a total of 63 people were accepted on to the programme.

The breakdown of the number of people on the programme and their average hours and wages by area is as follows:

Area	*Participants*	*Average hourly wage* £	*Average hours*
Dudley and Sandwell	15	2·18	19·7
Leeds	27	2·20	18·7
London South	1	2·00	20·0
Lothian and Borders	20	2·30	16·2

Fifty one people are still in receipt of the allowance. It is not possible to provide information on whether those who have left the programme are in employment.

Action Credit Scheme

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employement how many people have taken part in the action credit scheme in each of the three pilot areas; how many ceased claiming income support to start full-time work; how many ceased claiming income support to start part-time work; how many failed to secure employment after the three-month job search period; and whether he has any plans to extend the scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 12 January 1990, (*Official Report*, column *786*).

Fraud Staff

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employement what is the annual amount of expenses paid to his Department's fraud staff; and if he will break down the figure into payments for car allowance, overnight accommodation and other categories.

Mr. Eggar: In the year April 1988 to March 1989 the total amount of expenses paid to 1,300 fraud staff, which includes investigators and administrative support staff, from this Department was £2,202,428.

This payment consisted of:

	£
Overnight accommodation and car allowances	1,867,307
Overtime and travelling time	53,402
Equipment (cameras, computers, furniture etc.)	281,719

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what surveillance equipment is used by his Department's fraud staff; and in which areas such equipment is held.

Mr. Eggar: The surveillance equipment used by my Department's fraud investigators is as follows:

- Binoculars
- Cameras
- Radios
- Video Cameras

This Department does not collate centrally information on the surveillance equipment held by areas.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the most recent figures for the number of firms *(a)* satisfying quota obligations under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, *(b)* issued with quota exemption permits and *(c)* not meeting their quota obligations and without quota exemption permits.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* On 1 June 1989, the latest date for which information is available, the number of firms *(a)* satisfying quota obligations under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 was 7,276, *(b)* issued with quota permits was 18,530 and *(c)* not meeting their quota obligations and without permits was 6,170.

Wage Increases

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the effect on employment of double-digit wage increases in the financial sector; and what is the basis of this estimate.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have been asked to reply.

I do not have an estimate of the effect of high wage increases in the financial sector on its own, but excessive wage increases in any sector of the economy will be harmful to jobs.

HEALTH

Hospitals, Trent

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the last 12 months by hospital within the Trent regional health authority *(a)* hospitals that have been on red alert and *(b)* the duration of the alert.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the Trent regional health authority for the information he seeks.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the Trent regional health authority, the number of hospitals *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each year since 1980.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may like to write to the chairman of Trent regional health authority for the information he seeks.

Hamlets Way Residential Unit

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the Hamlets Way residential unit, at 199 Hamlets way, London E.3, has been designated part III accommodation by his Department; and how many such hostels have been so designated.

Mr. Freeman: The designation of residential establishments managed by local authorities is a matter for the authority concerned and information is not collected centrally. I understand that the Tower Hamlets Way hostel is treated as a local authority-managed residential care home for income support purposes but this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. The Department of Health advised local authorities of the changes in the arrangements for paying income support to people in hostels in LAC(89)13 issued in September 1989. A copy of this circular is in the Library.

Ambulance Dispute

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement on the dispute involving ambulance crews.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Duncan Nichol, the NHS chief executive, has written to the trade unions confirming that he would be willing to hold further talks when there is some indication of a significant change in their position.

Elderly and Handicapped People

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his intention to bring forward proposals to amend the existing legal responsibilities of local authorities towards vulnerable elderly or handicapped people.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no plans to amend the existing legal responsibilities of local authorities towards these groups other than those announced in the White Paper "Caring for People" and set out in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

Self-governing Hospitals

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in respect of feasibility studies being carried out by hospitals considering self-governing status.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received a small number of representations on this subject. The Department of Health and health authorities are undertaking a wide range of projects designed to inform the implementation of the Government's proposals to improve the Health Service, including the setting up of National Health Service hospital trusts.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on studies on the morbidity rates of populations subjected to drinking water which has been chlorinated.

Mr. Freeman: Adequate disinfection by chlorination has had a marked effect in reducing morbidity rates from water-borne infectious diseases. However, this treatment leads to the production of chlorination by-products, some of which have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals when administered in large doses for long periods. Numerous studies of chlorinated water and disease rates, particularly cancer morbidity and mortality have been published, and the Department sought advice from its independent expert advisory committee on the medical aspects of the contamination of air, soil and water. It said:

"We have found no sound reason to conclude that the consumption of the by-products of chlorination in drinking water which has been treated and chlorinated according to current practices, increases the risk of cancer in humans.

The effective disinfection of water supplies is clearly of great importance in maintaining public health. In our opinion, modification of chlorination processes which have proved effective over many years, or the replacement of chlorination by other disinfectants, is not required by the available data on cancer epidemiology, animal carcinogenicity, and mutagenicity in relation to chlorination by-products in drinking water."

This advice was conveyed to water authorities and water companies in England and Wales in DoE/Welsh Office letter WP 12/1986, and republished in annex 1 of "Guidance on Safeguarding the Quality of Public Water Supplies" (HMSO, 1989). Relevant epidemiological and other research is kept under review.

Post-menopausal Women

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there are any National Health Service-funded studies to estimate the cost to the National Health Service of treating osteoporosis, heart attacks and strokes in post-menopausal women; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has recently commissioned an economic evaluation of hormone replacement therapy which will look at its costs and benefits in relation to osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease. We are also considering the funding of three further projects on osteoporosis and related problems. Comprehensive information about research funded by the National Health Service is not collected centrally.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce hospital waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's aim is to reduce the time patients have to wait for treatment, because this, rather than the number waiting at any moment, is a key measure of service in the NHS.

In 1986 the Government launched the waiting list initiative to tackle the problem of excessive waiting time. Health authorities and their clinical staff have introduced many improvements both in management—to ensure the most efficient use of resources—and in clinical practice —for example by the greater use of new techniques and day surgery.

The waiting list initiative has been backed by a waiting list fund. The Government have invested £119 million over four years in the waiting list fund to tackle particular problems of long waiting times. By April 1990 the fund will have enabled well over 300,000 additional inpatients and day cases and 200,000 additional outpatients to be treated. Many thousands more will be treated in 1990-91.

In early 1989 a management team, led by Mr. John Yates of Inter Authority Comparisons and Consultancy, went into the 22 districts with the longest waiting times in the country to find out why the lists there were so long and to suggest how they could be shortened. Part of the waiting list fund was earmarked to finance the team's recommendations, where additional resources, and extra treatments, proved necessary.

In the first six months of the team's work the number of patients waiting over a year in the 43 specialties studied reduced by 26 per cent., and further reductions are expected. The team will continue its work in 1990-91 when, backed up by £12 million of the £33 million fund for next year, it will be examining the 100 longest specialty waiting lists with most patients waiting over one year for treatment.

Amniocentesis Tests

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women received an amniocentesis test in the 15th, 16th and 17th weeks of pregnancy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to commission research on the rate of spontaneous abortion and the rate of miscarriage associated with the amniocentesis test;

(2) what figures he has on the number of premature births associated with the amniocentesis test.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A report by the Royal College of Physicians on pre-natal diagnosis and genetic screening published in September 1989 said that there is still some uncertainty about the exact risk to pregnancy from amniocentesis largely because the risk is so low and extremely difficulty to measure. The report noted that studies suggest a 1 per cent. excess risk of spontaneous abortion following amniocentesis and a slight increased incidence of mild respiratory problems in the newborn. The commissioning of further research would be a matter for the Medical Research Council which is responsible for biomedical research.

Miscarriages

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of miscarriages by the week of pregnancy in which they occurred from the 15th week to term.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Selective Reduction of Pregnancy

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State Health how many National Health Service hospitals and private clinics practise selective reduction of pregnancy; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We know of two hospitals where selective termination of pregnancy has recently been performed. The names of the hospitals are not released for reasons of maintaining confidentiality.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the practice of selective reduction of pregnancy; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Selective termination of pregnancy should be performed only if the requirements of the Abortion Act 1967 are fulfilled.

Conductive Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further steps he is taking to encourage conductive education.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Disabled gave my

hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) on 15 December at columns *848-49*. The Department is playing an active role in discussions with the Hungarian Government and in the other measures needed to bring conductive edcuation to this country, including support for the Foundation for Conductive Education, Birmingham.

Abortion

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the laws on abortion in each western European country; and if he will give details of the gestational periods equivalent to British gestational calculations during which abortion is permitted in each of those countries with the specific permitted grounds for abortion within each of these periods.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 11 January at column *716*. The survey referred to also covers the law and practice on abortion. I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested as soon as the report is ready.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health upon what date he expects to be able to publish the results of the recent study into post abortion stress disorder.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In view of the large amount of data to be analysed the contract for the joint Royal College of General Practitioners/Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists study "Attitudes to Pregnancy" was recently extended to 31 December 1990. The final report is expected to be submitted to the Department shortly after that date.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any application for a product licence has yet been received in connection with the abortifacient drug RU486.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is not usual practice to disclose information about whether or not an application for a product licence has been received or the progress of any such application for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Trust Funds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to be able to write to the hon. Member for Don Valley as promised in his answer of 16 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *421-22*, relating to trust funds.

Mr. Freeman: I have written to the hon. Member today.

AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out in the *Official Report* the terms in which his Chief Medical Officer stated recently that the outcome for HIV carriers is likely to be the same irrespective of cause; and what consideration he has given to its relevance to the claim for financial help for people who acquired the virus from blood transfusions equal to that given to people with haemophilia who contracted the virus after the injection of contaminated blood products under the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is no known difference in the proportion of people developing AIDS at any given time interval following infection when comparing the different routes of transmission of sexual intercourse, and receipt of infected blood or blood products. This issue has been explored in a number of scientific articles including the Journal of the American Medical Association (3 February 1989, pp 725-727) and AIDS 1988, 2 (supplement 1, S57-63). Apparent differences may be due to the effect of age on the rate of progression to AIDS. The ex-gratia payments given to provide help for haemophiliacs with HIV and their families recognised their wholly exceptional circumstances. Haemophiliacs were already suffering from a disability which affected their employment prospects, insurance and mortgage status. Also the hereditary nature of haemophilia means that more than one member of the family may be infected with HIV.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will be replying to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, of 23 December 1989, on people who have acquired AIDS from blood transfusions under the National Health Service.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend has now written to the right hon. Member.

Population Statistics

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what projections he has of the total numbers and percentage of the United Kingdom population who will be *(a)* over 60 years old and *(b)* over 75 years old in the years 2000, 2010 and 2020; and what is the total number and percentage of the United Kingdom population who are currently 50 years of age or older.

Mr. Freeman: The most recent (1988-based) projections of the Government Actuary are as follows:

Thousands

Year	Aged 60 and over		Aged 75 and over	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1990	11,884	20·7	3,985	6·9
2000	12,017	20·3	4,369	7·4
2010	13,214	22·1	4,461	7·4
2020	14,400	23·7	4,730	7·8

At mid-1988 the United Kingdom population aged 50 or older was estimated to be 17,878,000 or 31·3 per cent.

Lead

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will outline current research into the long-term effects of the ingestion of small amounts of lead on children in respect of neurological damage; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what studies are being made of the permanency of effects of the ingestion of small amounts of lead on children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is aware of recent research, published in the United States, which attributes

neurobehavioural deficits in teenagers to their markedly elevated exposure to lead during childhood. The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom. The MRC receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science. It is not currently funding any research into the long-term effects of the ingestion of small amounts of lead on children in respect of neurological damage. However, the council continues to keep this area under review. It is always willing to look at any sound proposals for research. Other research may be in hand elsewhere, but will not be known of until it is published.

Research on the neuropsychological effects of lead in children was reviewed by the Medical Research Council advisory group which reported in June 1988. The group's conclusions were:

"The Group's earlier report in 1983 suggested that any effects of lead at the exposure levels seen in the United Kingdom are very small and cannot be detected with any certainty. This conclusion is still largely applicable, but the evidence for an association between body lead burden and IQ is now stronger.

While observed statistical associations detailed in this review are consistent with the hypothesis that low level lead exposure has a small negative effect on the performance of children in ability and attainment tests, the limitations of epidemiological studies in drawing causal inferences are such that it is not possible to conclude that exposure to lead at current urban levels is definitely harmful. In view of these conclusions, it would be prudent to continue to reduce the environmental lead to which children are exposed."

Since 1974 it has been the policy of successive Governments to contain and reduce exposure to lead wherever practicable. Successful measures have been taken to reduce lead exposure through petrol, water, air, food, industrial emissions, paint, cosmetics, ceramic glazes and toys. Monitoring programmes have shown a continuing fall in blood lead levels in children and adults.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there are any proposals for regulatory action in respect of the ingestion of small amounts of lead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There are currently no such proposals. Regulations already in force limit the levels of lead found in the environment, foodstuffs and consumer products. The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 set a statutory maximum allowable concentration of 50 microgrammes of lead per litre of drinking water. The Lead in Food Regulations provide a maximum permitted general limit of lead content of food of 1·0 milligrammes per kilogramme of food, with individual limits on specified foods.

The Pencils and Graphic Instruments (Safety) Regulations 1974 limit the amount of lead in paint and in the lead or colouring materials of pencils or crayons, although under the terms of a voluntary agreement, the industry has already phased out lead in domestic paints. The Glazed Ceramic Ware (Safety) Regulations 1988 specify leaching limits of heavy metals from crockery, and similar regulations apply to cooking utensils. The lead content of toys is limited under the Toy (Safety) Regulations of 1974 and 1989.

There are also programmes to reduce lead levels in the atmosphere, and to reduce or eliminate lead exposure through industrial emissions, cosmetics and petrol.

Defibrillators

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of defibrillators provided for ambulances out of health authority funds.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally.

Hospice Funding

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will be in a position to give the amounts of Government funding to St. Ann's hospices at Heald green, Cheshire, and Little Hulton, Greater Manchester.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We shall shortly be notifying health authorities of the allocations they will receive from the additional £8 million we have made available for 1990-91 to enable them to increase the contributions they already make to voluntary hospices and similar organisations. The funding of individual projects is a matter for discussions between the authorities and the organisations concerned.

Welfare Milk Scheme

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to monitor negotiations between the constituent parts of the milk industry with respect to the apportionment between them of costs incurred as a result of current proposals for the welfare milk scheme discount; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Regulations introducing a revised reimbursement price structure for the supply of liquid welfare milk reflect the size and value of the purchase. The regulations assist the milk industry voluntarily to use its well-established price negotiating procedures to share the costs equitably throughout all sectors of the trade. It would not be appropriate to monitor these commercial transactions centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *572*, if he will make a statement on the nature and scope of his new research programme into the vertical transmissibility of BSE.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 18 December 1989, *Official Report*, Col. *30*. This is a long-term research project and I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what compensation is paid in respect of cattle first identified as bovine spongiform encephalopathy sufferers in markets and abbatoirs; to whom such compensation is paid; and on how many occasions during each of the last four years such compensation has been paid.

Mr. Maclean: Compensation is paid in all cases to the owners of cattle slaughtered at the Ministry's behest in accordance with statutory requirements. Details of

individual payments are not held centrally. Animals which have been moved for slaughter from a farm before BSE is suspected are valued as barren animals and no allowance is made for any loss of condition due to BSE or other cause. Such valuation is usually lower than if the same animal had been valued as a BSE suspect on the farm.

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any evidence of cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy occurring in animals too young to have been exposed to infected feed.

Mr. Gummer: No. I am not aware of a single case of BSE in an animal too young to have been exposed to feed containing ruminant protein material. Cases can be expected to occur for several years to come; this is not because the infection is spreading or because of a new source of infection, but because of the long period that can elapse before the symptoms emerge.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is carrying out tests on offal from cattle thought to be free of bovine spongiform encephalopathy to establish whether the bovine spongiform encephalopathy agent is present in the tissue; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Such tests would not be expected to yield a positive result in more than a tiny number of cases. It is a much better approach to ensure that the offal which might carry the BSE agent in apparently healthy animals do not enter the human food chain at all.

Beef

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take in the light of the United States Government's ban on the consumption of British beef by United States forces stationed in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There is no ban. Legislation has been passed in the United States which would introduce subsidies on American meat supplied to United States bases in the Community. As a result those bases could be exclusively supplied with American meat. The European Commission has taken up this matter with the United States authorities.

North Sea

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the letter sent to him by Norway on behalf of the three Nordic signatories calling for an urgent meeting of the scientific and technical working committee on prior justification procedures, following his announcement of three licences for dumping in the North sea.

Mr. Gummer: I have not yet received such a letter, but will place a copy in the Library should I do so.

Knacker Industry

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department intends to support an amendment to the proposed regulation by the European Commission that bans the uplifting of dead stock from farms by licensed knackermen, which would allow the United Kingdom to have the authority to determine its own means of disposal of dead and casualty animals and to continue with the existing national sterilising arrangements.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on 17 January 1990, *Official Report*, 17 January, column *292*.

Coastal Protection Schemes

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the criteria governing approval of applications by local authorities of coastal protection schemes, and the scales of financial grant available; what changes have been made since 1983 in these criteria and whether further changes are envisaged; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The criteria for approval of a proposed coastal protection scheme are that the work will be technically appropriate, cost-effective and environmentally sympathetic, and that any objections to the proposed scheme have been either withdrawn or resolved.

Grant is available at up to 70 per cent. of the costs of individual coastal protection schemes; until October 1987 the maximum grant rate was 79 per cent. Criteria for approval are unchanged since 1983.

No further changes are envisaged other than minor adjustments arising as a consequence of the new local government finance arrangements.

Waste Dumping

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *748*, whether he will suspend the licences granted to Fisons, Sterling Organics and Orsynthetics pending a reassessment of the basis of the objections raised by the Government of Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, West Germany and Norway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am determined that the disposal of industrial waste at sea shall be terminated. More than half the licences in force in 1987 have already been withdrawn.

International agreements provide for a continuation of sea disposal of our wastes until acceptable means of land disposal are available. Indeed, to replace sea disposal by the use of environmentally unacceptable means of land disposal would break the terms of the North sea declaration.

Information recently received by the Ministry indicates that an acceptable means of disposal other than sea dumping is now available for the Fisons waste. The company has therefore been advised that its licence will not be renewed when it expires in February.

I do not propose to suspend the remaining licences. Either production would have to stop or an environmentally unacceptable means of land disposal used. Cessation of production would not only hit employment, it would damage the interests of those many people who need drugs such as paracetemol.

Food Safety

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer of 11 January to the hon. Member for South Shields, *Official Report*, column *738*, concerning the Food Safety Bill, if he will list the individual local authorities with which discussions were held with officials from his Ministry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Pursuant to my reply to the hon. Member for South Shields of 11 January (*Official Report*, column *738*), there were no discussions held between officials and individual local authorities on the resource implications of the Food Safety Bill. The individual officers of local authorities who were present at meetings were representing one or other of the organisations listed in my reply, not their employers.

Illegal Fishing

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning alleged illegal fishing by Spanish trawlers following publication of a letter on this subject in *Fishing News*, 27 October 1989; and if he will draw the European Community Commissioner's attention to these allegations.

Mr. Curry: I have received no representations about illegal fishing by Spanish trawlers following publication of the letter in the *Fishing News* of 27 October 1989. Enforcement of Community legislation is for the member state concerned. But if I receive information about alleged illegal activities by other fishermen, I will of course pass this on to the EC Commission.

Wheat

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current average prices per tonne for (i) milling wheat and (ii) feed wheat prices in *(a)* France, Denmark and Holland, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* Spain and *(d)* the United Kingdom; and what steps are being taken to ensure that efficient British cereal growers obtain similar prices to their Continental counterparts.

Mr. Curry: The national average of market prices provided by the Commission of the European Communities for the week ending Saturday 6 January 1990, converted to £ sterling using spot rate values for 5 January, are set out in the table:

	Breadmaking Wheat		*Feedwheat*	
Country	*National currency per tonne*	*£ per tonne*	*National currency per tonne*	*£ per tonne*
France	1,275	135	1,296	137
Denmark	1,437	134	n/a	n/a
Netherlands	434	139	434	139
Germany	392	142	384	139
Spain	26,170	146	n/a	n/a
United Kingdom	121	121	118	118

I am considering the Commission's proposals for the 1990 price review, which include provision for devaluation of the green pound.

Soft Fruit

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what effect he estimates the import of soft fruits in bulk will have on the Scottish and United Kingdom soft fruit industries.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom food industry has for a number of years drawn on both home and imported sources for its supplies of semi-processed soft fruit. I am confident that growers of soft fruit both north and south of the border can face fair competition. In this context my noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, and I met growers' representatives on 16 January and agreed with them the steps to be taken to ensure that the EC Commission implements its recent commitment given within the framework of the extension of the generalised system of preference to Poland and Hungary. The Commission undertook to ensure that the prices agreed annually with our suppliers in eastern Europe are respected by those suppliers in their trade with the Community.

Rabies

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals have been kept in quarantine for rabies in each of the last five years; and how many have developed the disease.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available in the form requested. The number of import licences issued during the past five years was:

	Number
1985	7,628
1986	7,547
1987	8,829
1988	9,091
1989	10,010

No animals developed rabies in quarantine in this period.

End-of-Lay Hens

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he takes to ensure the humane handling of end-of-lay hens being removed from battery cages; if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My Department is currently spending £0·8 million each year in research related to the development of more humane handling systems, including studies on broken bones. Additional work is being planned in this subject. We have proposed amendments to the Battery Hens Regulations 1987 and enouraged the industry in the production of its guide to handling end-of-lay hens which has now been sent to producers. Systems for keeping egg-laying hens are similar within Europe and we have therefore asked the Commission to ensure that the problem is tackled in the review of the battery hens directive.

SCOTLAND

Cochlear Implants

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many cochlear implants were carried out in Scotland in the last year or for the latest period for which figures are available; and how many centres provided by the National Health Service in Scotland are offering cochlear implants for the profoundly deaf apart from the unit at Ayr county hospital;

(2) if he will consult voluntary organisations representing the profoundly deaf about the cochlear implant programme and its availability in Scotland;

(3) what information he has about the number of patients presently on waiting lists for a cochlear implant; and how many people there are in Scotland who might benefit from such treatment;

(4) what representations he has had from the Ayrshire and Arran health board about the funding of a centre for cochlear implants;

(5) what sums he has made available for a cochlear implant programme for 1990-91 and the two succeeding years; whether he has any plans to ask health boards in Scotland to submit bids for funding to develop a cochlear implant programme locally; and if he will make a statement;

(6) whether his Department will be represented at the seminar arranged in March by the Department of Health to discuss the development and provision of cochlear implants.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend the Minister for Health in Scotland announced on 11 January that funding would be made available for a cochlear implant programme in Scotland. Decisions as to the level of funding and location of the programme are currently being considered. I would be glad to have the benefit of any views which voluntary organisations representing the profoundly deaf may wish to offer.

To date four cochlear implants have been carried out in Scotland, all at Crosshouse hospital, Kilmarnock, the first one in March 1989. A request for funding of a centre there was received from Ayrshire and Arran health board earlier this week. No other centre in Scotland offers a service, as far as I am aware. Information is not centrally available on the numbers on the waiting list for an implant, nor on the numbers who might benefit.

My Department will be represented at the seminar being held in March by the Department of Health to discuss cochlear implants.

Agriculture Development Programme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applicants there have been for the agriculture development programme; and how many applications have been refused.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At 12 January 1990, 2,750 applications had been approved. About 100 applications are still under consideration and more may be submitted before the closing date for applications of 28 February 1990. One hundred and sixty-five applications have been refused or were withdrawn prior to approval. A number of the applications which were refused or withdrawn because they failed to meet ADP criteria—mainly the requirement that breeding stock numbers should not increase during the period of the plan—were revised by the applicants, resubmitted and subsequently approved.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total budget of the agriculture development programme; and how much he envisages being taken up.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The ADP submission to the European Commission envisaged public expenditure on the programme of about £38 million. It is not possible to indicate the precise level of expenditure over the programme period to March 1993 since the programme is still open for applications and eventual grant payments do not necessarily match exactly the level of expenditure envisaged when applications are approved.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individual schemes are now operational under the agriculture development programme; how many have subsequently had their total grant allocation cut by his Department; and if he will detail this by geographical area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total number of applications approved at 12 January 1990 is 2,750. This is broken down by type of measure and island group in the table:

	Farm Development Scheme	*Livestock Development Scheme*	*Fish Farming*	*Infrastructure*	*Crofter Housing*	*Total*
Shetland	189	274	3	6	9	481
Orkney	520	496	5	2	2	1,025
Argyll and Inverness	236	263	3	4	—	506
Skye	170	337	10	2	1	520
Clyde Islands	127	89	2	—	—	218
	1,242	1,459	23	14	12	2,750

Grant is normally paid on approved cost or actual cost, whichever is the lower, provided that the Department is satisfied after inspection that the cost incurred is not excessive in relation to the works actually undertaken. Details of claims which have had to be restricted are not held centrally.

Croft Houses

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland grants were made for croft houses by year over the past 10 years; what was the expenditure in total; and what was the average grant on individual croft houses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table:

	Number of grants made[1]			Expenditure[2]		
	New house	Improved house	Total	New house £	Improved house £	Total £
1979	148	47	195	[4]590,000	[5]25,000	615,000
1980	192	63	255	698,000	35,000	733,000
1981	147	54	201	558,000	28,000	586,000
1982	133	43	176	522,000	24,000	546,000
1983	77	36	113	314,000	20,000	334,000
1984	132	67	199	665,000	58,000	723,000
1985	143	66	209	836,000	82,000	918,000
1986	113	53	166	709,000	45,000	754,000
1987	119	59	178	882,000	81,000	963,000
1988	95	113	208	—	—	[3]3,316,000

[1] Number of grants made for new houses or improvements completed.
[2] Actual expenditure in year.
[3] No split available for grant only. Total includes loans for houses.
[4] The maximum grant available for new houses was £4,000 from 1979, £6,500 from 1982 and £8,700 from 1986
[5] The maximum grant available for house improvements was £750 from 1979 and £1,500 from 1986.

In general new house construction attracted the maximum grant. The average grant for house improvement was £700.

Fish Farms

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many referrals there have been to his consultative committee on fish farm applications; and how many applications have been refused.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no referrals made to the advisory committee to date. Representatives from the relevant statutory bodies have been invited to serve on the committee. The necessary arrangements for referral of applications for a sea bed licence where a statutory consultee maintains its objection are now operational.

Tourism

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list his Department's total expenditure on tourism in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Lang: The information is as follows:

Financial year	Expenditure £ million (Cash)
1979-80	7·9
1980-81	9·8
1981-82	11·2
1982-83	12·9
1983-84	16·7
1984-85	18·5
1985-86	18·0
1986-87	21·5
1987-88	17·3
1988-89	18·7

Notes:

1. The figures are in respect of expenditure on the promotion of tourism by the Scottish Tourist Board, the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Scottish Development Agency.

2. The figures include expenditure by the Scottish Development Agency for the period 1984-85 to 1988-89 covering loan and equity finance for tourism projects which meet its normal investment criteria and tourist projects under schemes for urban and rural development. Expenditure details for earlier years are not readily available. In addition, a number of feasibility studies, land engineering and property development projects funded by the agency may have tourism benefits.

3. Provision by the Highlands and Islands Development Board is through its marketing and projects programmes and under its section 8 assistance scheme; the figures do not include salary and administration costs incurred by the board.

4. Total expenditure by the Scottish Tourist Board is provided, including salary and administration costs, in performing its statutory functions of promoting Scotland as a tourist destination, both within the United Kingdom and overseas, and encouraging investment in tourism infrastructure.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has received the Scottish tourist board's review of training within the industry; and whether he plans to publish the findings.

Mr. Lang: The review was commissioned by the Scottish tourism co-ordinating group which will consider arrangements for publicising its findings at its meeting on 19 January.

Rural Enterprise Programme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the areas of the Highlands and Islands which will be eligible for the rural enterprise programme; what are the funding arrangements underpinning the programme; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The whole of the Highlands and Islands Development Board area is eligible for support under the rural enterprise programme. The intention is to target assistance on the areas in greatest need and to concentrate action on a limited number of localities at any one time to ensure that the resources available are applied to best effect.

Subject to the European Commission making a contribution as part of its funding of the rural development programme for the Highlands and Islands, the Government have agreed in principle to provide £8·5 million over the period 1990-91 to 1992-93. Funding in the years beyond 1992-93 will be decided in the annual public expenditure negotiations.

The programme is intended to boost the rural economy by helping farmers and crofters in the selected areas embark on new economic ventures in addition to their

traditional activities. Final details have still to be settled, including the selection of areas in which the programme will operate initially.

Crofting Estates

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has made any decision on the future of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland's crofting estates; and what representations he has received on the issue.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The future of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland's crofting estates is currently under review. My noble Friend the Minister of State has had some discussions with the Crofters Commission and with the Scottish Crofters Union but as yet no proposals for change have been put forward and none will be undertaken before full consultation has taken place with all interested bodies.

Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the Government's contribution to the Highlands and Islands Development Board, *(b)* the Highlands and Islands Development Board's income from other sources and *(c)* the Highlands and Islands Development Board's total expenditure for every year from 1979-80 to 1988-89 in cash terms and at constant 1988-89 prices.

Mr. Rifkind: The information is as follows:

Highlands and Islands Development Board
Expenditure 1979-80 to 1988-89
(£ million at cash and 1988-89 prices)

	Grant-in-Aid		Receipts		Total expenditure	
Year	Cash	1988-89 prices	Cash	1988-89 prices	Cash	1988-89 prices
1979-80	17·4	32·7	4·0	7·5	21·4	40·2
1980-81	20·0	31·7	3·7	5·9	23·7	37·6
1981-82	22·9	33·1	4·4	6·3	27·3	39·4
1982-83	27·5	37·1	5·2	7·0	32·7	44·1
1983-84	31·3	40·4	6·8	8·8	38·1	49·2
1984-85	34·6	42·5	7·5	9·2	42·1	51·7
1985-86	30·4	35·4	9·3	10·7	39·7	46·1
1986-87	26·3	29·8	9·2	10·3	35·4	40·1
1987-88	26·2	28·1	11·7	12·5	37·9	40·6
1988-89	31·5	31·5	10·5	10·5	42·0	42·0

Regional Aid

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing expenditure on regional preferential assistance to industry in Scotland for each year from 1976-77 to 1988-89 at constant 1988-89 prices.

Mr. Rifkind: The information requested is given in the table:

Gross expenditure on regional preferential assistance at constant 1988-89 prices

	£ million
1976-77	592·5
1977-78	365·2
1978-79	349·4
1979-80	269·9
1980-81	314·9
1981-82	339·9
1982-83	499·2
1983-84	295·3
1984-85	230·3
1985-86	229·9
1986-87	273·9
1987-88	164·4
1988-89	151·2

Note: Includes gross expenditure in Scotland on regional selective assistance, regional development grants, regional enterprise grants, Scottish Development Agency expenditure on land and factory building in assisted areas and Highlands and Islands Development Board expenditure on grants and land and factory building. The figures also include a number of forms of assistance in the years up to 1982 which have been discontinued.

Training

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were on *(a)* employment training schemes and *(b)* YTS schemes in Scotland at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Rifkind: On 12 January 1990 there were 25,623 participants in employment training and at the end of December there were 46,074 young people on YTS in Scotland.

Rural Legal Partnerships

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research has been undertaken to assess the impact of the changes proposed in the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill on the viability of legal partnerships in rural areas.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* No such research has been commissioned, but two research projects funded by my Department have some relevance. One, which is nearing completion, has examined factors influencing the market for conveyancing services in Scotland with particular emphasis on advertising and fee charging practices. The sample used in the survey was drawn up using the Department of Employment's travel-to-work areas to represent three types of market, namely cities, medium-sized towns, and rural areas plus small towns. The second project, due to start soon, will compare fees charged for conveyancing before and after the abolition of scale fees in 1985. A similar sampling method will be used.

DEFENCE

Death and Injury Compensation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state *(a)* the total deaths and *(b)* the total injuries in the armed services in (i) 1988 and (ii) 1989; how many of the service men or their next of kin will receive no Ministry of Defence compensation; what is the average compensation his Department will pay per person in relation to (1) death and (2) injury; whether he will make it his policy to arrange for a comprehensive personal insurance cover scheme for all service men and women; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The figures for deaths and medical discharge as the result of injury for United Kingdom regular forces in 1988 and 1989 are as follows:

(a) Deaths

	Number
1988	316
1989	[1]336

[1] Provisional.

(b) Medical discharge as the result of injury

	Number
1988	244
1989	[1]

[1] Not yet available.

Financial provision in respect of those who die in service, or who are medically discharged as the result of injury, is made under the terms of the armed forces pension scheme. Benefits payable can comprise pensions and/or lump sums, including those payable to eligible dependants in the event of death. The amounts depend upon the circumstances of each case. Relevant factors can include rank, length of service, whether death or injury is attributable to service and, where appropriate, degree of disability. It is not therefore possible to provide an average figure for the total amount which may be paid per person. A benefit will be payable in all cases except where medical discharge is due to causes that are not attributable to service and less than two years' reckonable service has been given.

Where death or medical discharge is attributable to service provision is also made under the terms of the war pensions scheme administered by the Department of Social Security.

I believe these arrangements to be satisfactory.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hardened aircraft shelters have been, or are due to be, constructed at RAF Finningley; and what is their purpose.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no hardened aircraft shelters at RAF Finningley, nor do we plan to construct any.

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete his review of the arrangements in Gibraltar for logistics for the garrison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A review of the logistic support arrangements for all the armed forces in Gibraltar was completed in November 1989 and it is expected that many of the principal recommendations arising from the review will be implemented by October 1990, when the new joint forces headquarters comes into being.

Works Organisation

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what purpose his Department is setting up a works organisation; and what will be the total salary bill.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On 25 May 1988 my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) announced the Government's decision that as from the 1 April this year the Ministry of Defence would be "untied" from the PSA. This means that the MOD will have new responsibilities both for managing funds and for deciding how to undertake our substantial works programme.

The MOD is setting up Defence Works Services at Sutton Coldfield to help in the discharge of these new tasks. It will not, however, directly manage works services. DWS will supply professional, technical and contractual expertise to Ministry of Defence departments and service commands which are the customers for works services so that the best procurement options for the supply of services are identified.

Under present plans, the total salary bill for DWS staff for the first full year of operation will be around £3 million at current prices rising to about £4·5 million during 1992-93 and thereafter.

Cavalry Officers

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement as to the benefits to service efficiency of cavalry officers in regiments which do not have a ceremonial role being encouraged to ride; what benefits accrue from riding that do not accrue from other adventure training activities; and what is the cost to public funds per hour of *(a)* riding and *(b)* other forms of training.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All Army personnel are encouraged to participate in a range of both sporting and adventurous training activities. Such activities are complementary to other forms of military training in enhancing and developing the personal qualities and soldierly skills required of Army personnel.

Some £1·25 million per annum is spent on the provision of adventurous training for the Army. Information regarding the cost of riding cannot be provided without disproportionate effort. It would not be practicable to calculate the cost per hour of adventurous training.

Trident

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent to date on production and development for the Trident programme by the United Kingdom Government, and what percentage of this has been spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in the United States of America and *(c)* elsewhere.

Mr. Alan Clark: Actual expenditure figures for the Trident programme as a whole are not available beyond September 1989. The total expenditure for the project up to this point is £2,730 million, of which some £370 million is for development and £2,360 million for production. Seventy-four per cent. of the expenditure has been incurred in the United Kingdom and 26 per cent. in the United States of America. There has been no readily identifiable expenditure elsewhere.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of costs already incurred to the United Kingdom Government, as a result of the decision to purchase the Trident D5 missile system, it has been agreed would be reimbursed by the United States Government, in the eventuality that development and production of the D5 missile system is cancelled by the United States Government.

Mr. Alan Clark: There is no agreement specifying the reimbursement to the United Kingdom of a particular percentage figure.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current Trident deployment schedule.

Mr. Alan Clark: As previously announced, it remains our intention to deploy Trident into operational service in the mid-1990s.

Dockyards

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those commercial dockyards that have benefited from repair and refit work following the changes in Her Majesty's dockyards.

Mr. Neubert: Following is a list of those firms which have won contracts valued at £10,000 or more for ship refit or ship repair work since the introduction of commercial management at Devonport and Rosyth Royal dockyards in April 1987. All the firms listed have won work from the unallocated programme, which is put out to competition on the open market, with tenders being invited from all suitable shiprepair contractors, including the Royal dockyards.

A & P Appledore (Aberdeen) Ltd.
A & P Appledore (Falmouth) Ltd.
A & P Appledore (Tyne) Ltd.
Ailsa Perth Shipbuilders Ltd.
Appledore Shipbuilders
Babcock Thorn Ltd.
Berthon Boats Ltd.
J. Bolson & Son Ltd.
Bristol Channel Ship Repairers.
British Dredging Ship Repairers Ltd.
Cairds Industrial Services plc.
Camper & Nicholsons
Clyde Dock Engineering Ltd.
Clyde Shipbuilding & Repairing (1987) Ltd.
Cockenzie Ship & Boatyard Ltd.
E. Cole & Sons (Cowes) Ltd.
Cosens & Co. Ltd.
Crissan Marine Ltd.
Devonport Management Ltd.
Emsworth Shipyard
Eyemouth Boat Building Co. Ltd.
Falmouth Shiprepair Ltd.
Forth Estuary Engineering Ltd.
Garvel Dry Dock Co. Ltd.
Globe Engineering (Hull) Ltd.
Hall Russell Ltd.
Halmatic Ltd.
Harland and Wolff plc.
Herd & MacKenzie Ltd.
N. Holman & Sons Ltd.
Holyhead Boatyard Ltd.
Humber Shiprepairers Ltd.
James Adam & Sons (Shiprepairers) Ltd.
James Miller and Sons
Mannings Marine Ltd
Marine & Port Services Ltd.
Mashford Brothers Ltd.
McGruers and Co. Ltd.
Midland Ship Repairers Ltd.
A. H. Moody and Son Ltd.
Odessa Shipyard Ltd.
Ramsgate Marine Ltd.
Richards Shipbuilders Ltd.
RTR Marine Ltd.
Smith Shiprepairers Ltd.
Seaforth Welding Co. Ltd.
Sharpness Shipyard Ltd.
Souter Shipyard Ltd.
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd.
Tees Dockyard Ltd.
Thew Engineering (Southampton) Ltd.
Timbacraft Ltd.
Tyne Dock Engineering
Tyne Shiprepairers Ltd.
Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Ltd., Portsmouth
Wear Dockyard Ltd.
Wright and Beyer Ltd.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish and tabulate the refit times for auxiliary vessels refitted in *(a)* Her Majesty's dockyards and *(b)* commercial shipyards for the last five years.

Mr. Neubert: It is our policy generally to place refit work for RFA and RMAS vessels by competitive tender and most is now undertaken by privately owned commercial shipyards. It is not our practice to publish raw data on timekeeping because refits are rarely comparable in terms of the condition of the vessels and the work undertaken.

Tritium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to assess the security of long-term supply of radioactive tritium for his nuclear warhead production programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Arrangements for the supply of tritium are kept under regular review to ensure that the requirements of defence nuclear programmes are fully met.

Disablement Pension

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to increasing the pre-1973 war disabled pension.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: War disablement pensions are paid under the war pensions scheme administered by the Department of Social Security. The rates payable do not differentiate between disabilities originating before, or after, 1973. Pensions may also be payable, under the provisions of the occupational scheme for members of the armed forces, to those who are eligible. The rules of eligibility and the basis for calculating the latter awards were changed with effect from 31 March 1973, but it has not been considered possible to extend those changes retrospectively to include those whose service ended before that date.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual cost of the provision of pensions for pre-1973 war disabled.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Figures of expenditure on pensions payable under the armed forces pension scheme to those with a disability attributed to service are not separately maintained.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the total annual cost of increasing pensions by £40 a week for pre-1973 war disabled.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The annual cost of making a payment of £40 per week to all those currently receiving a DSS war disablement pension would be approximately £400 million. Separate figures are not available for those whose service ended before 31 March 1973.

CHARM Tank Gun

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if progress on the CHARM tank gun programme is on schedule; and if Royal Ordnance will be able to meet the timescale of the Challenger 2 development programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: The CHARM gun programme is on schedule to meet the timescale of the Chieftain replacement programme as set out in my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 20 December 1988 (*Official Report*, Vol. 144, col. 283).

Ambulance Services

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the areas of the country in which military personnel have been providing ambulance services and the dates at which they became involved in each area.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 17 January, the areas where service personnel have been assisting the police and voluntary services in the provision of an accident and emergency service, together with the date that these services began, are as follows:

Location	*Since*
London	8 November 1989
Hertfordshire	17 November 1989
Bedfordshire	25 November 1989
Lincolnshire	25 November 1989
South Yorkshire	8 December 1989
West Midlands	15 December 1989
Dorset	18 December 1989
Hereford and Worcester	22 December 1989
Staffordshire	4 January 1990
Surrey	11 January 1990
Essex	11 January 1990
Oxfordshire	12 January 1990
Buckinghamshire	12 January 1990
West Sussex	12 January 1990
Warwickshire	12 January 1990
Berkshire	17 January 1990

Service ambulances also operated in Derbyshire between 24 November and 1 December.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to date of the forces' operation of the ambulance service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 9 January to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) (*Official Report*, col. *614*). Figures for the period ending 31 December 1989 have not yet been finalised.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of military personnel and vehicles currently involved in the provision of ambulance services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Nine hundred and sixty-eight service personnel and 181 service vehicles are involved directly in the provision of an accident and emergency service.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 January 1990

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rural Roads

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of Government plans for investment in the rural roads network of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is planned to invest some £109 million in developing, improving and maintaining the total road network of Northern Ireland in the 1990-91 financial year. An actual breakdown of this investment between urban and rural roads could be attained only at disproportionate cost to the Department.

Investment in the rural roads network will be made according to need, road safety considerations and the priorities established to make the best possible use of available resources.

Prisoners (Classification)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the differences in the manner in which prisoners with different classifications are treated by the prison authorities.

Mr. Cope: The classification of prisoners by age, length of sentence, temperament and record is taken into account in deciding the allocation of prisoners to prisons in Northern Ireland, and determines the amount of pre-release home leave for which they will be eligible to apply in the final stages of their sentence.

The security category allocated on committal reflects both a prisoner's escape potential and the risk he would pose to society and the security forces should he escape. Decisions on security categories are taken after a thorough examination of all the relevant information available. Reviews are conducted periodically during sentence and prisoners are often downgraded to a lower security category.

The security category is also taken into account in determining the prison to which a prisoner is allocated, and it determines the degree of supervision and control that is exercised. Those in the top risk category are held in single-cell accommodation which is searched at irregular intervals, and they are subject to a higher frequency of searching and cell transfer than other prisoners. They are also assigned individual prison officer escorts during movement within the prison, which is always on a one-to-one basis.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the systems used for classifying prisoners in Northern Ireland prisons; and how many prisoners there are within each classification.

Mr. Cope: The classification of prisoners in Northern Ireland is governed by the Prison Rules (NI) 1982 which provide that a prisoner may be classified having regard to his age, temperament and record. On committal all prisoners are in addition allocated a security category. Both a prisoner's classification and security category can be changed during his term of imprisonment.

The tables provide a breakdown of the population in Northern Ireland prisons as at 15 January 1990:

Classification	*Number*
Untried	342
Appellant	14
Adult indeterminate	386
Secretary of State's pleasure	26
Short term star	125
Short term ordinary	131
Long term star	367
Long term ordinary	173
Young person	164
	1,728

Security category	*Number*
Low risk	144
Medium risk	1,259
High risk	302
Top risk	23
	1,728

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is *(a)* the total number of red-book prisoners in Northern Ireland, and *(b)* the number of red-book prisoners who have served over 13 years in prison, and who were denied Christmas parole in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: There are currently 23 top risk (commonly known as "Red Book") prisoners in Northern Ireland,only 10 of whom are sentenced prisoners. Two such prisoners, who are serving life sentences, had spent 13 years in custody at 21 December 1989 but were excluded from applying for Christmas home leave. Home leave schemes are designed to assist prisoners to prepare for their eventual return to the community. Prisoners who are in the top risk category after 13 years in custody are not, in my view, making satisfactory progress and I am not, therefore, prepared to grant them this privilege.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many firearms, listed by the category under which they are identified by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, have been stolen in each Royal Ulster Constabulary division in each of the last five years from *(a)* civilians and *(b)* the security forces, or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* Information split into Royal Ulster Constabulary divisions is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Readily available information is as follows:

Firearms stolen in Northern Ireland 1984-89

Year	*Stolen from*	*Bullet firing*	*Shotguns*	*[1]Air weapons/ miscellaneous*
1985	Security forces	16	—	—
	Civilians	19	79	9
1986	Security forces	14	—	1

Year	Stolen from	Bullet firing	Shotguns	[1]Air weapons/ miscellaneous
	Civilians	13	96	20
1987	Security forces	189	—	4
	Civilians	34	91	13
1988	Security forces	14	—	—
	Civilians	16	54	13
1989	Security forces	19	—	—
	Civilians	17	42	4

[1] Miscellaneous includes: Blank firing weapons, muzzle loading weapons, antique weapons, tranquilliser guns and starting pistols.

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on out-of-court payments made to ex-residents of the Kincora boys' home.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The manner in which claims for compensation are finally settled is entirely a matter for agreement between the parties. Out-of-court settlements are, however, quite usual in civil actions and are to the advantage of all parties.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what compensation payments have been made to ex-residents of the Kincora boys' home; on what dates they were made; how many cases are still to be processed; and on what dates he expects further cases to be settled.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* To date, compensation payments have been made to five ex-residents, as follows: £5,000 on 31/3/88; £10,000 on 26/5/89; £7,500 on 26/5/89; £2,500 on 19/7/89; £6,000 on 10/8/89. Eight further claims remain to be processed, but it is not possible to give any indication of when they will be settled.

In my reply of 23 June 1989, *Official Report*, column *265*, I stated that one of the claims had been settled on 15 April 1988. This date was incorrect and should have been 23 March 1988. I regret this error. The claim settled on 23 March was paid on 31 March as indicated above.

Fire (RUC Complex, Carrickfergus)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any evidence gathered by the Stevens inquiry into allegations of collusion between members of the security forces and paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland was destroyed as a result of the fire in the office of the inquiry in the Royal Ulster Constabulary complex at Carrickfergus, County Antrim.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* I understand that it has not so far been possible to assess fully the damage and loss of documents following the fire at the Seapark complex on 10 January. However, as Mr. Stevens made clear in his press statement on 11 January, duplicate files of the investigation were kept at a separate location as a matter of routine and his investigation has not been disrupted.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average number of claimants of *(a)* income support, *(b)* unemployment benefit and *(c)* family credit, at each box in each of the district offices of the Department of Health and Social Services, in each month during 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However the most recent figures for the average numbers of unemployed claimants by box in each social security office in Northern Ireland are as follows:

Numbers of unemployed at 14 December 1989

Social Security office	Average number of claimants per box
Andersontown	169
Antrim	236
Armagh	216
Ballymena	125
Ballymoney	171
Ballynahinch	49
Banbridge	153
Bangor	247
Carrickfergus	115
Coleraine	367
Cookstown	229
Corporation Street	209
Downpatrick	189
Dungannon	229
Enniskillen	238
Falls	234
Holywood Road	237
Kilkeel	92
Knockbreda	213
Larne	207
Limavady	144
Lisburn[1]	168
Londonderry	202
Lurgan	189
Magherafelt	198
Newcastle	230
Newry	211
Newtownabbey	384
Newtownards	341
Omagh	345
Portadown	162
Shaftesbury Square	228
Shankill	250
Strabane	181

[1] Figures at 11 January 1990.

Home Helps

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount spent by each area health board on the provision of home help services in each year since 1980.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The information following represents expenditure in cash terms on home help salaries and incidental expenses and does not include similar information on professional and clerical staff involved in the provision of the service:

	Northern Board £	Southern Board £	Eastern Board £	Western Board £	Total £
1979-80	1,893,389	2,187,959	4,771,576	1,686,338	10,539,262
1980-81	2,232,907	2,586,826	5,693,287	1,874,056	12,387,076
1981-82	2,938,992	3,003,696	6,637,044	2,337,646	14,917,378
1982-83	2,843,703	3,390,568	7,200,508	2,554,349	15,989,218
1983-84	3,083,577	3,689,195	7,349,699	2,584,367	16,706,838
1984-85	3,221,097	3,757,331	7,438,522	2,683,434	17,100,384
1985-86	3,466,446	4,194,696	8,125,473	3,038,568	18,825,180
1986-87	3,330,584	4,231,471	8,401,322	2,881,754	18,845,131
1987-88	3,741,591	4,921,126	9,877,840	3,387,835	21,928,392
1988-89	3,829,632	5,186,892	10,219,235	3,285,999	22,521,758

Livestock (Compensation)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums are payable in compensation to farmers who lose livestock as a result of action by the armed forces; and if he will give the average sum payable for the death of (i) a cow, (ii) a bull, (iii) a calf, (iv) a bullock, (v) a sheep, (vi) a ram, (vii) a lamb, (viii) a horse, (ix) a boar, (x) a sow and (xi) a piglet.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to provide details of average sums payable in compensation for the loss of various types of livestock as the amount awarded will vary according to the age, pedigree etc. of the animal concerned. However, each claim is dealt with on its own merits, and compensation awards are assessed by reference to current market prices and professional veterinary advice. The Ministry of Defence paid during 1989 in the order of £400,000 by way of compensation to farmers in Northern Ireland in respect of the loss of livestock arising from activities by the armed forces.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to extend programmes of development assistance to Bangladesh.

Mrs. Chalker: Bangladesh is, and has long been, one of the largest recipients of British development assistance. The programme concentrates on the energy, natural resources, infrastructure and health-population sectors. Among planned activities for United Kingdom support are more help on the exploitation of gas reserves, further rural development work through local NGOs, and studies directed at mitigating the effects of the frequent and severe flooding to which the country is subject.

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his planned expenditure in Gibraltar in the current financial year.

Mrs. Chalker: Expenditure on aid to Gibraltar in the current financial year is expected to be about £0·5 million.

Holiday Visit Passages

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the approximate cost of holiday visit passages paid in respect of *(a)* children of Overseas Development Administration personnel and *(b)* children of technical co-operation officers in receipt of education allowances for the latest available year.

Mrs. Chalker: The latest year for which figures are available is 1988-89. In that year, the cost of holiday visit passages for children of staff of the Overseas Development Administration was £22,900. For children of all personnel financed from technical co-operation funds, including technical co-operation officers and supplementees, the cost was £1,089,218.

Tropical Rain Forests

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the initiatives that are being taken in relation to the management, utilisation and conservation of tropical rain forests, particularly in the field of species diversity, genetic diversity and ecosystem diversity; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Overseas Development Administration is currently implementing a forestry initiative with some 165 projects ongoing or in preparation, with a total value of £150 million. The aims include helping developing countries maximise the economic and social benefits they enjoy from their forests in a sustainable way, and conserving the planet's variety of plant and animal species, many of which are unique to tropical forests.

In the field of species diversity, genetic diversity and ecosystem diversity the ODA supports the research work of the Oxford Forestry Institute and other British institutes and universities. We are currently funding 23 projects worth some £4 million in these areas. We also finance such projects under our bilateral country programmes. Examples include the Limbe gardens conservation of genetic resources project in Cameroon; assistance to forestry conservation research in Nepal; assistance for the conservation of the forest genetic resources of Honduras; help with a project in Ghana to bring tropical moist forest under sustained yield management; assisting with forestry inventory and management work in the Oban hills of Nigeria. Following the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Brazilian Government last year we hope to assist with the establishment of a biological reserve in the Caxiuna national forest. Internationally we are collaborating with other donors in the tropical forestry action plan and we support the work of the International Tropical Timber Organisation.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Solicitors (Remuneration)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any proposals to increase the remuneration of duty solicitors; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Legal aid rates are reviewed each year in accordance with the Legal Aid Act 1988. The Lord Chancellor has not yet decided by how much any legal aid rates should be increased this year.

Paul Malone and Thomas Ryder

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Attorney-General what progress has been made by the Director of Public Prosecutions in the case of Paul Malone and Thomas Ryder; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Between November 1988 and May 1989 the West Yorkshire police forwarded six reports to the Director of Public Prosecutions concerning their investigations into allegations by a number of persons, including Paul Malone and Thomas Ryder, of criminal misconduct by officers of the Merseyside police. The director has briefed counsel to advise and has so far received his advice upon five of the reports. The sixth advice from counsel is awaited. The evidence and advices received so far are being considered by the director's office and a decision on whether any criminal proceedings should be instituted as a result of the investigations will be taken in due course.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

COMECON

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice the Government are giving to businesses considering investment projects in COMECON countries.

Mr. Redwood: Companies considering investment in eastern Europe are welcome to consult my Department. We point out that in all COMECON countries except Hungary the scope for investment is at present limited to participation in joint ventures with local enterprises and that the rules and regulations for these ventures vary from country to country. Direct investment is possible in Hungary and is made more attractive by the existence of an increasingly coherent legal framework and by the availability of British accountants and lawyers based in Budapest. Other countries in this area, such as Poland, offer some similar attractions and are working hard to offer more. Throughout eastern Europe prospects are, perhaps, particularly good in food (production, processing and packaging) and health care (pharmaceuticals and medical equipment), but the risks of investment and the provisions for repatriating profits are changing. We therefore encourage companies to consult the commercial sections of our embassies as well as local representatives of British banks and their usual advisers.

Motor Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in productivity in the motor vehicle industry since 1972 and 1979 together with the number of employees, the number of cars produced, and the trading profit.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Productivity, production and trading profit statistics are matters for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Employment statistics are a matter for the Secretary of State for Employment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the Government's estimate of the proportion of the output of motor vehicles produced in the United Kingdom in terms of the shareholding by foreign vehicle producers together with *(a)* the percentage increase in real hourly earnings of adult male manual workers in the motor vehicle industry since (i) 1972 and (ii) 1979 and of all non-manual employees in the rest of the private sector and *(b)* the increase in output per head in the motor vehicle industry and the rest of the private sector.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: An estimate of the proportion of the output of motor vehicles produced in the United Kingdom in terms of the shareholding by foreign vehicle producers is not available. Earnings figures are a matter for the Secretary of State for Employment. Output per head figures are a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Consumer Protection

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations he has received from hon. and right hon. Members, and members of the public concerning the need for legislation to protect the consumer when purchasing goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has had regarding inadequacies in consumer protection in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I and my officials receive numerous communications dealing with a wide range of subjects. Consumers in this country are protected by a substantial body of existing legislation.

Unpublished Inspectors' Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will place in the Library copies of his Department's unpublished inspectors' reports which have been given to professional bodies.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Dixons (Takeover Bid)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce whether he intends to refer the takeover bid by Kingfisher of Dixons plc to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: On 16 January my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that he had decided, in accordance with the recommendation of the Director General of Fair Trading, to refer the proposed acquisition by Kingfisher plc of Dixons Group plc to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

It would not be appropriate to comment in detail on the proposed acquisition in advance of the commission's report. The commission has been asked to submit its report to the Secretary of State by 27 April 1990.

Trade Marks

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the average waiting time before his Department deals with applicaptions for new trade marks.

Mr. Forth: The average time from filing to issue of an examination report is nine months. The average time from filing to registration of unopposed applications is 24 months.

Patent Office

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take to enable the Patent Office to deal promptly with its duties and to minimise delay to investors and exporters.

Mr. Forth: An increase of 50 staff has been approved for the trade marks registry to deal with a backlog of cases which has built up since service marks were introduced in 1986. These staff are currently being recruited and trained.

The Patent Office, which is in the course of relocating to Newport (Gwent), is due to become an executive agency of the Department of Trade and Industry in the course of this year. This is expected to result in substantial improvements in efficiency and quality of service, in particular when the relocation is complete in the autumn of 1991.

Knitwear and Textiles

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Government in assisting the knitwear and textile industries will offer special financing arrangements for these industries to re-equip with British-made machinery.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 15 January]:* No. Such arrangements would conflict with the European Commission ban on sectoral aid schemes for the textile and clothing industry. The provision of finance to domestic producers on condition that they buy British goods would in addition be in breach of our GATT and Community obligations. The greatest encouragement to buy British is the availability of competitive British goods and services. My Department's policies are geared to helping business to achieve this.

Manufacturing Productivity

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the Government's policy on increases in productivity in manufacturing industry, and what advice is given to employers seeking to achieve such increases.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The most important spur to the significant productivity growth by British manufacturing since 1980 has come from the competitive pressures of more open markets. Government policies to promote this objective have included privatisation, deregulation, elimination of restrictive practices and international negotiations to reduce trade barriers through the GATT and in the European Community. In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry's enterprise initiative enables businesses to receive various forms of help which develop management skills and promote best practice and so further improve productivity.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Research Councils

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will respond to the advice he has received from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the future structure of the research council system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have today written to Sir David Phillips, chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, accepting the recommendation made to me by the board that it should be reconstituted this spring.

The text of my letter is as follows:

"Dear Sir David

Future structure of the research council system

Thank you for your letter of 15 November conveying the Board's advice about the future structure of the Research Council system.

The case which you put forward for reconstitution of the ABRC—as a smaller body with a more explicit remit to improve co-ordination and joint working among the Research Councils—is strong and convincing. The Government therefore intends to implement this recommendation with effect from 1 April. The terms of reference for the new ABRC will be those proposed in the annex to your advice. I am very pleased that you have accepted my invitation to become the first chairman of the new Board, and I hope to be able to announce its full membership within a few weeks.

I and my colleagues are considering the Board's subsequent advice about improving co-ordination between the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council. I shall let you know our conclusions as soon as possible.

I shall, naturally, be informing Parliament about the Government's decision on the reconstitution of the ABRC and, given the wide interest in the scientific community, I am arranging for this letter and the Board's advice to be published."

I am arranging for copies of this letter and of the board's advice to be placed in the Library.

Peer Review System

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the membership of the ABRC working group investigating reforms of the peer review system under the chairmanship of Margaret Boden; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will outline the scope and remit of the ABRC working group investigating reforms of the peer review system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that the membership and terms of reference of the ABRC's working group on peer review are as follows:

Membership

Professor Margaret Boden, FBA (Chairman)—Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Sussex; and ABRC Member.

Professor Sir Eric Ash, FRS FEng.—Rector, Imperial College of Science and Technology, and ABRC Member.

Sir Charles Reece—former Research and Technology Director, ICI; and ABRC Member.

Dr. David Edge—Science Studies Unit, Edinburgh University.
Dr. John Skehel, FRS—Director, National Institute for Medical Research.
Dr. Peter Williams—Chief Executive, Oxford Instruments plc.

Terms of Reference

1. To describe the present practices of the Research Councils in using peer review for the appraisal of proposals for research projects, programmes, centres and facilities; and for the monitoring and evaluation of output and performance.
2. To estimate the costs of peer review in terms of the resources and time committed by the Councils, their staff and committee members, and by applicants and referees.
3. To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the peer review systems operated by Councils; and to assess their efficiency and effectiveness for the appraisal of different types of research support, including for expenditure on and access to large facilities.
4. To review studies of peer review undertaken in the United States and elsewhere, and to draw appropriate lessons for the United Kingdom.
5. To make recommendations concerning:
   - the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for peer review;
   - peer review mechanisms as regards support for young researchers and new research fields;
   - the use of peer review, and any alternatives, in relation to investment and time allocation decisions for large experimental facilities.
6. Throughout, to construe "peer review" broadly—encompassing also, for instance, "merit review".

My right hon. Friend and I will be interested to hear in due course of the ABRC's conclusions arising from this work.

Subatomic Particles Research Project

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will outline British involvement and funding proposals for participation in the subatomic particles research project at the Sudbury neutrino observatory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Sudbury neutrino observatory project is a collaboration involving Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom's involvement is through a group at Oxford university's nuclear physics laboratory which is developing a water purification and testing system for the large heavy water detector being built in northern Ontario.

The group is supported by means of a research grant of £276,000 over three years (1989-92) from the science and engineering research council (SERC) and a contribution from Oxford university of about £120,000 over the same period.

Any application for further funding for the project would be considered by SERC against other calls on its budget.

Bradford City Technical College

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what right of appeal parents have whose children are refused a place at Bradford city technology college; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: CTCs are independent schools and parents will have no automatic right of appeal if their children fail to achieve one of the limited number of places available. However, my right hon. Friend will expect colleges to look at individual cases on their merits.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact the introduction of the poll tax will have on the retail prices index in April.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Autumn Statement forecast is for RPI annual inflation to fall to 5¾ per cent. by the fourth quarter of 1990. It is not the practice to provide more detail than published in table 2.7 of the Autumn Statement.

Public Expenditure White Paper

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the 1990 public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The 1990 public expenditure White Paper will be published at 3.30 pm on Tuesday 30 January, and copies will be available in the Vote Office.

Premium Bonds

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of premium bond purchases for each of the last five annual periods for which figures are kept.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The number of purchases for each of the last five calendar years has been as follows:

	000's
1985	2,530·0
1986	1,949·8
1987	1,962·0
1988	2,036·7
1989	[1]1,416·0

[1] provisional

National Savings

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of new National Savings bank customers for the investment account for the last five annual periods for which figures are kept.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The number of new customers opening investment accounts is not available. The number of new investment accounts opened during each of the last five calendar years was as follows:

	000's
1985	544·8
1986	519·9
1987	697·3
1988	605·3
1989	515·9

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the total number of new ordinary accounts opened, under the national savings scheme for each of the last five annual periods for which figures are kept.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The number of new national savings ordinary accounts opened in each of the last five calendar years is as follows:

	000's
1985	528·2
1986	506·0
1987	502·6
1988	471·1
1989	343·3

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any additional plans to further increase the minimum deposit level for National Savings bank ordinary accounts.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* My right hon. Friend has no present plans to increase the minimum deposit for national savings ordinary accounts.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to cause the Department for National Savings to issue any further guidelines to retirement pensioners on savings and personal security, either on its own or in conjuction with police authorities.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* For some years the Department for National Savings has responded to requests to assist local crime prevention campaigns by providing specially prepared leaflets which remind pensioners that their money is safer kept in a savings account than at home. I understand that the department will continue to offer such assistance where it is practicable to do so.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has received any representations about the future of the Department for National Savings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations. Our objectives for national savings are to encourage more long-term committed savings and less liquid debt; to make available through the national savings system products gross of tax for the non-taxpayer; and to continue to manage efficiently the investments of many millions of personal savers.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Treasury intends to review its policy on the Department for National Savings.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* Policy on national savings products and their terms is always kept under review.

Taxation

Mrs. Ray Michie To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much taxation was raised from persons and organisations resident within, or operating within, Scotland during the financial year 1988-89; and if he will list the yield under the heading of each tax.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* Information is available only in respect of income tax, inheritance-capital transfer tax, and local authority rates. In the case of income tax and inheritance-capital transfer tax, the information is available only in terms of tax liabilities.

The latest estimates available are that the income tax liabilities of residents of Scotland in 1987-88, the latest available year, were £3·4 billion, the capital transfer tax liabilities in 1985-86 on Scottish death estates and lifetime transfers were about £70 million, and local authority rates were £1,955 million in 1988-89. Capital transfer tax on lifetime transfers has since been abolished.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of *(a)* portfolio and *(b)* direct investment overseas each year since 1979, both at current prices and at constant 1989 prices; and what has been the percentage change each year.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The estimates of United Kingdom investment overseas at current prices, distinguishing direct and portfolio investment, since 1979 are published in "Economic Trends" for December 1989 (table A8). An assessment of investment at constant prices can be made using the implied gross domestic product price deflators published in "Economic Trends" (table 2) and in the CSO databank. These publications are available in the Library.

Bank Lending

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of bank lending to each main sector of United Kingdom residents each year since 1979 at constant 1989 prices; and what was the percentage change each year in each case.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* Details on the level of lending to the main United Kingdom sectors is published for recent years in "Financial Statistics" (table 6.2) and for earlier years on the CSO databank. An assessment at constant prices can be made using the implied gross domestic product price deflators published in "Economic Trends" (table 2) and in the CSO databank. These publications are available in the Library.

Foreign Earnings

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of foreign earnings of each category of financial institution in the City of London in 1979, 1984 and 1989 or the latest date for which information is available, at current prices and at constant 1989 prices.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The available information at current prices up to and including 1988 is given in the published annual Pink Books on the United Kingdom balance of payments (table 6.1) and on the CSO databank. An assessment at constant prices can be made using the implied gross domestic product price deflators published in "Economic Trends" (table 2) which is also available on the CSO databank. These publications are available in the Library.

Invisible Earnings

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of invisible earnings each year since 1970 and for each month since January 1989 both at current prices and at constant 1989 prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The latest estimates of invisibles at current prices

and of trade in services at constant prices are given in "Economic Trends" for December 1989 (tables A1 and A3) and on the CSO databank. An assessment of all invisibles at constant prices can be made using the implied gross domestic product price deflators published in "Economic Trends" (table 2) and on the CSO databank. These publications are available in the Library.

Money Supply

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage change each year since 1970 in each main measure of the money supply.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* Details on the level of five money supply measures are published for recent years in "Financial Statistics" (table 11.10) and for earlier years on the CSO databank both of which are available in the Library.

Financial Assets

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the current value of the total assets of *(a)* pension funds, *(b)* insurance companies, *(c)* building societies, *(d)* commercial banks, *(e)* merchant banks, *(f)* United States banks in London, *(g)* Japanese banks in London, *(h)* other foreign banks in London, and *(i)* other major categories of dealers in the City of London.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The latest estimates are given in the following publications, which are available in the Library:

"Financial Statistics"
Non-bank credit companies (table 7.4); Unit trusts (tables 7.6 and 7.8); Investment trusts (table 7.9); Insurance companies (table 7.10); and Pension funds (table 7.11).
"Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin"
Banks, distinguishing United Kingdom retail, merchant and other banks, and United States, Japanese and other overseas banks (tables 3.1 to 3.8); Building Societies (table 6.2).

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Council

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the level of Government grants to the British Council for each year since 1978-79, including the grant allocation for the year 1990-91.

Mr. Sainsbury: The table shows the level of Government grants to the British Council:

(£'000)

Year	*Total*
1978-79	45,891
1979-80	50,447
1980-81	56,165
1981-82	63,496
1982-83	68,608
1983-84	73,291
1984-85	81,513
1985-86	86,344
1986-87	91,990
1987-88	100,825
1988-89	101,059
1989-90	110,863
[1]1990-91	121,159

[1] Estimate.

Czechoslovakia

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average time taken to process visa applications for citizens of Czechoslovakia wishing to visit the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury: Information about the average length of time taken to process visa applications is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, under a visa understanding with Czechoslovakia in 1980, each Government have undertaken to process visa applications for stays of up to three months within 14 working days. Most are issued well inside this time frame.

PRIME MINISTER

Watford Gap

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Watford Gap.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

ENVIRONMENT

English Heritage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra financial provision has been made to English Heritage in each financial year since it assumed responsibility for the relevant duties of the Greater London council; and what was the consequent increase in total expenditure, total grant offers made, total grants paid and total section 3A repair grant offers made since that date.

Mr. Trippier: The Greater London council's historic buildings division and historic house museums transferred to English Heritage in 1986. Additional grant-in-aid of £7·75 million was allocated to English Heritage in 1986-87 to cover the resulting extra costs. Since then the former Greater London council functions have ceased to be identified as a separate entity for the purposes of grant-in-aid but have become an integral part of English Heritage's national organisation and operation. In seeking extra resources each year English Heritage presents its bids on the basis of its work programmes (for example properties-in-care and conservation including building repair and archaeology grants) rather than on a regional basis. Allocation of existing and any additional resources among the regions is entirely a matter for English Heritage. Expenditure on grants in Greater London is as follows:

£ million (cash)

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[1]
Section 3A repair grant offers	0·74	1·46	1·32	1·58
Total grant offers for the 4 years		£19·457 million		
Total grants paid	2·84	4·30	4·81	4·82
		(Total £16·77 million)		

[1] Planned.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the total expenditure by English Heritage and its predecessor, respectively, the total grant offers made and the total of grants paid, for each year 1981-82 to 1990-91;

(2) what was the total income and the income from grant-in-aid, respectively, of English Heritage and its predecessor, for each year 1981-82 to 1990-91.

Mr. Trippier: Prior to the setting up of English Heritage in 1989, the Department of the Environment was directly responsible for historic building grants, archaeology grants and the portfolio of properties-in-care. In 1986 English Heritage also took over responsibility for the Greater London council's historic buildings division and historic house museums; this is reflected in the total 1986-87 figures below. Accounting procedures within the Department during 1981-1984 differed from those subsequently adopted for and by English Heritage. As a result comparable information for 1981-82 and total grant "offers" for 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The table reflects voted provision for expenditure (rather than grant-in-aid which did not apply) by the Department in 1982-83 and 1983-84 on the activities later transferred to English Heritage.

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91 (planned)*
Total provision	36·3	45·9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grant in aid (English Heritage)	—	—	49·9	52·2	60·1	65·3	66·2	72·4	78·0
Total Income (English Heritage)	—	—	52·8	55·8	65·1	72·4	75·5	81·2	88·0
Total gross expenditure	34·8	43·5	52·1	55·0	62·8	71·0	78·4	84·7	90·0
Total grants paid	18·4	19·5	24·1	24·8	28·6	27·5	29·5	30·9	30·4
Total grants offered	—	—	27·7	28·2	29·8	34·2	33·0	33·7	36·4

Chatham and Medway Docks

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money the Government have committed to the redevelopment of Chatham and Medway docks; to whom it is intended to distribute the money; and whether any consultancy agencies are involved.

Mr. Trippier: Following the closure of the royal naval dockyard at Chatham, the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust was established in April 1984 to take responsibility for some 80 acres of the dockyard area, containing about 50 buildings or sites scheduled as ancient monuments. The trust was financed by a Government endowment of £11.35 million to assist it in repairing and maintaining the historic structures and in promoting the site as a "living dockyard". The Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Defence commissioned a consultancy report on the future of the historic dockyard prior to the establishment of the trust and the trust itself has employed consultants for a number of studies since 1984.

The redevelopment of the remainder of the former royal naval dockyard is being managed by the English Industrial Estates Corporation which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I understand that English Estates will have committed about £26 million to the project by the end of the current financial year and that consultants have been employed to assist with the project.

Part of the dockyard was designated an enterprise zone in October 1986, which entitles it to full relief from payment of rates for a 10-year period. Figures for rates forgone are available only for the north-west Kent enterprise zone as a whole, and not for the Chatham maritime enterprise zone as a separate entity.

Tyneside Enterprise Zone

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the extent of retail floorspace in the Tyneside enterprise zone in each year since E2 status was declared distinguishing between floorspace in Newcastle and Gateshead.

Mr. Moynihan: The table shows the amount of retail floorspace in the enterprise zone for each year for which information by type of use has been available. The year 1987 is the latest for which such information has been published. There is no breakdown for individual parts of the zone. As the hon. Member will be aware, however, the large majority of the increase in retail floorspace has taken place in the Gateshead area.

Retail floorspace in Tyneside enterprise zone

Year	*'000 sq m*
1984	0·2
1985	4
1986	20
1987	129

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the sums paid by Government to *(a)* Newcastle and *(b)* Gateshead council in 1989-90 in substitution of rates due from properties in the Tyneside enterprise zone, distinguishing between industrial and commercial property.

Mr. Moynihan: Claims made by local authorities in respect of rate revenue forgone in enterprise zones do not distinguish between industrial and commercial property. Payments made so far in 1989-90 to Gateshead metropolitan borough council and Newcastle city council amount to £10,835,487 and £1,518,385 respectively. The authorities' final claims are likely to add a further 10 per cent. to these figures.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the full report of the United States Environment Protection Agency into the toxic waste held in Wath upon Dearne concludes that the material must be handled with great care.

Mr. Trippier: In sending forward a summary report and supporting analytical data, the Environment Protection Agency draws attention to the need to handle the material with care because of the presence of volatile organic compounds. The presence of such compounds was one of

the reasons for transferring the waste into sealed drums —a task undertaken well before the Environment Protection Agency report became available.

Housing, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to approve city grant and estate action applications in respect of homes for rent and sale on the Lower Grange estate in Bradford; how quickly, after decisions on these applications are announced, he expects a start to new building; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State responsible for housing on 13 December, *Official Report*, Volume 163; column *727*. The Department is continuing to appraise the applications for both city grant and estate action support and I hope it will be possible to reach decisions on both cases in the near future.

Sport and Active Recreation

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is *(a)* the estimated total cost and *(b)* the estimated cost to public funds of publishing the report of the review of sport and active recreation in the inner cities.

Mr. Moynihan: The estimated total cost of publishing the report of the review of sport and active recreation provision in the inner cities is £19,900, of which £7,900 will be met from public funds and £12,000 from private sector sponsorship.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage of drinking water, by volume, in England that is treated by the addition of *(a)* chlorine and *(b)* ozone.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Precise information is not available. However, I understand that more than 99 per cent. of water supplies in England are treated by the addition of chlorine as a disinfectant. At only six sites, which produce less than 1 per cent. of water supplies, is water treated by the addition of ozone. It is important to note that even when ozone is used in the treatment of drinking water, chlorine is normally added at the final treatment stage to provide for residual disinfection.

Batteries and Accumulators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department has taken to reduce the volume of spent batteries and accumulators in household waste.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have long encouraged recycling wherever economically and technically feasible, and the United Kingdom has an excellent record of reclaiming lead-acid and larger nickel-cadmium batteries, and mercuric oxide and silver oxide button cells. Recycling of smaller, consumer-type batteries has not yet proved commercially viable. Reductions in the volume of certain spent batteries and accumulators in household waste is one objective of a modified draft directive recently published by the European Commission. Negotiations have yet to begin on the final form of the directive, and it would not be sensible for the Government to act independently in advance of their completion.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department has taken to promote research aimed at reducing the dangerous substance content and increasing the use of less-polluting substitute substances in batteries and accumulators, and into methods of recycling.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

The Department's Warren Spring laboratory has in the past undertaken research into methods of battery reclamation and recycling, and is currently collaborating on a project aimed at recovering consumer-type alkaline manganese and nickel-cadmium batteries from the domestic waste stream. An examination is also under way of the environment, economic and technical issues which recovery involves. The promotion of research is one aspect of a modified draft directive on batteries and accumulators containing dangerous substances recently published by the European Commission. The Government will await finalisation of the directive before deciding upon measures for its implementation.

FA Cup Final

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the report of the Director General of Fair Trading concerning ticket allocation at the Football Association cup finals in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

The chief trading standards officer for the city of Liverpool asked the Director General of Fair Trading to look into the arrangements for the allocation of tickets at the Football Association cup finals in 1988 and 1989, under his duty at section 2 of the Fair Trading Act 1973. I understand that the director general hopes to be able to respond in the near future.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that Her Majesty's Government will not enter a reservation on behalf of Hong Kong with respect to the recent listing of the African elephant in appendix I of CITES.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House on 17 January at column 300.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to enter a reservation to CITES on behalf of Hong Kong to allow the current ivory stockpile in the Crown colony to be placed on the market.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House on 17 January.

TRANSPORT

Motorways

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those lengths of motorway exceeding 35 miles in extent which are not provided with immediately adjoining service facilities.

Mr. Atkins: The Government's general policy is to provide motorway service areas (MSAs) at intervals of roughly 30 miles on English motorways. MSAs in Wales and Scotland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland respectively. Lengths of motorway in England exceeding 35 miles and currently without MSAs are as follows:

Motorway	*Mileage*	*Comment*
M4[1]	59	MSA proposed for Reading area
M6[2]	38	—
M11	54	MSA Proposed for Birchanger (Junction 8)
M25	117	MSA open at South Mimms, under construction at Thurrock, and proposed at Clacket Lane (Westerham) and in the western quadrant of the motorway
M42	40	MSAs under construction at Tamworth and proposed for the Solihull area

[1]Heston MSA to Membury MSA.
[2]South bound, Southwaite MSA to Killington Lake MSA.

Certain other journeys involving distances of more than 35 miles between MSAs are possible using more than one motorway. It is intended that almost all of the gaps will be filled by the MSAs in the Government's strategic programme which, in addition to those already referred to, comprises sites on:

M18 (Hadfield)
M20 (Hollingbourne and Westernhanger)
M27 (Meon)
M40 (Tetsworth, Ardley and Barn Hill)
M54 (Telford)
M56 (Hapsford)
Birmingham Northern Relief Road; Birmingham Western Orbital; and Blackburn Southern bypass (sites to be selected).

I am writing to my hon. Friend enclosing a map showing existing and proposed MSAs and the motorway network. I have arranged for copies of the map to be placed in the Library.

Marchioness Disaster

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has considered a public inquiry following the Marchioness disaster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Under the new regulations governing the work of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch, provision is made for investigations into serious marine accidents to take the form of an inspector's inquiry with a subsequent report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State by the chief inspector of marine accidents. This is considered to be the appropriate form of investigation for this accident.

It is expected that the inspector leading the inquiry will be in a position to submit his findings to the chief inspector very soon. The report of the chief inspector will then be published at the earliest practicable date.

British Rail

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much land is due to be sold off by British Rail in the next three years by region; if he will list the estimated value of that land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: These are commercial matters for the British Rail Property Board and I do not have the information in the forms requested. British Rail's published corporate plan 1989 contains the following forecasts for property-asset sales:

Financial years	*£ million*
1990-91	293
1991-92	248
1992-93	261

Cyclists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to how many local authorities have active cyclists' consultative committees; if he will list them; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Atkins: This information is not collected centrally. A number of local authorities are known to have developed good working relationships with local cycling groups.

Our latest local transport note on cycling "Making Way for Cyclists" (published by HMSO) contains several references to the benefits of good consultation with local cycling interests. A copy has been placed in the Library.

River and Port Pilots

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the river and port pilot manning requirements and costs in the United Kingdom and on the continent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Pilot manning levels and costs in the United Kingdom are matters for the competent harbour authorities. I understand however that since the implementation of the Pilotage Act 1987 on 1 October 1988 pilotage charges have in general been held steady, with reductions being achieved in some cases. As regards manning, there were 1,225 licensed pilots immediately before the implementation of the 1987 Act and 229 pilots have since been made surplus.

The Department holds no up-to-date information regarding pilot manning levels or costs on the continent.

Household Refuse Tips

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what guidelines he has issued providing for the safe and harmless transport by lorry on public

highways of rotting refuse from controlled household refuse tips of five to 20 years' vintage; when they were last renewed; and what proposals he has to revise them;

(2) what guidelines he has issued to local authorities on the transportation of putrescent household refuse of five to 20 years' vintage by lorry; and what proposals he has to revise them.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 January, *Official Report*, Vol. 165, column *330*.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines he has issued to provide for the safe, odour-free and pollution-free transportation by rail of rotting refuse of five to 20 years' vintage from controlled household refuse tips; and what proposals he has to revise them.

Mr. Atkins: There are no specific guidelines on the rail transport of putrescent waste. British Rail standards for the transport of dangerous goods generally reflect international requirements. Noxious goods which are not dangerous would be subject to British Rail's conditions of carriage and conditions of acceptance.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what alternatives to the Channel tunnel project's safety committee requirement for video surveillance in respect of last resort use of halons are currently under consideration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Channel tunnel intergovernmental commission, in giving its decision that Eurotunnel may continue development of its transport system on the basis of the principle of non-segregation of passengers from cars and coaches, laid down a number of binding requirements.

One of these is that a video surveillance system should be provided to monitor the interior of the shuttle wagons. Another is that fire extinction measures in the shuttle trains should include a Halon 1301 system or other agent with the same extinguishing capabilities. Halon may only be used either when passengers have been evacuated or as a last resort when the lives of passengers are endangered in spite of the use of other means of extinction.

It is for Eurotunnel to consider how to give effect to these requirements when bringing forward for approval design proposals for further development of its system.

Mitchell Bypass

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what stage plans have reached to begin work on the Mitchell bypass on the A30 in Cornwall;

(2) when he expects the A30 Mitchell bypass to be opened;

(3) when he intends the documentation regarding the building of the A30 Mitchell bypass in Cornwall to be issued to possible contractors.

Mr. Atkins: All the statutory procedures have been completed for the A30 Penhale-Carland Cross scheme which includes a bypass for Mitchell. Tender documents are in preparation and a contract is expected to be awarded later in the year. Construction should take about 18 months.

Zelah Bypass

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the A30 Zelah bypass to be opened.

Mr. Atkins: A contract is expected to be awarded later in the year and construction should take about 12 months.

British Rail (Investment)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make it his policy for new investment in British Rail to be judged on the basis of cost-benefit analysis.

Mr. Portillo: The new objectives for British Rail, announced by my right hon. Friend last month, allow for the use of cost-benefit analysis where exceptionally investment which increases the asset base of the Network SouthEast and provincial sectors cannot meet the required rate of return of 8 per cent. This will enable the Government to decide whether capital grants would be justified on wider social and economic grounds. For BR's commercial sectors the Government see no case for subsidy and financial appraisal continues to be appropriate.

Mr. Mark Woodward

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will arrange for Mr. A. J. Woodward and his solicitor to have access to the tape recordings referred to by the solicitors acting for Her Majesty's Coastguard in the case of Mark Woodward in their letter of 12 January to Noel Horner, solicitor, of Truro.

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes. Arrangements are already in hand for Mr. Woodward and his solicitor to hear the tapes on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday of next week.

Cars (Carbon Dioxide Emissions)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he proposes to take to control the level of carbon dioxide emissions from motor cars.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 7 December 1989. *(Official Report*, 7 December, column *347.)*

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Caenarfon of 8 January, *Official Report*, column *502*, on local government finance in Wales, what allowance he has made, in calculating the income from the standard community charge for each district in Wales, for owners of holiday homes who previously paid domestic rates, changing to the uniform business rate for such properties, where they are let out for a proportion of each year.

Mr. Peter Walker: The assumptions I have made for standard charge multipliers for each district in Wales for 1990-91 are set out in paragraph 3 of the Welsh revenue support grant distribution report.

Regulations will shortly be laid before the House defining the boundary between domestic and non-domestic property and bringing into non-domestic rating those individual units of self-catering accommodation which are available for letting for 140 or more days each year. On the basis of those regulations, account can be taken in future local government finance settlements of the non-domestic rate income collectable in respect of these properties. It will be pooled and distributed on a per capita basis to all Welsh districts.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what percentage he based his inflation forecast in determining the Welsh local government expenditure settlement for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Peter Walker: The local authority settlements for 1988-89 and 1989-90 represented the Government's view of what it would be appropriate for local government to spend. Like all public expenditure plans they were set in cash terms.

Batteries and Accumulators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps he has taken to promote the marketing of batteries and accumulators containing smaller quantities of dangerous substances or less-polluting substances;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that consumers are fully informed about the dangers of uncontrolled disposal of spent batteries and accumulators;

(3) what steps he is taking to inform consumers of the method of moving batteries and accumulators which are built into appliances;

(4) what steps he is taking to set up a deposit system for batteries and accumulators;

(5) what steps his Department has taken to reduce the heavy metal content in batteries and accumulators.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs on Thursday 18 January 1990 at columns *356-58*.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now publish his assessment of the level of farm incomes in Wales for 1989; and what were the corresponding figures for 1988.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information on the level of farm incomes in Wales in 1989 is due to be published in June in the Welsh Office publication "Farm Incomes in Wales" No. 4, 1990. Some limited information, on average net incomes in Wales for the pair of years 1987-88 and 1988-89 will also be included in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food publication "Agriculture in the United Kingdom" to be published early next month.

Bypass (A487)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the target commencement date for construction of the Penygroes and Llanllyfni bypass scheme on the A487 trunk road in Gwynedd.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Plans announced in "Roads in Wales: 1989" do not include a bypass for Penygroes and Llanllyfni. This section of the A487 is the subject of a feasibility study but it is too soon to speculate on its conclusions.

Grant-aided Schools

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the independent or direct grant schools in Wales that are grant-aided directly by the Welsh Office, noting the amount of aid to be paid in the current financial year.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The only direct grant school in Wales, TS Indefatigable, Anglesey, will receive grant totalling £15,750 in the current financial year. Payments to meet the costs of tuition fee remissions at independent schools participating in the assisted places scheme are shown in the table:

School	*Payment—1989-90 (estimate)* £
Howells School, Llandaff	338,380
Howells School, Denbigh	236,811
Christ College, Brecon	186,547
Rydal School, Colwyn Bay	128,121
Penrhos College, Colwyn Bay	163,726
Llandovery College, Dyfed	92,025
Monmouth School for Boys	320,596
Monmouth School for Girls	127,302

Rural Unemployment

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West of 30 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *339*, whether he makes any general estimates on a regular basis of figures for rural unemployment.

Mr. Peter Walker: No.

Hospital Building

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the five largest hospital building projects in Wales currently under construction; and what is the projected cost of each.

Mr. Grist: The five largest hospital building projects currently under construction in Wales are shown in the table:

Project	*Projected Cost £ million*
New Llanelli Hospital	26·9
Singleton Hospital West Ward Block	12·3
Royal Gwent Hospital Development Scheme 6	10·7
North Rhondda Community Hospital	8·0
Prince Charles Hospital Development Scheme 2	5·2

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the five largest hospital building projects completed in Wales since 1979; and what is the cost of each.

Mr. Grist: The five largest hospital building projects completed in Wales since 1979 are shown in the table:

Project	Cost £ million
Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor	36·9
Princess of Wales hospital, Bridgend	25·5
Morriston hospital development scheme I	20·4
Wrexham Maelor DGH	17·4
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	12·5

Housing (Ceredigion)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest estimate of the number of additional houses likely to be needed in Ceredigion over the next five years.

Mr. Grist: The statutory responsibility for assessing housing need in any particular area rests with the local authority concerned.

A487 Lower Fishguard

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve the trunk road A487 at Lower Fishguard, Pembrokeshire during the next five years; and if he will make a statement in the light of the latest serious accident.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: A scheme for a relief road was considered but deferred because of local objections to its effect on the environment. It will be re-examined and discussed with local authorities.

Household Refuse Tips

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will lay down guidelines to local authorities on the planning, environmental health and waste disposal criteria for granting permission for tipping partly rotted household refuse removed from one controlled refuse tip to another.

Mr. Grist: Guidance on the disposal of household refuse is contained in the series of waste management papers published by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, and in Welsh Office circulars 76/76 and 38/89. My right hon. Friend has no proposals to issue further guidance.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what licences he has issued for the tipping of transported partly rotted household refuse from controlled local authority tips of five to 20 years' vintage.

Mr. Grist: The responsibility for issuing waste disposal licences rests with district councils in Wales as waste disposal authorities.

Road Improvements

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which trunk road improvement schemes in Wales are expected to start in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: An announcement will be made in the Welsh Office commentary on the public expenditure White Paper due to be published in March.

Forestry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales where in Wales the Forestry Commission proposes to sell off forests and woods giving the size in acres, the nature of the woodland and the estimated cost of the forests and woods in question; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The Forestry Commission's current disposals programme will extend over the next 10 years and the selection of properties for sale will accordingly be staged over that period. Advance notification of properties to be placed on the market is given in the *Estates Gazette* when firm decisions to sell are taken by the commission.

The following forest areas are at present being offered for sale on the open market. These areas are all predominantly coniferous.

County and Name	Area (acres)	Guide Price[1] £
Dyfed		
The Goginal Woodlands		
Allt Goch	72	135,000
The Ty Cerrig Woodlands		
Ty Cerrig Wood	114	95,000
Bylchau-Duon	153	125,000
Talley Woodlands		
Allt y Goitre	71	85,000
Maestwynog	28	23,000
Tanyrallt	16	11,500
Powys		
Three Woodlands		
New Pieces and Old Wood	11	8,000
Cae Mawr Coppice	12	16,000
The Linger and Maes-y-Mwm	11	10,000
Dyfed		
Synod Inn Woodlands		
Ffynnon Le Frith	62	60,000
Hafod Iwan	80	73,000
Croes Heddyg Newydd	34	35,000
Penrhiwgaled	12	12,500
Cnwc yr Ehedydd	5	7,000
Esgair Onen	8	10,000
West Glamorgan		
Craig Ynysgollen	24	20,000
Dyfed		
Carmarthen Woods		
Allt Werncorgam	28	25,000
College Wood	30	25,000

[1] The guide price is the figure given by the agents to interested parties.

HEALTH

National Health Service Spending

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out in the *Official Report* a table showing, for the years 1987-88 and 1988-89 (estimated), the average cost per head of spending in the National Health Service by health authorities, broken down into groups as follows: births, ages up to four years, five to 15 years, 16 to 64 years, 65 to 74 years and 75 plus years.

Mr. Freeman: District-based figures of average total revenue expenditure per head of resident population for 1987-88 and 1988-89 are shown in the table. (The figures for 1988-89 are provisional in that they are as yet subject to audit.)

Although the greatest use of health care facilities tends to be the very young and the elderly it is not practicable centrally specifically to assign district health authorities' total expenditure to particular age groups.

Total revenue expenditure per resident

	1988-89 (cash) £	*1987-88 (cash)* £
Northern Region		
Hartlepool	266	233
North Tees	194	181
South Tees	285	253
East Cumbria	252	229
South Cumbria	185	169
West Cumbria	215	195
Darlington	278	253
Durham	162	149
North West Durham	244	215
South West Durham	250	223
Northumberland	243	220
Gateshead	183	168
Newcastle upon Tyne	575	514
North Tyneside	152	134
South Tyneside	178	161
Sunderland	248	223
Districts Total	254	229
Yorkshire Region		
Hull	265	236
East Yorkshire	223	212
Grimsby	227	207
Scunthorpe	171	151
Northallerton	145	139
York	242	225
Scarborough	185	167
Harrogate	230	211
Bradford	237	214
Airedale	209	191
Calderdale	208	187
Huddersfield	248	224
Dewsbury	181	162
Leeds Western	301	275
Leeds Eastern	301	263
Wakefield	368	339
Pontefract	187	172
Districts Total	240	218
Trent Region		
North Derbyshire	163	143
Southern Derbyshire	216	201
Leicestershire	221	196
North Lincolnshire	247	228
South Lincolnshire	190	172
Bassetlaw	184	167
Central Nottinghamshire	216	196
Nottingham	282	254
Barnsley	199	178
Doncaster	215	191
Rotherham	188	170
Sheffield	357	322
Districts Total	234	212
East Anglian Region		
Cambridge	313	282
Peterborough	240	202
West Suffolk	197	177
East Suffolk	226	206
Norwich	243	219
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	202	184
West Norfolk and Wisbech	186	166
Huntingdon	219	189
Districts Total	233	209
North-West Thames Region		
North Bedfordshire	173	159
South Bedfordshire	186	171
North Hertfordshire	173	149
East Hertfordshire	135	118
North-West Hertfordshire	320	283
South-West Hertfordshire	146	126
Barnet	299	263
Harrow	246	218
Hillingdon	321	282
Hounslow and Spelthorne	243	211
Ealing	179	158
Riverside	601	514
Parkside	394	341
Districts Total	269	236
North-East Thames Region		
Basildon and Thurrock	210	185
Mid-Essex	219	199
North-East Essex	220	202
West Essex	200	175
Southend	180	161
Barking/Havering/Brentwood	207	188
Hampstead	688	592
Bloomsbury	1,226	1,076
Islington	372	334
City and Hackney	543	483
Newham	253	227
Tower Hamlets	542	485
Enfield	187	166
Haringey	293	270
Redbridge	219	193
Waltham Forest	328	288
Districts Total	307	273
South-East Thames Region		
Brighton	240	218
Eastbourne	221	203
Hastings	217	202
South-East Kent	175	158
Canterbury and Thanet	234	217
Dartford and Gravesham	246	229
Maidstone	226	208
Medway	185	164
Tunbridge Wells	283	260
Bexley	212	190
Greenwich	342	300
Bromley	233	205
West Lambeth	640	568
Camberwell	438	374
Lewisham and North Southwark	437	386
Districts Total	279	251
South-West Thames Region		
North-West Surrey	235	217
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	151	134
South-West Surrey	305	271
Mid Surrey	305	276
East Surrey	318	288
Chichester	216	199
Mid Downs	201	179
Worthing	182	162
Croydon	237	209
Kingston and Esher	283	258
Richmond, Twickenham, Roehampton	195	176
Wandsworth	620	543
Merton and Sutton	256	227
Districts Total	259	231
Wessex Region		
East Dorset	206	183
West Dorset	216	199
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	194	172
Southampton and South West Hampshire	290	262
Winchester	223	198
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	217	199

	1988-89 (cash) £	1987-88 (cash) £
Salisbury	312	278
Swindon	225	201
Bath	207	190
Isle of Wight	229	207
Districts Total	226	203
Oxford Region		
East Berkshire	189	171
West Berkshire	195	173
Aylesbury Vale	349	315
Wycombe	143	126
Milton Keynes	161	143
Kettering	165	148
Northampton	222	205
Oxfordshire	255	229
Districts Total	209	187
South Western Region		
Bristol and Weston	310	279
Frenchay	282	255
Southmead	246	221
Cornwall/Isles of Scilly	195	181
Exeter	280	254
North Devon	218	199
Plymouth	268	241
Torbay	210	190
Cheltenham	186	165
Gloucester	224	208
Somerset	210	192
Districts Total	240	218
West Midlands Region		
Bromsgrove and Redditch	188	177
Herefordshire	203	192
Kidderminster	293	273
Worcester	211	195
Shropshire	201	185
Mid Staffordshire	171	153
North Staffordshire	244	223
South-East Staffordshire	196	178
Rugby	170	160
North Warwickshire	239	213
South Warwickshire	236	215
Central Birmingham	580	521
East Birmingham	232	211
North Birmingham	245	223
South Birmingham	323	283
West Birmingham	355	322
Coventry	247	220
Dudley	210	190
Sandwell	153	136
Solihull	170	155
Walsall	196	174
Wolverhampton	250	228
Districts Total	236	214
Mersey Region		
Chester	300	283
Crewe	185	171
Halton	142	128
Macclesfield	226	208
Warrington	287	265
Liverpool	365	325
St. Helens and Knowsley	197	182
Southport and Formby	268	234
South Sefton	416	321
Wirral	217	196
Districts Total	265	237
North Western Region		
Lancaster	385	353
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	206	186
Preston	616	582
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	200	181
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	327	300
West Lancashire	252	228
Chorley and South Ribble	88	79
Bolton	201	181
Bury	173	152
North Manchester	499	434
Central Manchester	633	562
South Manchester	571	518
Oldham	189	165
Rochdale	160	143
Salford	400	363
Stockport	194	176
Tameside and Glossop	172	148
Trafford	162	146
Wigan	191	172
Districts Total	267	241

Sources:

(a) 1987-88 and 1988-89 annual accounts of district health authorities.

(b) Mid-year estimates of resident population—1987 and 1988 respectively (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys).

Notes:

1. District capital expenditure and all expenditure incurred by regional health authorities on behalf of their regions as a whole is excluded.
2. Expenditure on family practitioner services is excluded: such expenditure is accounted for by family practitioner committees (FPCs) and cannot strictly be attributed to particular districts.
3. Significant variations in per capita expenditure figures at district level arise principally because:
   (i) people travel across district boundaries for treatment and sub-regional resource allocations reflect the pattern of service provision locally;
   (ii) the population figures used make no allowance for people resident in one district who receive treatment in another or for the difference in morbidity and age/sex structure of particular populations.

Expenditure, North-West

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage of capital spending as a proportion of total spending by regional health authorities in the north-west; and what was the comparable figure 10 years ago.

Mr. Freeman: Information for the Mersey and North Western regions together with aggregated figures for all regions in England is shown in the table.

Capital expenditure figures for individual regions fluctuate from year to year mainly reflecting changes in the pattern of capital investment throughout the country.

Hospital and community health services (HCHS) capital expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure

	1978-79 Per cent.	1988-89[1] Per cent.
Mersey Region	9·8	6·1
North Western Region	9·1	6·5
All Regions	7·7	7·9

[1] Based on provisional expenditure figures (as yet subject to audit).

Notes:

1. The figures, derived from annual accounts, include expenditure incurred by regional health authorities and the district (formerly area) health authorities comprising those regions.
2. HCHS includes hospital, community health, patient transport (ie ambulance), blood transfusion and other services.
3. The table excludes expenditure on family practitioner services.

Over-Prescribing

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sanctions are available currently against general practitioners who, after professional assessment, are considered to be over-prescribing; what changes will be introduced under the new general practitioners contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At present, action can be taken under regulation 16 of the NHS (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1974 against general practitioners who are considered to be prescribing excessively. Regulation 16 provides for the Secretary of State to refer cases to local medical committees (LMCs) for investigation. LMCs may recommend a withholding of remuneration against GPs who prescribe excessively. There have been no referrals under regulation 16 since 1974. The Department is currently discussing with representatives of the medical profession, in the light of the Government's plans to introduce indicative prescribing budgets, how the existing sanctions process should be modified to provide a more effective procedure. GPs who exceed their indicative prescribing budget will not face sanctions on that fact alone. Only where there is clear evidence of excessive prescribing will the FPC refer the matter for consideration by a professional committee. We expect that the application of sanctions will be a process of last resort.

Health Authority Budgets

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statutory powers regional health authorities have to ensure that district health authorities do not exceed their budgets; and whether it is his intention to extend this power to FPSA spending as well.

Mr. Freeman: Under section 97 of the National Health Service Act 1977, as amended, it is the duty of each regional health authority to allocate money to its districts and under section 97A each district health authority has a duty to ensure that its expenditure does not exceed its allocation.

The Secretary of State makes allocations to family practitioner committees for their administrative expenditure and, from 1 April 1990, will make allocations for cash-limited expenditure on direct reimbursement of part of general medical practitioners' practice expenses. The National Health Service and Community Care Bill presently before Parliament contains provisions to transfer this task to regional health authorities. As with district health authorities, it is the duty of each family practitioner committee to ensure that its expenditure does not exceed the amount allocated.

East Cleveland Hospital

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects work to begin on the new hospital in east Cleveland.

Mr. Freeman: No firm decisions have been taken yet about the timing, size and content of the new development. My hon. Friend may care to contact the chairman of the Northern regional health authority if he would like more information.

Paramedics

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified paramedics are employed by Durham area health authority; how many are in training; and what is the total number of paramedics to be trained.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We do not hold information centrally about paramedics. The hon. Member may care to contact the chairman of the Durham health authority for the information.

NHS

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to rebut allegations that he has plans to privatise aspects of the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The White Paper "Working for Patients" clearly states that the Government have no plans to privatise the National Health Service. We support a Health Service which is open to all, regardless of income, and financed mainly from general taxation. The aim of all our reforms is to raise the performance of all parts of the NHS nearer to that of the best.

Vaccination Leaflet

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Pembroke of 21 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *379*, he will place in the Library the research which indicated that the original version of the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccination leaflet ID19 ISBN1 85448 050 2 had limited appeal.

Mr. Freeman: The assessment of the MMR leaflet ID19 is still in draft format. A copy of the final report will be placed in the Library on its completion.

Tuberculosis Vaccinations

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of stocks of tuberculosis vaccinations held nationally.

Mr. Freeman: Temporary supply difficulties arose last year whilst our source of supply moved production facilities to a new site. This necessitated conserving remaining stocks by restricting vaccination to those at particular risk of exposure to tuberculosis. Adequate stocks remain for that purpose and I am glad to say that fresh supplies should be available by April 1990 to enable routine school vaccination to recommence later this year.

National Fitness Survey

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any proposals to back up current epidemiological studies, known as the national fitness survey, to allow calibration of the survey tools, such as more accurate energy cost estimates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Some calibration of the survey tools is built into the national fitness survey proposals: for example repeatability studies will help to indentify errors associated with the physical tests. On the specified point

about energy cost estimates, estimates are already published which will be applied to the survey data collected, and while some of these figures are in need of revision they will nevertheless enable reasonable estimates to be made. Producing more accurate energy cost estimates would require small intensive studies which could be undertaken at any time, the results of which could be applied retrospectively to the national fitness survey data. The Department has no plans at the moment to commission such work, but the national fitness survey team hopes that the survey itself will inspire such studies.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the level of industrial and commercial sponsorship of the national fitness survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The national fitness survey is being financed jointly by the Department of Health, the Health Education Authority and the Sports Council. Negotiations are continuing with potential commercial sponsors in order to extend the size of the survey to provide accurate analyses of data to regional level.

HEALTH

Air Ambulances

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many successful missions have been carried out by the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if any of his Department's Ministers have met representatives of the *Daily Express* concerning the London Air Ambulance;

(2) what representations his Department has received from the *Daily Express* and its management concerning the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State met representatives of Express Newspapers plc in February 1988 to discuss the helicopter emergency medical service.

The Department has met regularly with representatives of Express Newspapers plc and all other parties involved in the helicopter emergency medical service since March 1988.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Ministers will now arrange a visit to the Cornwall First Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: There are no present plans to do so, but we will bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's suggestion should a suitable opportunity arise.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total monthly running costs for the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial contribution the *Daily Express* has committed to the London Air Ambulance; and over what period.

Mr. Freeman: Express Newspapers plc has agreed to meet all costs directly associated with the aircraft used by the helicopter emergency medical service, including purchase, maintenance and salaries, for the period 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1991.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been provided through his Department's capital support for the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: Capital funding in respect of the helicopter emergency medical service is to provide a helipad and lift at the London hospital, Whitechapel and to contribute towards the cost of resuscitation bays at the same hospital.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the breakdown of the cost supported through the Department's revenue funding of the London Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: Central funding has been agreed as follows in respect of day-to-day revenue costs of the helicopter emergency medical service:

	£ 000s
1989-90	
ITU beds	46
Medical salaries	11
1990-91	
ITU beds	274
Medical salaries	63
1991-92	
ITU beds	205·5
Medical salaries	47·25

The figures are at 1989-90 prices.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to review the resources committed to the London Air Ambulance for the three years from January 1989 before the funding is exhausted.

Mr. Freeman: The helicopter emergency medical service is to be independently academically evaluated during the period of the agreed funding.

Welfare Milk

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning his proposal to reduce the value of welfare milk tokens; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the proposal.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) on 8 January at column *505* and to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on 16 January at columns *201-202*.

Ambulance Dispute

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of *(a)* Army, *(b)* St. John Ambulance and *(c)* Red Cross vehicles deployed in (i) each health authority and (ii) in total.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 8 January 1990]:* On 15 January 1990 the numbers of military vehicles deployed, by regional health authority, were:

	Number
Trent regional health authority	17
North West Thames regional health authority	15
North East Thames regional health authority	10
South West Thames regional health authority	[1]67
Wessex regional health authority	8
Oxford regional health authority	9
West Midlands regional health authority	51
TOTAL	177

[1] Including the London Ambulance Service.

St. John and Red Cross vehicles assist health authorities from time to time depending on local operational conditions. Information about numbers of vehicles deployed is not held centrally.

Health Information Systems

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities are engaged in a pilot study of health information systems, stating in each case *(a)* the

additional costs of undertaking the study and *(b)* how those costs are shared between the Department and the health authority.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Various pilot studies into health information systems are in progress. These include:

1. *Hospital Information Support Systems (HISS)*
There are three pilot sites. The districts involved are:
Nottingham, Darlington, Greenwich
Expenditure by the Department in the current financial year is £2·94 million. Information on health authority expenditure on these projects is not held centrally.

2. *Resource Management Initiative (RMI)*
Hospitals in six district health authorities are pilot sites for the resource management initiative. The districts are:
Huddersfield, Lewisham and North Southwark, Newcastle, South Lincolnshire, Winchester, Wirral
The costs of these projects are shared by the Department and the health authorities concerned. Information on health authority expenditure on these projects is not held centrally. Expenditure by the Department so far in this financial year is £1·1 million.

Regional Allocations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for 1990-91 the cash sums added or deducted from each National Health Service region's allocation in respect of cross-boundary flows of patients and in the case of the Northern region, identify the sum in respect of inflows of patients from Scotland.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* The information requested is shown in the table. In the case of Northern region the sum of £1,361,000 added for cross-boundary flows represents an addition of £1,383,000 for net inflow from Scotland less £22,000 for net inflow to Wales.

Cross-boundary flows for 1990-91

£000's

	+/− *English cross-boundary flows (net)*	+/− *Wales and Scotland (net) flows*
Northern	−7,054	1,361
Yorkshire	−3,593	−53
Trent	−24,784	−233
East Anglian	14,551	58
North West Thames	−20,566	394
North East Thames	55,896	212
South East Thames	13,232	462
South West Thames	−37,094	−2
Wessex	−4,944	81
Oxford	−6,865	−6
South Western	3,459	572
West Midlands	4,252	6,184
Mersey	−14,663	11,429
North Western	28,173	586
Total	0	21,045

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *663*, he will list *(a)* amounts paid to each regional health authority in respect of patients served from outside England under the resource allocation working party formula, *(b)* express those payments in standard prices with the current year as the base and *(c)* express such payments as a cash figure per 1,000 population of the region in standard prices with a similar base.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* No specific allocation was made to English regions in respect of the flow of patients from outside England. Cross-boundary patient flows from outside England were only taken into account under the resource allocation working party (RAWP) formula in assessing the relative needs of English regions.

EMPLOYMENT

Genetically Manipulated Organisms

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the 15 planned genetically manipulated organisms that have been released since 1986; and what was their purpose.

Mr. Nicholls: The 15 releases that have been notified to the Health and Safety Executive since 1986 are as follows:

Genetically manipulated organisms involved	*Number of releases*
1986	
Baculovirus	1
1987	
Baculovirus	
Bacterium	
Potato	3
1988	
Baculovirus (x2)	
Potato (x4)	6
1989	
Baculovirus	
Potato (x2)	
Tobacco plant (x2)	5

All the releases were small-scale field trials for agricultural research and development purposes.

Productivity Gains

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's policy on passing on productivity gains to the workers in the form of pay increases in *(a)* British-owned firms and *(b)* foreign-owned firms.

Mr. Nicholls: Productivity is a vital influence on the costs and competitiveness of all businesses, irrespective of ownership. Pay increases should not automatically absorb all of the productivity gains made. Resource must be available for improvement of price competitiveness, future investment, increased output and jobs.

Child Care

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amenities for child care are available to single parents taking up employment training.

Mr. Nicholls: Lone parents on employment training (ET) can get help towards the cost of childcare facilities. Training providers are encouraged to set up creche facilities and training on ET can often be arranged to take account of individual domestic circumstances.

Company Annual Reports

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to ensure that companies produce, as part of their annual report to shareholders, a section of the report detailing their health and safety activities.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so.

Trade Union Members

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the trade unions that have applied to the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members for copies of the booklet "Guide for Trade Union Members", or the "Short Guide for Trade Union Members"; and how many copies were supplied to each trade union.

Mr. Nicholls: I am advised by the independent Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, that the trade unions or associations in the following table have applied for copies of the booklets "Guide for Trade Union Members" or the "Short Guide for Trade Union Members":

Trade Union/Association	*Number of guides provided*	*Number of short guides provided*
National Communications Union	3	3
Federated Union of Managerial and Professional Officers	12	950
Electrical, Electronic Telecommunication and Plumbing Union	3	2
Civil and Public Services Association	1	—
National Union of Public Employees	—	100
British Cement Staff Association	4	—
Retail Book, Stationery and Allied Trades Employees Association	1	—
Barclay Group Staff Association	10	25
Institute of Professional Civil Servants	1	—
Society of Telecommunications Executives	1	1
National Union of Journalists	1	1
Broadcasting and Entertainments Trades Alliance	2	—
Transport and General Workers Union	1	1
National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers	2	1
Society of Radiographers	1	1
National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education	1	1
National Graphical Association	1	1
Building Trades Union	3	3

Noise at Work

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions, improvement notices, or prohibition notices relating to the control of noise at work in the years 1981 to 1989 have been initiated by the railway inspectorate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to him on 26 October 1989 at columns *597-99*.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures are being taken to monitor the application of the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 in respect of recording studios; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive enforce compliance with the Noise at Work Regulations in the course of preventive inspection visits to recording studios.

Hearing Defects

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research has been carried out to establish whether musical sounds cause hearing defects to the same degree as industrial noise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Available evidence is inconclusive and does not justify treating the hazard created by high levels of musical sounds as different from that created by industrial noise at the same levels.

Disabled People (Training)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking in his plans for training and enterprise councils to safeguard national provision of training for disabled people by the voluntary sector.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 10 January 1990]:* I am currently considering future arrangements for voluntary sector training providers who offer training for people with disabilities on a national basis.

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage increase in average earnings of full-time manual workers in the motor vehicle industry in the year to April 1989 and the increase for non-manuals in banking and business services.

Mr. Nicholls: The increases were 9·9 per cent. for manual employees in the manufacture of motor vehicles and parts, and 10·3 per cent. for non-manual employees in banking and business services.

YTS

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* contracted YTS places and *(b)* YTS trainees in training, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole for March and September for each year since 1986.

Mr. Nicholls: The table shows the number of YTS contracted places and the number of young people in training on YTS as at March and September of each year since 1986, for each Training Agency region and for Great Britain:

Number of contracted places and number of young people in training on YTS

Figures rounded to nearest 100

	South East	London	South West	West Midlands	East Midlands and Eastern	Yorkshire and Humberside	North West	Northern	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
31 March 1986											
Contracted places	46,300	17,000	24,600	58,600	—	31,900	45,800	20,400	18,300	34,300	297,300
Number of YPs in training	41,500	16,000	20,900	53,700	—	28,200	39,400	17,800	16,400	31,500	265,200
30 September 1986											
Contracted places	47,900	27,200	32,700	59,600	48,800	44,200	62,600	31,900	26,400	46,500	427,900
Number of YPs in training	38,000	19,300	28,700	48,700	42,600	38,900	56,400	27,300	21,700	38,800	360,400
31 March 1987											
Contracted places	52,400	34,100	34,700	61,000	52,300	46,400	67,400	33,400	28,400	47,600	457,700
Number of YPs in training	33,300	17,300	24,500	41,400	36,300	34,100	49,100	28,300	20,500	37,700	318,200
30 September 1987											
Contracted places	66,000	37,400	46,600	77,100	68,200	59,800	90,400	43,700	32,200	59,300	580,700
Number of YPs in training	46,000	20,300	35,400	55,100	51,700	49,900	67,100	31,400	25,400	45,700	428,000
31 March 1988											
Contracted places	63,600	32,500	44,300	69,900	65,800	54,900	82,300	38,200	28,500	58,800	538,800
Number of YPs in training	42,200	20,700	31,300	46,500	46,700	43,800	60,200	28,500	23,100	46,100	389,100
30 September 1988											
Contracted places	62,500	33,400	45,300	71,600	65,900	60,200	81,800	39,800	29,400	62,400	552,300
Number of YPs in training	45,800	22,200	34,500	51,700	52,200	52,000	67,900	33,200	25,900	50,300	435,500
31 March 1989											
Contracted places	58,900	30,300	43,400	69,100	63,500	61,400	80,500	39,600	29,000	62,000	537,700
Number of YPs in training	40,000	21,200	30,500	43,600	46,600	45,200	60,700	30,500	23,800	49,800	391,900
30 September 1989											
Contracted places	60,500	32,000	40,500	64,100	60,700	59,600	78,000	38,600	28,500	60,900	523,500
Number of YPs in training	41,300	21,500	32,200	46,500	49,400	49,200	63,700	32,000	25,200	50,700	411,600

Note: Due to independent rounding, regional totals may not correspond to Great Britain total.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are his best estimates of the numbers of *(a)* YTS employed trainees and *(b)* YTS non-employed trainees who will be liable to pay the poll tax in 1990-91.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Young people become liable to pay the community charge at age 18. The following shows the number of young people aged 18 and above by status at the end of November 1989:

	18 and over
Non-employed trainees	48,470
Employed trainees	24,782
Total	73,252

Principal Wages Inspector

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why the principal wages inspector refuses to make available to hon. Members the guidance notes issued to inspectors for use when deciding whether or not to prosecute an employer who is paying below wages council levels.

Mr. Nicholls: The principle on which consideration of prosecution action is based, which is that the offence should be deliberate or repeated and the evidence judged sufficient, has always been made clear to hon. Members. The detailed procedural notes issued to inspectors assume a knowledge on the part of the user which can be gained only after training and experience and are, in any event, for internal use only.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Appeals

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases referred to the Court of Appeal under section 17 (1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 were heard before a jury.

Mr. John Patten: In all cases referred by the Home Secretary to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, there will have been a hearing before a jury at the original trial. Once a case has been referred under this section, it is for the Court of Appeal to decide how the matter should proceed, but I understand that in one such case a re-trial was ordered by the Court of Appeal and that this was heard before a jury.

Vagrants

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons have been convicted for begging or related offences since the beginning of 1989 in England and Wales;

(2) how many persons have been prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act 1824 since the beginning of 1988, in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: The number of people prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act 1824 (as amended) in England and Wales for 1988 was 2,810. Of these, 1,461 were for indecent exposure, 573 were for begging and 594 were for being on enclosed premises for an unlawful purpose. Information on prosecutions and convictions for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Legal Advice

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether police officers are obliged to inform suspects of their right to receive free legal advice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under section 58 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 police officers are obliged to inform suspects of their right to legal advice, but not obliged to inform them that the advice is free. The revised code of practice for the detention, treatment and questioning of persons by police officers, which my right hon. and learned Friend hopes to lay before the House shortly, will require the police to advise suspects that legal advice is free.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to clear the backlog of cases at the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on Friday 8 December 1989 at columns *409-17*. Since then we have approved the board's request for 10 additional staff who are now in post.

We understand that the board will shortly submit its detailed request for a further increase in staff, which we will consider urgently.

Broadcast Frequencies

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to ensure that consumers are made fully aware of the full implications of the broadcast frequencies reshuffle in respect of receiving equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The Green Paper on Radio in 1987 and the White Paper on Broadcasting in 1988 alerted viewers and listeners to our plans for the future of broadcasting. The changes proposed will not affect the frequencies used by existing independent local radio stations. But two medium wave networks will be reassigned from the BBC to facilitate the introduction of national commercial radio. The BBC is accordingly planning to place greater reliance on VHF/FM, and has increased the rate of building new FM transmitters.

BBC Radio has started informing listeners of its plans, including information about a new national sports and education network, Radio 5, which will be launched on 27 August 1990 on the AM frequencies currently used by Radio 2. It is understood that the BBC intends to increase its promotional efforts during the year as the changes draw nearer, and has formulated plans to ensure that listeners are fully advised on the new arrangements.

Correspondence received both at the Home Office and at the BBC indicates that there is already considerable public awareness of the changing situation, and we shall continue to have regard to listeners' needs as frequency planning proceeds.

As for television, we believe most viewers realise that they will require new receiving equipment if they wish to see the new services which are being introduced. The White Paper also pointed out that most video cassette recorders and some home computers would need to be retuned in areas in which Channel 5 was receivable, irrespective of whether their owners chose to receive the new service. But it added that any costs incurred might be met by Channel 5 licensees.

Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions since 1979 his Department has utilised the expertise of the forensic entomologist Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu; whether the assistance provided by Dr. Erzinclioglu could have been supplied by anyone employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what alternative facilities are to be available for forensic entomology to assist police investigations, following the non-renewal of the research grant for Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make it his policy to provide funding for the research of the forensic entomologist Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu in the department of zoology at Cambridge university; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if his Department's forensic science service employs any persons with specialist knowledge of forensic entomology; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Dr. Erzinclioglu's position is at present under consideration and I will write to the hon. and learned Member.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contact his Department has had with the Belgian Government in implementing a similar scheme in the United Kingdom as their Oikoten scheme, as an alternative to custody for persistent juvenile offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The Government have encouraged the development of schemes offering constructive and demanding community-based facilities for dealing with juvenile offenders at risk of receiving custodial sentences in England and Wales. These schemes have made an important contribution to the reduction by nearly 60 per cent. in the number of juvenile offenders given custodial sentences in 1988 compared with 1981. I am aware that other countries operate similar schemes but we are not familiar with the details of the Oikoten scheme.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Set-Aside

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received over the desirability of placing an upper limit on the amount of land which an individual farmer may set aside, or on the amount of compensation for set-aside which an individual farmer can receive.

Mr. Curry: I have received no recent representations about such limits, which would not in any case be consistent with the Community set-aside rules.

Dairy Export Refunds

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why EEC spending on dairy export refunds has increased in the past three years; and what steps were taken to ensure that the increase is compatible with the EEC agreement with New Zealand on orderly marketing of dairy surpluses.

Mr. Curry: Increased expenditure on dairy export refunds in 1988 and 1989 resulted from an increased volume of sales in response to a strenthening of demand on world markets at a time when the Community was rightly concerned to give priority to exports over sales into intervention. All EC dairy exports have complied with the rules of the GATT international dairy arrangement, of which both New Zealand and the Community are members. This includes the low-priced EC butter exports which took place in 1987 and 1988 under derogations agreed by all parties to the arrangement.

Variable Import Levy (Wheat)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why the EEC variable import levy for wheat is more than 100 per cent. in excess of the gap between EEC and world prices; and if he will make it his policy to seek a substantial reduction in the forthcoming common agricultural policy price negotiations.

Mr. Curry: The variable import levy for wheat is calculated by the Commission of the European Communities by deducting from the threshold price the lowest known world price, adjusted to take account of quality and the cost of delivery to Rotterdam. The import levy is therefore always greater than the difference between the threshold price and quoted world prices, except in the case of the lowest known world price.

In considering the Commission's proposals for the 1990 CAP price negotiations, I will take account of the possibility of reducing the wheat threshold price.

Cereal Imports

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why the EEC threshold price for cereal imports has not been reduced in line with the cereal intervention price.

Mr. Curry: Over the last three market years, the start-of-season Community intervention prices for common wheat and barley have been reduced by 3 per cent. as a result of the operation of the stabiliser. Over the same period, the threshold price has been reduced by 5·8 per cent. for common wheat and 6·1 per cent. for barley as a result of the operation of the stabiliser and, in addition, a fall in the transport costs used in calculating threshold price levels.

Whaling

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received from hon. and right hon. Members and members of the public calling for a total ban on whaling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have received a great many representations on whaling. We work hard to ensure the conservation of whales. The United Kingdom played a leading role in securing the present moratorium on commercial whaling under the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and has been very active in working to ensure that it is not undermined. We have had much success with this policy—for example, Korea and now Iceland are no longer conducting scientific whaling research programmes.

Animal Feed (Colouring Matter)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy for colouring used solely in animal feed to become subject to the Colouring Matter in Food Regulations 1973.

Mr. Maclean: The use of colourings in animal feed is controlled by directive 70/524/EEC as amended. The directive sets out the permitted list of colourants, prescribed maximum levels in feedingstuffs and labelling requirements for feedingstuffs containing them. In the UK all these provisions are implemented in the Feeding Stuffs Regulations 1988 as amended. The Colouring Matter in Food Regulations 1973 as amended deal with colours in human food and I have already announced that I will be circulating proposals to revise the regulations for public comment shortly.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the main changes in the present common fisheries policy since its introduction in January 1983.

Mr. Curry: The present structure and foundation of the common fisheries policy was laid down in 1983. Changes since then have essentially been adjustments and improvements such as annual TACs and quotas; additions to and improvements on technical conservation measures; and revisions to the market support arrangements; enforcement;and arrangements made to take account of the accession of Spain and Portugal. The principles on which the common fisheries policy was founded have not been changed.

White Fish

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the national fixed percentage share of the seven main edible white fish species in fishing area VII in *(a)* 1983, *(b)* 1986, *(c)* 1989 and for 1990 for each European Community country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The percentage shares of total allowable catches between member states were set as part of the 1983 common fisheries policy settlement and are shown in the table:

Member state percentage shares of main white fish stocks in area VII

Stock	Belgium	France	Ireland	Netherlands	United Kingdom
Cod VII excluding VIIa	4·5	76·4	10·2	0·6	8·3
Cod VIIa	2·7	7·3	46·7	0·7	42·7
Haddock VII	1·1	66·7	22·2	—	10·0
Saithe VII	0·3	56·3	28·1	—	15·4
Whiting VIIa[1]	0·6	6·9	39·6	0·1	52·8
	(0·5)	(6·4)	(43·8)	(0·1)	(49·2)
Whiting VII excluding VIIa	1·0	60·0	27·8	—	10·7
Plaice VIIa	5·1	2·2	40·0	1·6	51·1
Plaice VIId, e	16·4	54·5	—	—	29·1
Plaice VIIf, g	24·8	44·8	6·9	—	23·5
Plaice VIIh, j, k[2]	6·1	12·6	43·5	25·3	12·5
Sole VIIa	49·4	0·6	12·2	15·6	22·2
Sole VIId	26·9	53·8	—	—	19·2
Sole VIIe	3·5	37·7	—	—	58·8
Sole VIIf, g	62·5	6·3	3·1	—	28·1
Sole VIIh, j, k	8·3	16·7	45·1	13·2	16·7
Hake Vb, VI, VII, VIII[2]	0·6	80·0	4·9	—	14·5

[1] For 1990 Hague Preference invoked. Member states' allocation adjusted accordingly. Figures in brackets show resulting percentage share-out for 1990 only.
[2] Allocation key first established in 1984 when TAC first set for this stock.

The percentage shares, which safeguard relative stability, apply each year except when stocks fall to a level when the Hague Preference is involved. This happened for the first time in area VII for the 1990 whiting quota for Ireland.

Milk Quota

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to make an announcement on the distribution of the additional 1 per cent. milk quota; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We shall make an announcement as soon as we have completed consultations with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and have obtained the EC Commission's agreement to our proposals.

DEFENCE

Overseas Service Allowance

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons a wounded convalescent soldier's overseas service allowance is terminated after 21 days; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Low Frequency Transmitters

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the progress of the planned trial extremely low frequency transmitter at Glengarry forest, Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All site surveys required for the extremely low frequency demonstrator programme should be completed by the end of April 1990. Preparation of the notice of proposed development continues but it is not possible to say precisely when it will be submitted to the Highland regional council. Various interested bodies are being consulted in order to take account of their views. Installation and trials of the transmitter will not proceed until planning permission has been granted.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements exist between the United Kingdom and other Governments regarding the use of extremely low frequency transmitters for the purpose of communicating with submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no such agreements.

WE177 Free-fall Bomb

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he envisages that the tactical air-to-surface missile, to replace the WE177 free-fall bomb, will have a range of between 500 and 5,500 km.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of options for the possible replacement of the WE177 free-fall bomb are under consideration. It is not possible to predict the outcome of these studies at this stage.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart regarding the possible joint development of an uprated ASMP, as a replacement for the WE177 free-fall bomb.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has discussed possible options for the replacement of the WE177 with M. Chevenement. However, details of these discussions are confidential.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart regarding the possible purchase of SRAM-2, or SRAM-T, as a replacement for the WE177 free-fall bomb.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None, although this subject was discussed with Mr. Cheney by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) in July 1989.

Trident

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any studies have been undertaken regarding possible substitutes for the Trident programme,

in the eventuality that development and production of the D5 missile system is cancelled by the United States Government.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Laser Weapons

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether bright flashes of light have been used in anti-terrorist operations by Her Majesty's armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to comment on the details of anti-terrorist operations.

Defence Staff List

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to write to the hon. Member for Don Valley about defence staff list documents as promised in his reply of 15 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *296*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I wrote to the hon. Member on 22 November and copies of my letter were placed in the Library of the House. I have now sent a further copy of the letter to the hon. Member.

Biological Weapons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the 77 research projects being carried out at United Kingdom universities in connection with the manufacture of biological weapons.

Mr. Neubert: No such projects are being undertaken. The United Kingdom has no biological weapons and no plans to acquire any.

Aircraft (Central Records)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department is taking to ensure that central records are kept of flights by *(a)* prior authorised non-Royal Air Force and *(b)* unauthorised non-Royal Air Force NATO military aircraft over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Neubert: None.

Low-flying Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reduction or increase has been made in the number of low-flying military jet sorties in each of the last five years.

Mr. Neubert: Over the last five years for which figures are available, the approximate number of military low-flying sorties in the United Kingdom attributed in central records to specific jet aircraft is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1984	92,000
1985	95,000
1986	101,000
1987	96,000
1988	97,000

Service Men (Murders)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what compensation has been offered to the families of three service men murdered in Northern Ireland on 18 November 1989; and why the overseas pay of the fourth service man, still recovering in hospital in Northern Ireland, was withdrawn.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

SCOTLAND

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to announce the outcome of the 1989 hill farming review; and if any changes are proposed to the hill livestock compensatory allowance system.

Mr. Rifkind: We hope to make an announcement very soon.

Offences Against Children

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many reported cases of *(a)* rape and *(b)* sexual offences against children, including incest, there have been in Scotland in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information on the number of rape cases recorded by the police is set out in the table. Information which separately identifies sexual offences against children is not held centrally.

Number of rape cases recorded by the police (including attempted rape)

	Number
1984	224
1985	248
1986	249
1987	241
1988	279

Batteries and Accumulators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps he has taken to promote the marketing of batteries and accumulators containing smaller quantities of dangerous substances or less-polluting substances;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that consumers are fully informed about the dangers of uncontrolled disposal of spent batteries and accumulators;

(3) what steps he is taking to inform consumers of the method of removing batteries and accumulators which are built into appliances;

(4) what steps he is taking to set up a deposit system for batteries and accumulators;

(5) what steps his Department has taken to reduce the heavy metal content in batteries and accumulators.

Mr Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs on Thursday 18 January, Vol. 165, columns *357-8*.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact of the uniform business rate in Scotland since its introduction.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government's intention is to move towards a national non-domestic rate in Scotland at the same level as that in England. Powers were taken in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to enable the Secretary of State to prescribe the non-domestic rate for each Scottish local authority as from 1 April 1990, and on 21 December my right hon. and learned Friend announced the rates to be prescribed for 1990-91. Rates have been set so as to reduce revenue raised from non-domestic ratepayers next year by £80 million which is equivalent to a reduction in rate poundages of 6·25 per cent. Our intention is to continue to move towards a common rate over the next few years, after which a national rate will be prescribed at the same level as that in England.

National Health Service Reform

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many postcards he received from members of the public expressing opposition to the Government's policy for the National Health Service; how many replies were sent out by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), and what was the cost of the staff time, stationery and postage included in sending those replies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The campaigns by the Labour party and NALGO resulted in receipt of some 47,000 postcards. In order to correct the misleading suggestions in this material about our proposals for improving the National Health Service, all of these cards received replies from the Scottish Home and Health Department. The total cost involved was some £8,800.

ENERGY

Diesel Oil

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many representations he has received from industry, commerce and the public relating to the notification to the public of changes in diesel oil costs over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In the last 12 months the Department of Energy has received around 60 representations from MPs, the public and small businesses about the price of diesel.

Oil product prices are not set by Government. They are a matter for the oil companies, suppliers and retailers and reflect the cost of supply and the level of competition prevailing in the market. The recent rise in the price of diesel reflected an unusual combination of increased seasonal demand in Europe and the United States of America, and reduced supply caused by European delivery problems, United States refinery shutdowns and reduced exports from the USSR.

European Energy Foundation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his departmental library receives copies of the European Energy Foundation monthly information bulletin.

Mr. Wakeham: No.

SCRAM Energy Journal

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his departmental library receives the SCRAM energy journal.

Mr. Wakeham: No.

Electricity Industry (External Financing Limit)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if there has been any change in the external financing limit for the electricity supply industry in England and Wales for the financial year 1989-90.

Mr. Wakeham: I have agreed a revised external financing limit of £1,780 million for the electricity supply industry in England and Wales for the financial year 1989-90. This revision from the previous limit of £1,300 million has been mainly due to the change in the tax position of the industry.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Benefits

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether, in the last six months, his Department has issued revised guidelines to doctors assessing fitness for work of people in receipt of disability-related benefits.

Mr. Scott: No.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners will receive an increase in their income as a result of the proposals he announced in his statement on benefits for the disabled on 10 January; and what is the estimated cost *(a)* gross, *(b)* net of benefits, *(c)* net of tax if appropriate and *(d)* net of benefit and tax if appropriate in each financial year 1990-91 to 1998-99.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* It is estimated that about 40,000 pensioners annually will benefit from the extension of attendance allowance to terminally ill people without any waiting period. By 2000-1, it is expected that a further 80,000 pensioners will benefit from the removal of the upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs. It is also expected that by 2000-1, some 50,000 pensioners will be in receipt of one of the proposed new lower rates of the disability allowance (having claimed before reaching age 65).

Effects on expenditure

	Gross (cost) £ million
(a) Cash	
1990-91	9
1991-92	19
1992-93	20

	Gross (cost) £ million
1993-94	21
1989-90 prices	
2000-1	145

(b), (c) and *(d)*. There are no offsetting changes to other benefits from these proposals, and the benefit gains are not taxable.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, pursuant to his statement on benefits for the disabled of 10 January, he will publish in the *Official Report* his estimate of the cost of the new disablement employment credit *(a)* gross, *(b)* net of benefit savings, *(c)* net of tax if appropriate and *(d)* net of benefit and tax if appropriate in each financial year 1992-93 to 1998-99 giving his estimate of the numbers who will be eligible and the expected take-up rate.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 15 January 1990]*: *(a), (b)* The net effect on expenditure of the disability employment credit is difficult to predict and will depend on whether recipients of the proposed benefit were previously receiving out-of-work benefits. Our initial, tentative, estimate is that gross expenditure on the disability employment credit might be about £80 million a year. Consequential benefit savings—through non-payment of full incapacity benefits—are estimated to be about £90 million a year.

(c), (d) The disability employment credit itself will not be taxable, although any associated earnings will be subject to income tax and national insurance contributions in the normal way.

Eligibility for the proposed disability employment credit will depend not only on prior or current receipt of qualifying benefits but also on level of potential earnings and availability of suitable jobs. Existing data do not provide sufficient information about these factors to enable us to produce reliable estimates of the number who will be eligible or of take-up rates. Our tentative estimates suggest some 50,000 people could receive the new benefit.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, pursuant to his statement on benefits for the disabled on 10 January, he will publish in the *Official Report* a breakdown of the additional net cost of his proposals broken down by measure for each financial year 1990-91 to 1998-99;

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the net cost or savings of the totality of the proposals contained in "The Way Ahead" in each of the financial years from 1990-91 to 2000-01; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 15 January 1990]*: It is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the cost of each measure for every year, particularly in the longer term, since the costs depend on a large number of factors which cannot be accurately forecast. The table therefore gives estimates for the first four financial years, together with an indication of the likely effects of 2000-01. The figures for 2000-01 are subject to considerable margins of uncertainty.

£ million cash

Net change in expenditure (+ = cost, − = saving)	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*£ million 1989-90 prices 2000-01*
Increase in adult's disability premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+ 18	+ 19	+ 19	+ 19	+ 25
Introduction of £10 carers premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+ 6	+ 15	+ 15	+ 15	+ 20
Increase in disabled childs premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+ 8	+ 8	+ 8	+ 8	+ 10
Extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies	+ 5	+ 6	+ 6	+ 6	+ 5
Extension of Attendance Allowance to terminally ill people without a waiting period	+ 13	+ 28	+ 29	+ 30	+ 25
Increase in top rate of Invalidity Allowance to £10	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Extension of Mobility Allowance to people who are deaf and blind	+ 4	+ 5	[1]—	—	—
Additional funds for the Independent Living Fund[2]	+ 19	+ 26	+ 27	+ 28	—
Introduce Disability Allowance	—	—	+115	+230	+280
Abolish upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs	—	—	—	—	+100
Introduce age-related addition in Severe Disablement Allowance	+ 15	+ 50	+ 50	+ 55	+ 50
Introduce Disability Employment Credit[3]	—	—	− 10	− 10	− 10
End entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance in new rates	− 1	− 17	− 41	− 61	−130
End accruals of new rights to Invalidity Benefit Additional Pension	—	0	− 5	− 25	−370
TOTALS[4]	+ 88	+141	+214	+296	+ 6

[1] Additional expenditure on mobility allowance for the deaf-blind is included in the Disability Allowance totals after 1992-93.
[2] Subject to decisions about the future of the Independent Living fund.
[3] The net effect on expenditure of the Disability Employment Credit is difficult to predict and will depend on whether recipients of the proposed benefit were previously receiving out-of-work benefits.
[4] Totals revised upwards since the Autumn Statement to reflect a small downwards adjustment of estimated savings from the change in the Reduced Earnings Allowance. Totals may not equal sum of components because of rounding.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, pursuant to his statement on benefits for the disabled on 10 January, if he will publish in the *Official Report* his estimate of *(a)* the number of people who will be eligible for each level of the care component and the mobility component of the new disability allowance, *(b)* the number of people who would have been eligible for attendance allowance and mobility allowance but will get the lower rate of the care and the mobility component and *(c)* the cost (i) gross, (ii) net of benefit, (iii) net of tax if appropriate and (iv) net of benefit and tax if appropriate of the disability allowance in each financial year 1992-93 to 1998-99.

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Mr. Scott *[holding answer 15 January 1990]: (a)* Current projections of the likely number of recipients of the proposed disability allowance by 1993-94 are:

Self-care component	*Number of recipients*
Higher rate	150,000
Middle rate	250,000
Lower rate	140,000
Mobility component	
Higher rate	700,000
Lower rate	150,000

Attendance allowance will remain to provide help with care needs for an estimated 600,000 people aged over 65.

(b) People will qualify for the upper level of the mobility component and the two upper levels of the care component on the basis of assessment criteria similar to those currently employed for mobility allowance and attendance allowance respectively.

(c) (i) and (ii). Details of the cost of introducing the disability allowance are set out in the table:

£ million

	Expenditure on disability allowance	*Expenditure on other [1]benefits*	*Total*
Cash			
1992-93	+75	+40	+115
1993-94	+160	+70	+230
1989-90 prices			
2000-01	[2]+300	+80	+380

[1] Income support and housing benefit.
[2] Includes £100 million additional expenditure on help with mobility needs due to abolition of upper age limit for payments.

(c) (iii) and (iv). Adjustments net of benefit and tax are not appropriate: the disability allowance will not be taxable.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his statement on benefits for the disabled on 10 January, if he will publish in the *Official Report (a)* his estimates of the cost of the age-related addition to the severe disablement allowance (i) gross, (ii) net of benefit savings, (iii) net of tax savings if appropriate and (iv) net of benefit and tax savings if appropriate for each financial year 1990-91 to 1998-99, *(b)* his estimate of the number of people who will be eligible for the new addition and the expected take-up rate, *(c)* the number and percentage of invalidity allowance and invalidity pension claims which will be replaced by the new addition and *(d)* his estimate of the additional number of people who will gain benefit because of the new addition and those who will lose it.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 15 January 1990]: (a)* It is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the costs of this measure for every year, particularly in the longer term, since the costs depend on a number of factors such as the future claims load which cannot be accurately forecast. The table therefore gives estimates for the first four years after implementation, together with an indication of the effect in 2000-01. Figures for 2000-01 are subject to considerable margins of uncertainty.

Effects on expenditure

£ million (cost)

	(i) Gross	*(ii) Net of other benefit changes*[1]
Cash		
1990-91	35	15
1991-92	118	50
1992-93	115	50
1993-94	120	55
1989-90 Prices		
2000-01	110	50

[1] Income-related benefits.

(iii) and (iv): Severe disablement allowance and the proposed age-related addition are not taxable.

(b) It is estimated that about 250,000 people will be eligible for the addition. All of these will receive the addition automatically with their existing severe disablement allowance payments.

(c) Invalidity allowance and invalidity pension claims are not affected by this proposal.

(d) Some 250,000 recipients of the severe disablement allowance will receive the addition. None will lose benefit. The number of severe disablement allowance recipients who will be better off in net terms is about 120,000.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his statement on benefits for the disabled on 10 January, if he will publish in the *Official Report* his estimate of the savings incurred in each financial year 1990-91 to 1998-99 as a result of ending new entitlement to the invalidity pension additional pension *(a)* gross, *(b)* net of benefits, *(c)* net of tax if appropriate and *(d)* net of benefits and tax if appropriate; what is his estimate of the number of people who will get (i) a reduced additional pension and (ii) no additional pension in each of the years; and if there will be a reduction in national insurance contributions as a result of this measure.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* It is not possible to provide reliable estimates of savings from this measure for every year, particularly in the longer term, since the level of savings depends crucially on a number of factors such as the future claims load and earnings growth which cannot be accurately forecast. The table therefore gives estimates for the first three years after implementation, together with an indication of the effect by 2000-1. The figures for 2000-1 are subject to considerable margins of uncertainty.

Effects on expenditure

£ million (saving)

	(a) Gross	(b) Net of other benefit changes[1]
Cash		
1990-91	—	—
1991-92	[2]Nil	Nil
1992-93	10	5
1993-94	30	25
1989-90 prices		
2000-01	475	370

[1] Includes consequential adjustments to invalidity allowance payments and income-related benefits.

[2] Ending the accrual of new rights to invalidity benefit additional pension from 1991-92 does not affect payments of additional pension until the following financial year.

(c), (d). Invalidity benefit additional pension is not taxable.

Numbers affected

The table gives details of the average number of recipients in each year who will receive:

	(i) A reduced additional pension[1]	(ii) No additional pension[1]
1990-91	—	—
1991-92	Nil	Nil
1992-93	95,000	Negligible
1993-94	265,000	Negligible
2000-01	870,000	35,000

[1] This table simply shows the numbers with reduced additional pension (AP) entitlements. For many there will be consequential adjustments to invalidity allowance or income-related benefits which will offset part or all of the reduction in AP entitlement.

The effect on national insurance fund expenditure will be taken into account in determining future levels of contributions.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his statement on benefits for the disabled on 10 January, if he will publish in the *Official Report* his estimate of the savings incurred in each financial year 1990-91 to 1990-99 as a result of ending new entitlement to the industrial injuries reduced earnings allowance *(a)* gross, *(b)* net of benefits, *(c)* net of tax if appropriate and *(d)* net of benefits and tax if appropriate.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* It is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the savings from this measure in every year, particularly in the longer term, since the savings depend on a number of factors, including the future claims load, which cannot be accurately forecast. The table therefore gives estimates for the first four financial years, together with an indication of the likely effect by 2000-1. The figures for 2000-1 are subject to considerable margins of uncertainty.

Effects on expenditure

£ million (saving)

	(a) Gross	(b) Net of other benefit changes[1]
Cash		
1990-91	1	1
1991-92	18	17
1992-93	43	41
1993-94	64	61
1989-90 Prices		
2000-01	140	130

[1] Income-related benefits.

(c), (d) Reduced earnings allowance is not taxable.

Long-Term Incapacity

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving a benefit for long-term incapacity under occupational sick pay schemes; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: Out of a total work force of 22 million it is estimated that just under 13 million (58 per cent.) have occupational sick pay cover for long-term sickness. These comprise about 6·5 million men (54 per cent. of the male work force) and 6 million women (61 per cent. of the female work force). Information about the coverage of age is not available. The information is based on the report on occupational sick pay schemes by IFF Research Ltd. for the Department of Social Security, published in November 1988.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average payment currently being received by recipients of a benefit for long-term incapacity under occupational sick pay schemes; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: I regret that information is not available in the form requested. The report on occupational sick pay schemes shows that 57 per cent. of all employees with long-term sick pay cover receive a percentage of salary when sick and a further 19 per cent. receive a scale rate. Payments for the remainder are calculated on a variety of different bases—for example, full basic salary, a flat rate amount or a discretionary rate.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving reduced earnings allowance as a supplement to their earnings; on what criteria he bases his proposal to abolish entitlement to reduced earnings allowance in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: On the basis of information for April 1988, just under 150,000 people received reduced earnings allowance. Of these, about 24,000 were likely to have been in work. Potential changes in benefits policy are assessed according to the criteria set out in paragraph 4 of Cm. 615 "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1989-90 to 1991-92".

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if entitlement to the proposed age-related addition to severe disablement allowance will be based on

age at the introduction of the addition or the age of the severe disablement allowance recipient at the commencement of the period of their incapacity for work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We propose to introduce payment of the new age-related addition to severe disablement allowance from December 1990. The rate of the addition will be related to the age of the recipient at the time the incapacity for work began.

Disability Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the models of a points system disability allowance referred to in paragraph 3.15 of "The Way Ahead."

Mr. Scott: I will shortly place in the Library further information about the disability cost allowance based on a points index which is referred to in paragraph 3.15 of "The Way Ahead".

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions were made about existing entitlement to attendance and mobility allowance in the models of a points system disability allowance referred to in paragraph 3.15 of "The Way Ahead"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The points-based benefit schemes referred to in paragraph 3.15 of "The Way Ahead" would have replaced attendance allowance and mobility allowance.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what criteria he has decided to exclude from the Government's proposals in "The Way Ahead" any help for people with disabilities with extra costs other than those arising from mobility or attendance needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The surveys of disability carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys found that attendance allowance and mobility allowance are well directed towards the most common of the more costly disabilities. Locomotion and self-care disabilities are associated with relatively high disability-related expenditure. Equally important, the benefits provide help to people with other disabilities in the frequent cases where they are combined with locomotion or self-care disabilities.

Invalidity Pension

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated saving in each year up to 2030-31 resulting from the phasing out of entitlement to earnings-related invalidity pension, gross and net of additional spending on invalidity allowance.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The available information on gross savings from ending the accrual of new rights to invalidity benefit additional pension is given in the table. The estimates are based on long-term projections of expenditure on additional pension which are subject to considerable margins of error; the savings estimates beyond 2000-01 are particularly uncertain. Since annual figures would therefore imply a spurious precision, the estimates are given at five-year intervals. Projections beyond 2025-26 are not available.

Effect on expenditure	*Gross change in additional pension expenditure at constant 1989-90 prices £ million (saving)*
1991-92	nil
1992-93	10
1993-94	30
1995-96	120
2000-01	475
2005-06	800
2010-11	1,025
2015-16	1,225
2020-21	1,525
2025-26	1,825

These are gross savings in additional pension expenditure before offsetting adjustments to invalidity allowance and income-related benefits. I shall write to the hon. Member enclosing estimates isolating the effect of invalidity allowance when these are available.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the expenditure on the additional component to invalidity pension that would be incurred in each of the next 20 years *(a)* under pre-1986 legislation, *(b)* under current legislation and *(c)* under the proposals in "The Way Ahead"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: *(a)* Information on additional pension expenditure under pre-1986 legislation is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(b) and *(c)* Projections of expenditure under current legislation and under the proposals in "The Way Ahead" (Cm. 917) are as follows. These estimates are subject to considerable margins of uncertainty, particularly in the longer term. Since the precision implied by annual estimates would therefore be spurious, the long-term projections are given at five-year intervals.

Projected expenditure on invalidity benefit additional pension at constant 1989-90 prices

£ million

	(b) current legislation	*(a) Cm. 917 proposals*
1990-91	565	565
1991-92	690	690
1992-93	820	810
1993-94	950	920
1995-96	1,225	1,100
2000-01	1,850	1,375
2005-06	2,125	1,325
2010-11	2,225	1,200
2015-16	2,350	1,125

The figures illustrating the effect of the proposals in "The Way Ahead" show the gross effect on expenditure. The net effect on social security spending will be less because of offsetting changes in invalidity allowance and income-related benefits.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the reduction in national insurance contributions consequent on the proposed abolition of additional component to invalidity pension; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The level of contributions depends on the overall demands on the national insurance fund. The expenditure implications of the proposed change in invalidity benefit will be taken into account in determining future levels of contributions.

Disability Employment Credit

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what account will be taken of other income in calculating entitlement to the proposed disability employment credit; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what account will be taken of the income of a spouse in calculating entitlement to the proposed disability employment credit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The precise details of the new disability employment credit are still to be considered.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for community care grants were *(a)* met in full, *(b)* met in part, *(c)* dealt with by awarding a part-grant and part-loan, *(d)* dealt with by awarding a loan only and *(e)* refused for each month since January 1989.

Mr. Scott: Details of the numbers of community care grant applications, decisions, awards made and percentage refused are in the Library. The other information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Crisis Loans

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of income support claimants *(a)* were repaying a budgeting crisis loan from their benefit, *(b)* were repaying a budgeting crisis loan at 10 per cent. or more of their benefit and *(c)* were repaying a crisis loan at 15 per cent. or more of their benefit for each month since January 1989.

Mr. Scott: The number of loans being repaid on the last day of each month expressed as a percentage of national income support caseload is shown in the table. Information regarding the percentage rate at which loans were being repaid by individual applicants is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	Budgeting loans (per cent.)	*Crisis loans (per cent.)*	*Caseload data used*
January 1989	5·7	0·9	November 1988
February	6·1	1·0	
March	6·5	1·0	February 1989
April	6·9	1·1	
May	7·5	1·1	
June	7·8	1·2	May 1989
July	7·9	1·2	
August	7·8	1·1	
September	7·8	1·1	August 1989
October	7·9	1·2	
November	8·0	1·2	November 1989
December	7·9	1·1	

Overseas Pensioners

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are made by his Department to pay pensions to overseas beneficiaries; what number of contracts exists for payment of United Kingdom pensioners resident overseas; what schemes have been contracted out; and how many countries are used for paying United Kingdom pensioners resident overseas.

Mr. Scott: There are approximately 530,000 British pensioners living overseas and the majority of these—some 400,000—are paid by direct payment into the pensioners' bank accounts. Under the terms of the social security convention between the United Kingdom and New Zealand the Department of Social Welfare there pays some 30,000 British pensioners on our behalf from funds transferred monthly to them for the purpose. The remaining pensioners are paid by means of sterling payable orders sent by post.

The contract for handling this post was awarded last year to DHL International (UK) Ltd. following a tendering exercise for which it submitted the lowest bid. The specification for the tender required delivery within a time span comparable with the delivery schedule quoted by Royal Mail, which also tendered. The performance achieved is being monitored. Generally DHL takes mail to various countries abroad and posts it through the domestic mail service there.

Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the most recent estimates of *(a)* the number of people contracted out in personal pension schemes and money purchase occupational schemes, respectively, *(b)* the cost to the national insurance fund of the 2 per cent. inducement under sections 1 and 7, respectively, of the Social Security Act 1986 in each year up to 1990-91, and how much of this cost relates to contributions in respect of each year from 1987-88 onwards and *(c)* the total cost to the national insurance fund of personal pension schemes and money purchase occupational schemes, respectively, in each year up to 1990-91.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to appendix 7 of the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Uprating Order 1990, and the Social Security (Contributions, Re-Rating) Order 1990 (Cm. 948) which was published yesterday. The number of people in contracted-out money purchase schemes is not known. Revenue forgone by the national insurance fund in 1988-89 in respect of personal pensions in 1987-88 was £289 million.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has as to the sex and age distribution of persons contracting out by means of personal pension schemes.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* The following information is based on a 1 per cent. sample of personal pension optants at a time when about 1·7 million applications had been processed. It relates to persons who paid some class 1 contributions for the year 1987-88 and who backdated a personal pension for that year. The table relates to the whole of the United Kingdom.

Age	*Male*	*Female*
16 to 19	121,300	93,100
20 to 24	309,000	199,100
25 to 29	271,700	110,700
30 to 34	125,200	46,600
35 to 39	184,100	60,600
40 to 44	138,100	21,900
45 to 49	4,800	500
TOTAL	1,154,200	532,500

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 January 1990

TRANSPORT

Radioactive Material

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the past 10 years, how many tonnes of radioactive material were *(a)* imported and *(b)* exported through the ports of (i) Barrow, (ii) Dover, (iii) Felixstowe, (iv) Harwich, (v) Liverpool (vi) Portsmouth, (vii) Southampton and (viii) Workington; and, in each case, what method of transport was used to convey the material to or from the port.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department does not collect this information, and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by year for the last 10 years *(a)* the sources and *(b)* the destinations, of radioactive material (i) imported and (ii) exported through the port of Immingham-Hull.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department does not collect this information on a routine basis and it can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for the publication of the safety requirements of the Channel tunnel design together with the supporting calculations.

Mr. Portillo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *45*, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *195*. The general characteristics of the Channel tunnel are specified in the concession agreement (Cmnd 9769). It is for Eurotunnel to prepare detailed designs and submit them for approval by the Channel tunnel intergovernmental commission. On safety matters, the commission is advised by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority, which has recently published its annual report for 1988-89. I understand that the authority intends to publish further reports in due course. The commission's recent decision on the non-segregation of passengers from their vehicles was accompanied by a number of binding safety requirements.

Light Rapid Transit Systems

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the current amount allocated for the development of light rapid transit systems for the financial year 1990-91, excluding London;

(2) what is the amount currently budgeted for allocation for the development of light rapid transit systems for the financial year 1991-92, excluding London.

Mr. Portillo: Total provision of about £50 million in 1990-91 and £40 million in 1991-92 has been made for the Manchester Metrolink project. No decisions have yet been taken on resource allocations for any other light rail schemes outside London.

Tamar Estuary Crossing

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends announcing details of the proposed study of a second road crossing of the Tamar estuary as outlined in his May 1989 "Roads for Prosperity" strategy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I aim to invite tenders this spring from consultants experienced in this kind of study. I shall make an announcement when an appointment has been made.

A27

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to construct a road of motorway standard north of the existing A27 in East Sussex.

Mr. Atkins: We have no present plans to do so but we are putting in place a major study into the need for an east-west strategic route running from Kent to Hampshire within a corridor between the M25 and the south coast.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy not to allow construction to begin on a new roundabout at the junction of the A27 and A26 at Beddingham until such time as a projected route has been announced for the proposed improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, and a full public consultation period has elapsed.

Mr. Atkins: No. Provision of this roundabout is considered good value for money in the medium term and will not pre-empt consideration of options for improving the A27.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy not to approve a final route for the A27 Folkington link until such time as a projected route has been announced for the proposed improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, and a full public consultation period has elapsed.

Mr. Atkins: The issue about which the hon. Member is concerned has been raised by others in the context of public consultation on our Folkington link proposals and will be considered before we decide how the matter should be taken forward. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide details of traffic flows along the A27 between *(a)* Lewes and Beddingham, *(b)* Beddingham and Alfriston and *(c)* Alfriston and Polegate for any of the last 15 years for which figures are available; and if he will indicate the division between HGV and other traffic.

Mr. Atkins: The annual average daily traffic flows for the years 1985 to 1988, for which information is readily available, were as follows. Percentages of heavy goods vehicles are shown in brackets:

	1985	1986	1987	1988
Lewes to Beddingham	17,500 (8·3 per cent.)	18,600 (8·3 per cent.)	18,800 (9·7 per cent.)	20,300 (9·6 per cent.)
Beddingham and Alfriston	11,600 (7·5 per cent.)	12,300 (7·4 per cent.)	12,700 (6·6 per cent.)	13,200 (10·3 per cent.)
Alfriston and Polegate	9,400 (9·2 per cent.)	10,000 (9·0 per cent.)	10,200 (7·9 per cent.)	11,000 (7·8 per cent.)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer in the *Official Report*, 16 January, column *154*, what the possible option identified by East Sussex county council involved with regard to *(a)* the dualling of the present A27 road, *(b)* the demolition of houses along the A27 and *(c)* the construction of a flyover.

Mr. Atkins: It is not our policy to release information from scheme identification studies in advance of public consultation. To do so could be misleading and cause unnecessary planning blight for which there might not be a satisfactory recourse under existing legislation.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last corresponded with East Sussex county council in respect of projected improvements to the A27; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: There is regular contact between my Department and East Sussex county council about our four major A27—and seven A259—schemes in addition to a number of other schemes in our regional programme.

Rear Seat Belts

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in which European Community states the installation of rear seat belts is mandatory; and from what date this took effect in each case.

Mr. Atkins: The table gives the available information on the mandatory fitment of rear seat belts in cars for each European Community member state.

Member state	*Rear belt requirement/Date*
Belgium	First registered from January 1987
Denmark	First registered from April 1989
France	First registered from October 1978
Federal Republic of Germany	First registered from May 1987
Greece	None
Italy	First registered from April 1990
Ireland	None
Luxembourg	First registered from 1988
Netherlands	First registered from January 1990
Portugal	First registered from January 1992
Spain	First registered from October 1990
United Kingdom	First registered from April 1987

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on the number of fatalities and injuries occurring in the United Kingdom if rear seat belts were worn in all vehicles.

Mr. Atkins: Our latest estimate is that if all rear seat car passengers wore seat belts, some 200 deaths and 9,000 injuries would be prevented each year.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current position of draft European Community legislation 9228/88; and when the wearing of rear seat belts will become mandatory.

Mr. Atkins: Member countries have not yet taken a decision on this Commission proposal. In the United Kingdom it is already mandatory for children to wear available rear restraints where appropriate for their use. In the case of adults we have no plans to introduce mandatory wearing before a sufficient proportion of cars has the equipment fitted as standard.

M40 (Widening)

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has considered responses to the environmental statement for the widening of the M40 motorway between High Wycombe and Stokenchurch; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: We have carefully considered the responses to the environmental statement issued on 15 September 1989 containing proposals for widening the M40 motorway. The Department has made various changes to the design of the scheme, in particular to take account of the interests of the environment in this attractive area. The improvements will make the best use of established planting and minimise the effects on wildlife. "Cut-off" lighting will be used to avoid unnecessary glare away from the highway. We shall be making full use of our discretionary powers to provide noise insulation for residential properties. The Department is about to invite tenders for the work.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Child Abuse

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had concerning the proposal by the National Association for Pastoral Care in Education to set up a national standing conference for educational responses to child abuse; and if he will made a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations.

Disabled Students' Allowance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce new proposals arising from the review of the disabled students' allowance.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend hopes to announce the outcome of his review of the disabled students' and other supplementary allowances in the spring, in time for any changes in the mandatory awards regulations to take effect from 1 September 1990.

European Parliament Reports

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the response of Her Majesty's Government to resolution A2-327/88 of the European Parliament on genetic engineering known as the

Rothley report and resolution A2-372/88 of the European Parliament on artificial insemination known as the Casini report.

Mr. Jackson: The Government have noted these resolutions, but have not responded.

National Curriculum

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to ensure that there are sufficient teachers to teach the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 12 December 1989 at column *553*.

Medical Research Council

Ms. Primarlo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to increase the budget allocation to the Medical Research Council for 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend announced his decision on the science budget allocations for 1990-91 including that for the Medical Research Council in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 10 January at columns *623-24*.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance is given by his Department as to supply teachers' salaries; whether local education authorities are required to pay supply teachers additional increments in accordance with years of service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Teachers employed on short-notice contracts are paid for the duration of each contract at the rate the LEA considers appropriate in the light of local needs and circumstances. In circular 12/89 the Department drew local education authorities' attention to the interim advisory committee's views on the dangers of setting a standard low point on the main scale and endorsed the suggestion of the IAC that such teachers should always be offered the opportunity of being involved in other duties as well as teaching pupils.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many letters he has received from parents of children with special learning difficulties, including dyslexia, on the issue of assessment and provision of statements under the Education Acts; and how many of these were in respect of children in Essex.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I regret that it is not possible to identify this information from the Department's records.

Alpha-rated Research

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what would have been the extra money required by each research council to have funded all the alpha-rated research projects in the financial year 1988-89; and how much money was spent by each research council on alpha-rated projects in that financial year.

Mr. Jackson: The additional amounts that would have been required to fund all alpha-rated research grant applications in the academic year 1988-89 were as follows:

	£ million
Agricultural and Food Research Council	0·3
Medical Research Council	17·9
Natural Environment Research Council	0·7
Science and Engineering Research Council	63·6
Economic and Social Research Council	5·0
	87·5

In the 1988-89 financial year the councils' spend on alpha-rated research projects was as follows:

	£ million
Agricultural and Food Research Council	9·1
Medical Research Council	44·5
Natural Environment Research Council	4·6
Science and Engineering Research Council	123·0
Economic and Social Research Council	4·3
	185·5

Student Loans Company

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in acquiring premises for the Student Loans Company, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor *[pursuant to his reply, 22 November 1989, column 5]:* The Student Loans Company Limited has reached agreement with landlords on the terms of a lease on premises at 100 Bothwell street in Glasgow. I have been requested by the landlords to guarantee the company's obligations under that lease. I have considered the lease and the terms of the guarantee requested. I have concluded that I should give such a guarantee in accordance with the departmental minute laid before Parliament on 22 November 1989 and have indicated to the Student Loans Company that I will do so.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the decision will be taken on the exact location in Glasgow of the headquarters for the Student Loans Company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the pursuant reply that my right hon. Friend gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). The headquarters of the Student Loans Company Limited will be at 100 Bothwell street, Glasgow.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Social Security

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases were heard by the social security commissioners in the last year for which statistics were available; how long on average each hearing took; and on what number of occasions the Department of Social Security and the appellant, respectively, was legally represented.

The Attorney-General: A total of 442 cases were heard by the social security commissioners in 1989. On average, each hearing took 2·25 hours. Statistics on the representation of parties are not kept.

Legal Aid

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General what arrangements will be made to obtain evidence and advice from the solicitors' profession on legal aid, for the purposes of the review of the financial conditions for legal aid announced on 13 November 1989.

The Attorney-General: The solicitors' profession will be consulted as appropriate for information and for its views.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what is his estimate of the percentage of the population now potentially eligible on income grounds for legal aid for non-matrimonial cases; what was the equivalent figure obtaining in 1979 and each successive year; and whether he will place a summary of relevant calculations of the data used in the Library;

(2) what progress has been made in the study of family expenditure survey data and the conclusions to be drawn from it in relation to eligibility for legal aid since his answer of 20 March 1989, *Official Report*, column *449*.

The Attorney-General: Estimates indicate that at present about 56 per cent. of the population is eligible on income grounds alone for civil legal aid in non-matrimonial cases. This estimate does not take account of the improvements announced on 13 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *3*, which will be introduced in April. It was based on data obtained from the family expenditure survey—in relation to income for each household type and deductions for housing costs, tax and national insurance payments and allowances for dependants—grossed up and uprated to current level equivalents through a computer model. Such calculations cannot be made for earlier years except at disproportionate cost.

Legal Advice and Assistance

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will take immediate steps substantially to increase the capital limit of £890 which applies to the legal advice and assistance green form scheme.

The Attorney-General: The capital limit for a single person for legal advice and assistance will be increased to £935 in April.

ENERGY

Nuclear Electricity

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of Nuclear Electric; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend has met the chairman of Nuclear Electric on a number of occasions to discuss aspects of the nuclear industry.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will set out those guarantees which were sought by the private sector in regard to nuclear stations in the negotiations over electricity privatisation.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 14 November 1989 at column *139*.

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to ensure that the operational expertise of the electricity supply industry in running its nuclear plants will be retained when the non-nuclear sector of the industry is privatised.

Mr. Baldry: Nuclear Electric will inherit all the CEGB's nuclear-related assets, expertise and support, including its expertise in health and safety. The chairman of Nuclear Electric has stated that safety is a paramount priority of Nuclear Electric.

Sellafield

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what payments have been made by his Department to British Nuclear Fuels plc over the past five years in regard to post-operational decommissioning work on facilities at Sellafield used to carry out contracts for his Department; what proportion of the work required arose from the pre-1971 period when Sellafield was operated by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority; and over what period of time negotiations were entered into over the payments for the work.

Mr. Baldry: None. My Department has no liabilities to British Nuclear Fuels plc for decommissioning.

"Energy Policy in the Greenhouse"

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to obtain a copy of the recently published study "Energy Policy in the Greenhouse" prepared by the international project for sustainable energy paths.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department already holds a copy of this study.

Waste Tips

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will make it his policy to promote methane extraction for useful energy generation of all controlled waste tips of over 1 million cu m of refuse;

(2) what is the most up-to-date estimate available to him of the minimum size, measured by cubic metres, of controlled household refuse tips, to sustain viable commercial methane extraction.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As I explained to the hon. Member in answer to his question of 18 January, my Department has a substantial programme to promote exploitation of methane from landfill sites. This work is not limited to sites with more than 1 million cu m of waste capacity. Landfill gas exploitation is being encouraged at all landfill sites containing a large proportion of biodegradable refuse providing such exploitation can be shown to be economic.

The minimum size of landfill sites for viable commercial methane extraction does not depend on volume alone. Factors such as locality of potential users are also important. For example, a small-scale greenhouse scheme could be supported by a site of only a few thousand cubic metres in volume. Hence, it would not be appropriate to suggest a minimum value, in terms of cubic metres of refuse on a landfill site, to sustain a viable extraction project.

Subsidence (Compensation)

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Scretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive British Coal's second annual report on its administration of the system for subsidence compensation and repair.

Mr. Baldry: I have today placed copies of this report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list for each local authority district the number of outstanding subsidence claims lodged with British Coal.

Mr. Wakeham: British Coal has no operational need to compile details of subsidence damage claims on a district council basis. Details of claims broken down by British Coal area are contained in British Coal's annual report to the Secretary of State for Energy. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary announced today in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), copies of the most recent report were today placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The provision of further information is a matter for British Coal.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list proposals for opencast working made by the Opencast Executive of British Coal to the appropriate planning authorities, giving the name, location and proposed capacity in each case'

(2) if he will list the applications for licences to operate opencast mines presently being considered by British Coal, giving the name, location and capacity in each case;

(3) if he will list the names, locations and capacities of each opencast mine being operated by the Opencast Executive of British Coal;

(4) if he will list the names, locations and capacities of each opencast mine being operated by a private company under licence from British Coal;

(5) on how many occasions in each of the past 10 years British Coal has withheld repayment of a bond it held from licensed opencast operators; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Wakeham: These are matters for the British Coal Corporation, and I have asked the chairman to reply to the hon. Member.

Fuel Exports and Imports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will now provide the information given in his answers of 9 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *767*, 19 December 1989, *Official Report*, columns *118-19* and 12 January, *Official Report*, columns *768-69*, relating to fuel exports and imports at 1990 constant prices.

Mr. Wakeham: I regret that the information requested (on the basis of 1990 constant prices) is not available. The procedure used to provide figures at 1985 constant prices in the previous answers referred to in the question was to apply the 1985 unit value for exports and imports to the relevant volumes for the years concerned. The equivalent export and import unit value figures for the whole of 1990 will not be available until February 1991 at the earliest.

Nuclear Power (Overseas Production)

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the examples of economic production of nuclear power abroad, referred to in his statement of 9 November 1989, *Official Report*, column 1182; and what information he possesses on how the cost of such nuclear electricity is calculated in each case.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend's remarks were informed by the IEA/NEA study "Projected costs of generating electricity from power stations for commissioning in the period 1995-2000", which gives information on the economics of nuclear power in a number of countries. The study will be published shortly.

PRIME MINISTER

Cults

Mr. Speller: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's mechanisms for the monitoring of cults in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: The Government are aware of the distress that can be caused to individuals and families as a result of involvement with certain cults, particularly where young people are concerned. Provided these groups operate within the law, however, it would not be right, in the Government's view, for us to place restraints on freedom of expression or freedom of religion and belief. Any evidence of illegal activities should be referred to the police who will take appropriate action.

The Government believe that the best way of dealing with these cults is through public exposure of their true nature. For this reason the Home Office has been providing start-up funding since October 1987 over three years for INFORM—Information Network Focus on Religious Movements. Its work is supported by the major churches. Under the terms of its grant, INFORM is required to produce a report annually on its activities. The report for the calendar year 1988 was received in May 1989, and the report for 1989 is expected in due course.

Student Loans

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to discuss the future of the scheme for student loans with the chairman of Barclays bank.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Prime Minister if she will dismiss the Secretary of State for Education and Science for his conduct in relation to the banks' decision to pull out of the student loan scheme; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. I was very disappointed that the banks decided to react to external pressure and withdrew from the memorandum of understanding with the Government to administer the student loans scheme. It is the students themselves who will now not have the benefit of access to the banks' branch networks to obtain the loans. But the banks' withdrawal does not affect in any way the objectives, principles or funding of the scheme. Preparatory work is well in hand.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government have any plans to take fiscal or other action against those banks which pulled out of the Government scheme for student loans; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government have expressed strong disappointment at the banks' withdrawal from the memorandum of understanding: at no stage has there been any question of action against the banks.

Hong Kong (Ivory Stocks)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister for what reasons responsibility for the Hong Kong ivory stock rests with the Foreign and Commonwealth office.

The Prime Minister: Matters related to the CITES Convention are the prime responsibility of the Department of the Environment. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is responsible for questions arising from the administration of Hong Kong as a dependent territory.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Footwear

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he intends to take to reduce the current imbalance of tariff and non-tariff barriers in footwear trade with *(a)* Thailand, *(b)* Brazil, *(c)* Australia, *(d)* India and *(e)* Japan.

Mr. Redwood: We and our Community partners fully support the objectives of the Uruguary round of multilateral trade negotiations in GATT, which include the specific aim of reduction or elimination by all participants of high tariffs and non-tariff measures.

The European Commission negotiates for the Community in GATT. It has details of all the concerns expressed to us by the United Kingdom footwear industry, and these will be carefully taken into account in formulating the Community's position in these negotiations.

Trade Surplus

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report*, a table showing in dollars for each year since 1985, and for 1989 to the latest available date at an annual rate, the trade surplus in manufactures and the balance of payments surplus for Japan, Germany, the United States of America and the United Kingdom with the world, the EEC and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: The available information is in the tables. Care should be exercised in comparing trade balances in manufactures with current account balances because of inconsistencies in valuation. The figures for 1989 relate to the periods shown because annualised figures can be unreliable as a guide to the outturn for the year.

Table 1
Trade balances in manufactures[1]

United States $ billion

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989 January to November*
Japan					
With:					
World	134·7	160·3	163·4	176	n/a
EC	12·7	20·1	22·7	27	n/a
United Kingdom	3·4	4·7	6·0	7	n/a
Federal Republic of Germany					
With:					
World	67·5	89·4	104·9	113	n/a
EC	24·5	38·1	50·6	60	n/a
United Kingdom	7·4	9·9	12·9	15	n/a
United States of America					
With:					
World	−112·9	−144·9	−152·1	−146	n/a
EC	−22·5	−29·0	−27·4	−20	n/a
United Kingdom	−1·3	−3·0	−1·9	—	n/a
United Kingdom					
With:					
World	−7·5	−11·8	−16·1	−30·8	−31·0
EC	−12·3	−15·9	−18·2	−23·9	−23·0

[1] Standard International Trade Classification, sections 5 to 8.
n/a—Not available.
Note: Imports valued inclusive of insurance and freight, exports valued exclusive.
Sources:
United Kingdom—Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.
Others—OECD except 1988 which are estimated from national sources.

Table 2
Balance of payments

US $ billion

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989 January to September*
Japan with:					
World	49·2	85·8	87·0	79·6	46·7
European Community	8·0	14·8	17·7	19·8	n.a.
United Kingdom	0·3	1·5	2·0	1·4	n.a.
Federal Republic of Germany with:					
World	15·2	35·2	45·1	48·5	44·4
European Community	−0·4	9·9	18·7	25·4	n.a.
United Kingdom	3·2	7·3	10·5	14·0	n.a.
United States of America with:					
World	−115·1	−133·2	−143·7	−126·5	−85·2
European Community	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
United Kingdom	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
United Kingdom with:					
World	4·2	0·1	−6·0	−26·0	−25·8
European Community	−4·1	−13·6	−21·0	−29·1	n.a.

n.a. = not available.
Sources: OECD and national statistics.

Accounting

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether he has asked the accountancy profession to develop any standard on price level accountancy;

(2) whether he has any plans to introduce a system of current value accounting for company accounts.

Mr. Redwood: The Government support the new accounting standards arrangements recommended by the Dearing committee in 1988, including the creation of a Financial Reporting Council and an Accounting Standards Board. In determining the work programme of the board, the council will no doubt take note of the existing commitment of the Accounting Standards Committee to explore effective means of developing a standard on accounting for the effects of changing prices.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy not to appoint inspectors from firms of accountants which have been criticised in inspectors' reports.

Mr. Redwood: No. My right hon. Friend will continue to appoint competent inspectors.

Export Services

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will supply figures for spending by his Department on export services, in constant prices, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: The following figures show gross and net expenditure by the Department on export services in constant price terms:

£ million (1979-80 prices)

Year	*Gross expenditure*	*Net expenditure*
1979-80	25·7	21·2
1980-81	19·5	15·8
1981-82	19·4	15·4
1982-83	21·0	16·6
1983-84	20·8	15·5
1984-85	[1]24·6	[1]18·8
1985-86	[2]24·6	[2]17·4
1986-87	24·6	15·5
1987-88	[3]23·4	[3]14·7
1988-89	[4]25·4	[4]16·6

[1] Expenditure on publicity and promotion was transferred from the COI budget with effect from 1984-85. On a constant price basis, the expenditure amounted to £1·4 million in 1984-85.

[2] Export Intelligence Service revenue was transferred to the exports budget from another DTI budget with effect from 1985-86. On a constant price basis this reduced net expenditure by £0·3 million in 1985-86.

[3] Includes expenditure on publications for the then Statistics and Market Intelligence Library previously treated as part of general library expenditure (value £0·2 million on a constant price basis).

[4] Figures for 1988-89 include grant-in-aid to the International Customs Tariff Bureau (value £0·038 million on a constant price basis), and the "New Products from Britain" service transferred from the FCO in the second half of the year (value £0·2 million on a constant price basis).

All figures have been converted using the implied GDP factor cost deflator.

Car Exports

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received assurances from each member state of the EEC that they will permit the import, without restriction, of cars produced in the United Kingdom by firms in Japanese ownership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The European Commission received an assurance from the French Government in April last year that cars produced in Sunderland by Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK Ltd. would be allowed to enter France without restriction and quite independently of the level of car imports into France from Japan.

No member state currently restricts in any way the import of cars produced in the United Kingdom.

The Commission has suggested that, during the transitional period over which it envisages that existing restrictions on imports of cars from Japan should be phased out, it may be necessary to take into account in some way the production of cars by Japanese-owned firms in the EC. The Government have made it clear that there is no question of the United Kingdom accepting any arrangement in which cars produced by Japanese-owned firms in the United Kingdom, or anywhere other than Japan, count towards ceilings on imports from Japan.

Japanese Car Imports

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the purpose of the voluntary restraint arrangement which limits Japanese car imports to 10·8 per cent. of the United Kingdom market; when it was introduced; and if he will now take steps to remove it.

Mr. Ridley: The voluntary restraint arrangement on imports of cars from Japan came into operation in 1975 following discussions between the vehicle industries of the United Kingdom and Japan.

The Government will consider the future of the arrangement within the context of Community-wide moves toward liberalisation of the European car market.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what restrictions are imposed on the import of Japanese cars by each member of the EEC; and if the EEC has any plans to remove these restrictions.

Mr. Ridley: In addition to the United Kingdom industry's arrangement, France has an unofficial limit on Japanese penetration of the market. There are formal quotas in Italy, Portugal and Spain. Although the Commission has not yet put forward detailed proposals, it envisages that restrictions should be phased out progressively over a transitional period which would extend beyond 1992.

Financial Services

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the directives on financial services which have been issued by the European Communities in the last year and the directives that are still required to be issued during the next six months to achieve a fair competitive environment in such services in the member countries.

Mr. Redwood: The second banking co-ordination directive, the solvency ratios directive, the own funds directive, the insider dealing directive, the bank branches directive and the prospectus directive have been adopted by the Council of Ministers in the last year.

The investment services directive, the life insurance services directive, the directive on the annual accounts of insurance undertakings, the motor insurance services directive, the third motor insurance directive and the mutual recognition directive (of stock exchange listing particulars) might be adopted by the end of 1990. The Commission has indicated its intention to submit to the Council of Ministers during 1990 texts of a capital adequacy directive for investment business, a non-life insurance framework directive and of a life insurance framework directive.

Adoption by Council of these further directives would represent important progress towards completion of the single market through a fair competitive environment in financial services. The investment services and insurance directives are especially important to British businesses wanting to do business on the continent of Europe.

Environmental Technology

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to meet the Ministers for Planning and the Environment of the Soviet Union to discuss opportunities for the sale of environmental clean-up and pollution abatement technology developed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is planning to visit the Soviet Union in the near future and will discuss all the main commercial opportunities available with Soviet Ministers during his visit.

Consumer Protection

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has indicating the percentage of the population supporting a change in legislation to strengthen consumer protection.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* No such information is available.

Consumer Guarantees

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations he has received from bodies opposed to the definition of a consumer guarantee in legislation; and how many of these bodies did not give evidence on the subject to the National Consumer Council.

Mr. Forth: A formal public consultation exercise has not been undertaken, but, following publication of the National Consumer Council report "The Consumer Guarantee", representations have been made both for and against the proposed overall approach and on various detailed aspects. It would be inappropriate to quantify the bodies involved in the same way as it would be to name them, since their views have been expressed in confidence.

Juno Project

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will outline progress in raising funds for the Juno project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 19 January 1990:]* The Juno project is being financed entirely by the private sector. While I wish it every success, Her Majesty's Government are not a sponsor and the hon. Member will need to seek the information he wishes from the project organisers.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Brazilian Rain Forests

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the visit to Brazil of Dr. Synott of the Oxford Forestry

Institute in November/December 1989, to discuss details of projects in sustainable forestry management and genetic resources of forests; and when such projects are likely to begin.

Mrs. Chalker: During this visit a number of possible projects were discussed with Brazilian institutions. These included the Tapajos forest management project, a tropical forest research project, a project to assist biological research in the Ducke reserve and a Varzea (floodplain forest) management study. Project proposals are currently being prepared for ODA consideration which will need to be cleared with the Brazilian Government. Implementation of these projects could begin in the second quarter of this year. Proposals for further projects are awaited from Brazil.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether work has begun on the joint five-year project by Brazilian scientific institutions and the Institute of Hydrology to improve knowledge of the critical effect of rainforests on climate; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have submitted a detailed proposal for this project to the Brazilian Government for their agreement. While we understand that the proposal is generally acceptable to the Government, we still await confirmation of their agreement to proceed. We hope to receive this within the next few weeks, in time to allow the participating institutions to start the first field season in July as planned.

Cambodia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Cambodia by officials of the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: During their visit to Cambodia officials identified a number of areas for potential ODA support, in co-operation with British non-governmental organisations and multilateral agencies. These included priority sectors such as food production, primary education and health care. There are also increasing opportunities for NGOs to extend their activities beyond Phnom Penh into the provinces. Severe skill shortages among Cambodians could be alleviated by the provision of volunteer experts (VSO) and by appropriate technical training. The ODA is actively discussing possible projects with the NGOs. In addition, as I announced in answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 8 January, I am making available a further £1 million to multilateral agencies for their programmes inside Cambodia in 1990-91.

Ethiopia

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest situation on the famine in Ethiopia; and what steps the Government have taken to alleviate starvation.

Mrs. Chalker: The international relief effort continues to be hampered by the civil conflict in northern Ethiopia. The most pressing need is to secure free access for relief supplies across the battle lines. We have been active in recent diplomatic efforts to try and secure this. It was reported on 18 January that agreement had been reached between the Ethiopian Government and the joint relief partnership of local church organisations on the necessary arrangements, but further details are awaited. We are meanwhile continuing to provide food and other emergency aid via British non-governmental organisations. The total value of our food and emergency aid in 1989 was nearly £18·5 million, including our share of the cost of assistance provided by the European Community.

Aid

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the proportion of gross national product given in aid by British Governments to developing countries, excluding commercial aid packages, in 1975, 1978, 1983, 1985 and 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: The aid and trade provision has been an integral part of Britain's aid programme since its inception. However, excluding aid reported to the development assistance committee of the OECD under the heading "Grants and Loans included in Associated Financing Packages", the figures are:

	per cent.
1975	[1]0·35
1978	0·45
1983	0·33
1985	0·31

[1] No associated financing was reported in 1975. The figure for 1989 is not yet available.

Britain's bilateral aid programme finances sound development projects and programmes of benefit to the recipient country. The bulk of it is tied to the procurement of British goods and services.

Forestry

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what visits he plans to make in order to evaluate the effectiveness of Britain's support for sustainable forestry projects.

Mrs. Chalker: I plan to visit East Africa and India in the spring. I expect to discuss our ongoing and planned forestry assistance during both these visits. The subject will also be covered during other visits later in the year.

WALES

Uniform Business Rate

14. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the overall expected change in rateable values in Wales as a result of the publication of the provisional list of revised valuations for the uniform business rate.

Mr. Peter Walker: Rateable value of business properties in Wales have increased by a factor of 8·4 overall.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the operation of the uniform business rate in Wales and its effect upon small business.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received a number of representations.

Rechem

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a further statement on the arrangements for the incineration of toxic waste at the Rechem plant.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend has been assured by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution that the plant is operating to current requirements.

Welsh Language Board

19. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what reponse he has made to the proposals of the Welsh Language Board for a new Welsh Language Act.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend is considering the proposals.

River Pollution

20. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from bodies concerned about river pollution in *(a)* Clwyd and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Grist: We have received a number of representations from organisations through Wales.

Health Authorities

21. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet the chairmen of the health authorities; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Grist: The date and agenda for the next meeting have not yet been agreed.

Ambulance Service

22. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives of the ambulance services in Wales; and when he plans to meet them again.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend met a group of ambulance men during a visit to Merthyr on 7 November, while I talked to members of the Clwyd service in December. There are no plans for any further meetings.

Water Privatisation

23. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the shares in the recently privatised Welsh Water share flotation was allocated to applicants resident in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on Tuesday 19 December.

Ronald Greedy

25. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the decision to transfer Ronald Greedy to Whitchurch hospital, the basis on which he was accommodated, the physical security arrangements and his subsequent escape.

Mr. Grist: My officials have already instituted inquiries of the district health authority into the discharge of the conditions which attached to Mr. Greedy's transfer to Whitchurch hospital. I shall write to my hon. Friend when I have considered its advice.

Batteries and Accumulators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps his Department has taken to promote research aimed a reducing the dangerous substance content and increasing the use of less-polluting substitute substances in batteries and accumulators, and into methods of recycling;

(2) what steps his Department has taken to reduce the volume of spent batteries and accumulators in household waste.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the replies given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs on Friday 19 January, at column *444*.

North Wales Initiative

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors changed during the previous six months which led him to announce his new north Wales initiative in early December.

Mr. Peter Walker: I announced in the Welsh Grand Committee in December 1988 that I had asked the Minister of State to discuss with local authorities and other bodies in north Wales how the opportunities presented by the upgrading of the A55 could best be grasped. These discussions resulted in the document "A55 —The Road of Opportunity" which sets out the developments which will take place in the next few years and indicates the decisions and activities required to maximise the potential brought by the road. As I said to the hon. Gentleman in my answer on 26 May a formal initiative for north Wales is unnecessary as existing mechanisms are adequate to allow continued improvement.

National Museum of Wales

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1989 reported by the National Museum of Wales, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1988.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: A total of 482,080 people visited the National Museum of Wales during 1989—42 per cent. fewer than the attendance reported for 1988. The difference is largely accounted for by the lower recorded numbers at the main Cathays park museum and, in this connection, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Members for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 6 November 1989. The transfer of responsibility for the former national museum outstation, Yr Hen Gapel, Tre'r Ddol, from 1 January 1989 has also affected the totals.

Local Government

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons are employed in Welsh local government and what were the corresponding figures for 1970 and 1980.

Mr. Peter Walker: The numbers of persons employed in Welsh local government in 1980 and 1989 are shown in the table. Corresponding information is not available for 1970.

Number of employees as at September

	1980	*[1]1989*
Full-time	107,135	99,108
Part-time	46,646	55,670
Total full-time equivalents	126,100	121,753

[1] Provisional.

Out-patient Clinics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what number of patients in each county in Wales had to travel distances of *(a)* over 10 miles, *(b)* over 20 miles and *(c)* over 30 miles in order to attend hospital out-patient clinics in 1988 and 1989;

(2) what percentage of patients in each county in Wales had to travel distances of *(a)* over 10 miles, *(b)* over 20 miles and *(c)* over 30 miles in order to attend hospital out-patient clinics in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Grist: The information is not available centrally.

Chernobyl

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* holdings and *(b)* sheep, remain subject to post-Chernobyl movements and sale restrictions in north Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: Approximately 416 holdings and 300,000 sheep.

Radiation Monitoring

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) whether his Department has received any correspondence from the Friends of the Earth's radiation monitoring unit about post-Chernobyl contamination in north Wales; and if he will make a statement.

(2) whether his Department will review its sheep monitoring programme in the derestricted area between Bala and Lake Vyrnwy.

Mr. Grist: No correspondence has been received by the Department from the Friends of the Earth's radiation monitoring unit about its recent report about post-Chernobyl contamination in north Wales.

The area between Bala and Lake Vyrnwy referred to in the report was derestricted in 1986 and monitoring then and subsequently has shown that radiation levels in sheep are well within the action level of 1,000 bq/kg.

Llanelli General Hospital

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the new Llanelli general hospital will open.

Mr. Grist: East Dyfed health authority advises that, on current programming expectations, the new Llanelli hospital should be open for out-patients at the end of February 1990 and for in-patients towards the end of April 1990.

Family Practitioner Committees

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the general managers of family practitioners committees, their qualifications and their date of appointment.

Mr. Grist: All eight family practitioner committees have now appointed general managers. The table indicates the dates on which appointments were or are to be taken up.

Family Practitioner Committee	*General Manager*	*Date of Appointment*
Gwent	Mr. H. T. Watkins	10 November 1989
Gwynedd	Mr. R. A. Thomas	10 November 1989
Mid Glamorgan	Mr. M. V. Jenkins	1 January 1990
Powys	Mr. R. G. T. Phillips	10 November 1989
South Glamorgan	Mr. B. A. Ruddy	10 November 1989
West Glamorgan	Mr. G. Plunkett	1 December 1989
Clwyd	Mr. C. N. Last	1 May 1990
Dyfed	Mr. J. P. French	1 May 1990

Information about the academic, professional or other qualifications of individual general managers is a matter for each family practitioner committee as the employing body.

Wages Councils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to meet the statutory wages councils to discuss the rates of pay set for categories of workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. Statutory wages councils are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Cerebral Palsy

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has commissioned to investigate the causes of cerebral palsy.

Mr. Grist: None, but results of research funded by the Department of Health are available to Wales.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department is taking to monitor trends in cerebral palsy.

Mr. Grist: The Welsh Office does not maintain a central statistical record of the incidence of this condition.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of children born in Wales, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available, who have been diagnosed as having cerebral palsy.

Mr. Grist: Cerebral palsy is not necessarily diagnosed at birth, so information on the number of children born in Wales each year and diagnosed with this condition is not available centrally.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has received any representations from teachers in West Glamorgan about the county council's policy of reducing the salary of supply teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Representations have been received from the West Glamorgan supply teachers' association. The pay of supply teachers is a matter for local education authorities to decide in the light of local circumstances and within the guidelines we have issued. LEAs have discretion to pay supply teachers at any point on the main scale provided that it is no lower than the minimum entitlement appropriate to the teachers' qualifications.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1989 reported by the Ulster museum, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1989 a total of 270,100 people visited the Ulster museum and the Armagh county museum—a decrease of 24 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1988.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Electoral Registration

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to amend the electoral registration form A so that persons registering can indicate if they are willing for the information to be available for sale by the registering authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 15 January at column *27*.

Replica Firearms

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ban the advertising, importation and sale of replica firearms in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The sale in England and Wales of any replica gun which can be readily converted to fire live ammunition is, under the Firearms Act 1982, subject to the same stringent controls as those imposed on actual firearms by the Firearms Acts 1968 and 1988. In addition, it is already an offence to use an imitation firearm to commit a crime or resist arrest the maximum penalty for which is life imprisonment.

Advertising on independent television and radio is, under the Broadcasting Act 1981, the responsibility of the Independent Broadcasting Authority. The authority has a duty to draw up and maintain a code of advertising standards and practice, and from time to time to consult me about the kind of advertisements which must not be broadcast. My right hon. and learned Friend has no power to take such a decision unilaterally. However the policy of independent television and radio companies is not to accept advertising for firearms whether replica or otherwise. Advertising in other media is a matter for the Advertising Standards Authority.

The importation of imitation firearms is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

We have no plans to introduce further controls on the sale of replica firearms in England and Wales.

Responsibility for firearms legislation elsewhere in the United Kingdom rests with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Football Safety

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *789*, to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, when he now expects to write with further details about the Middlesbrough-Leeds United game on Sunday 9 December, and whether the reply will refer to any safety agreement between Middlesbrough football club and Cleveland police.

Mr. John Patten: I hope to be able to write to the hon. Member within the next few days. I do not think that I can usefully comment in advance on what the letter will say.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the earliest date after which the men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings will be eligible for parole.

Mr. Mellor: Life sentence prisoners are not eligible for parole, but may be released on life licence at the discretion of the Home Secretary if this is recommended by the Parole Board. In accordance with our policy that no life sentence prisoner should be detained for more than 17 years without an independent review, consideration of these cases will begin in November 1991. However, such a review does not necessarily mean that the board will recommend release or that my right hon. and learned Friend would accept such a recommendation if it were made.

Mr. John Stalker

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute an independent judicial inquiry, with full powers to compel witnesses to attend and give evidence, into the circumstances surrounding those matters concerning Mr. John Stalker, the former deputy chief constable of the Greater Manchester police, and Mr. Kevin Taylor, and into the wider implications of those matters.

Mr. Waddington: I see no grounds for instituting a judicial inquiry into matters relating to Mr. John Stalker or Mr. Kevin Taylor as a result of the failure of the recent prosecution of Mr. Taylor. It will be for the chief constable of Greater Manchester to consider whether the proceedings indicate any misconduct on the part of officers of his force and if so to institute appropriate disciplinary or criminal investigation.

Video Surveillance

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to change the regulations governing video surveillance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans, at present, to change the guidelines on the use of equipment in police surveillance operations. Our information is that the guidelines work well and that the police service accept that they provide a clear statement of operational policy, with strict safeguards for the public. In the absence of evidence of abuse of the use of video surveillance, we have no plans to introduce regulations governing its general use.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about concessionary television licences for retirement pensioners.

Mr. Mellor: In 1989 we received 212 letters and four petitions calling for reduced price or free television licences for pensioners. One hundred and one of the letters were from hon. Members and three of the petitions were submitted through them.

Efficiency Scrutiny

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he hopes to publish the efficiency scrutiny into Government funding for the voluntary sector.

Mr. John Patten: The question of publication is at present under consideration.

Crime and Compensation

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time between a crime and compensation being paid to the victim; and how many cases remain to be resolved as at 31 December 1989.

Mr. John Patten: On 31 December 1989, a total of 96,177 cases were awaiting resolution by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. The board does not keep information on the interval between the dates of an incident and the application for compensation. Information about the proportion of cases resolved within certain times of application is given in the board's latest annual report (Cm. 900).

Entry Clearance

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* spouses and *(b)* children were awaiting entry clearance as at 30 November 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is available only for the Indian sub-continent, where 5,800 spouses and 4,300 children were awaiting a decision on their application for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom at 30 November 1989.

Drugs

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of seizures of illicit drugs occurs at British ports of entry.

Mr. Mellor: Seizures at ports and airports from persons, luggage, private vehicles and freight, and from ships and aircraft, represented about 7 per cent. of a total of 38,235 seizures of controlled drugs in the United Kingdom in 1988. Such seizures are, however, often of large amounts: in 1988, port seizures accounted by weight for 76 per cent. of the cocaine, 55 per cent. of the heroin, 12 per cent. of the amphetamines and 87 per cent. of the cannabis seized in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the ports of arrival in Britain and state *(a)* the street value, *(b)* amount and *(c)* type of each drug seized in every month for 1989.

Mr. Ryder: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that this information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Juvenile Crime

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from magistrates concerning juvenile crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: In the past 12 months the Magistrates Association and individual magistrates have made representations about various matters relating to juvenile crime and juvenile offenders. These include parental responsibility, cautioning, remands, suspended custodial sentences, custodial sentences for girls and the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.

Computer Crime

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that regional police forces have adequate resources to deal with computer crime.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The allocation of resources to particular forms of crime is an operational matter for chief officers. However, over the last 10 years we have approved 6,800 additional police officer posts for provincial police forces.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on the Government's plans for legislation on Sunday trading in the light of recent representations from the public and retail trade.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 17 January 1990 at column *266*.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the recent higher than average increases in crime statistics in *(a)* South Yorkshire and *(b)* Barnsley.

Mr. John Patten: Two hon. Members have recently tabled questions on aspects of crime in South Yorkshire. The Department has received many other representations about crime levels. Some of these relate to crime in particular areas, including South Yorkshire.

Video Recordings Act

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he collects on the number of *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions, for contravention of the Video Recordings Act.

Mr. Mellor: Information is collected from the police on all defendants proceeded against under the Video Recordings Act 1984 and the result of these prosecutions. In 1988, 27 defendants were prosecuted under the Act and 17 convicted. Information for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

DNA Testing

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is proposed to start the DNA testing scheme for applicants for settlement in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on 27 November at column *108*.

Prisons (New Technology)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons in England and Wales that have and use a fax machine or a computer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: All prisons in England and Wales have computers and 77 also have fax facilities. The prison service aims to improve IT support for the achievement of its objectives.

Mail Bags

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons in England and Wales still have inmates working on the sewing of mail bags; and how many inmates were doing this work on 5 January.

Mr. Mellor: On 5 January 1990 there were 715 inmates employed in the manufacture of mail bags, in the following establishments.:

Acklington
Birmingham
Bristol
Canterbury
Camp Hill
Gartree
Gloucester
Haverigg
Hull
Lancaster
Leeds
Liverpool
Manchester
Oxford
Preston
Stafford
Swaleside
Swansea
Wandsworth

Prisons (Recruitment and Training)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will next meet the officers of the Prison Officers Association to discuss recruitment and training.

Mr. Mellor: Recruitment and training were among the wide range of subjects discussed when my right hon. and learned Friend met the chairman and general secretary of the Prison Officers Association on 18 December. These matters also regularly arise when my right hon. and learned Friend and I meet local branches of the POA in the normal course of visiting prisons. Recruitment and training issues are regularly discussed with the POA at official level within Whitley council procedures.

Policing, Newham

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of policing the London borough of Newham in 1984-85; and what it is expected to be in the current year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is not available on the actual cost of policing individual boroughs. However, the estimated local manpower costs, increased by 30 per cent. to reflect non-manpower and central service costs, suggests a figure of £22·9 million is the cost of policing Newham in the current year. The data to produce a similiar estimate for 1984-85 are not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has undertaken regarding the consequential numbers of immigrants into the United Kingdom following the grant of the right of settlement in the United Kingdom to an immigrant from the New Commonwealth.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the Immigration Rules (HC 388) a person settling here may normally be accompanied or joined by his or her spouse and any children under 18 but other relatives are admitted only in strictly limited circumstances. The available information on immigration patterns from New Commonwealth and other countries is published in the Home Office volume "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1988" (Cm. 726). More detailed information is collected for the Indian sub-continent and published in "Home Office Statistical Bulletin" issue 44/89 "Immigration from the Indian sub-continent—1988". Copies of both publications are in the Library.

Hong Kong

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Hong Kong citizens will be eligible for British citizenship under the British Nationality Act, section 4(5) in return for rendering Crown services.

Mr. Waddington *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* There are currently some 180,000 Hong Kong British dependent territories citizens in Crown service under the Government of Hong Kong who are eligible to apply for discretionary registration as British citizens under section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981. An unknown additional number are eligible on the basis of past service. In accordance with the policy announced when the British Nationality Act was before Parliament, the limited powers under this provision are used sparingly.

Apart from a number of former members of the armed services in respect of whom certain assurances were given, there have been 540 applications from Hong Kong under section 4(5) since it came into force, of which nine have been granted. In view of the special scheme recently announced, I have no plans to change the policy within which section 4(5) applications are considered.

EMPLOYMENT

Jobcentres

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement regarding the future of jobcentres in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *614*. When decisions are taken about the future of offices in Doncaster and Mexborough he will be informed.

Labour Statistics

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed claimants since 9 October 1989, and for each region, and for Great Britain as a whole, have been *(a)* issued with warning letters for not actively seeking work, *(b)* had their claims referred to an AO for not actively seeking work, *(c)* had their claims allowed or disallowed and *(d)* have been referred to an AO for refusing suitable employment; and how many of those in *(d)* have had their benefits disqualified.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows the statistical information for the period 9 October to 24 November 1989 on questions of actively seeking employment and refusal of employment.

National monthly return—Actively seeking referrals and disallowances
Refusal of employment referrals and disqualifications
Period ending 24 November 1989

Regions	*Actively seeking employment*			*Refusal of employment*		
	Claimants issued warning letters	*Claims referred to adjudication officer*	*Allowed*	*Disallowed*	*Claims referred to adjudication officer*	*Not Disqualified*	*Disqualified*
Northern	293	24	1	4	17	3	9
Yorkshire and Humberside	337	47	1	5	49	5	0
East Midlands and Eastern	318	39	21	2	55	2	7
London and South East	1,704	261	31	20	340	15	23
South West	350	58	8	12	26	1	1
Wales	384	61	3	8	30	4	4
West Midlands	319	33	5	0	43	10	0
North West	562	40	11	5	28	3	7
Scotland	553	30	7	3	26	5	2
National	4,820	593	88	59	614	48	53

Form UB672

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will instruct his officers to give claimants a copy of the UB672 form in cases where there are doubts about an unemployed claimant's availability for work or whether he is actively seeking work at a Restart or any other counselling interview, if the claimant or their representatives requests it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: If a UB672 has been completed because of doubts that the claimant is available for work or actively seeking it, current instructions provide that claimants or their representatives may receive a copy of the form on request at any time.

Employment and Training Schemes

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the participants in his training schemes and special employment measures referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 14 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *148 (a)* went on to get regular employment and *(b)* have started for a second or subsequent time.

Mr. Nicholls: Information on the number who went on to regular employment after attending a training opportunities scheme (TOPS) in 1979-80 is set down in the Manpower Services Commission's annual report 1980-81 filed in the House of Commons Library.

Of the young people on YTS in 1988-89, 66·8 per cent. were in regular employment three months after completing their programme.

In the period April 1988 to March 1989, 12 per cent. re-entered YTS.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the total expenditure on Government training schemes since 1972 at current and at 1989 prices; and what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the expenditure.

Mr. Nicholls: Records are kept on the basis of the standard financial year for Government expenditure, which runs from 1 April to 31 March.

The Manpower Services Commission was established in 1974. The total spent on training schemes since 1974 by the Employment Department Group Training Agency (and its predecessors, the Training Commission and the Manpower Services Commission) is as follows:

£ millions

	cash value	*constant 1988-89 prices*
1974-75	96·4	376·1
1975-76	171·7	525·2
1976-77	256·0	682·9
1977-78	292·0	693·4
1978-79	373·6	793·6
1979-80	451·4	848·8
1980-81	560·4	889·0
1981-82	749·1	1,080·8
1982-83	868·5	1,169·2
1983-84	1,049·5	1,337·5
1984-85	1,144·1	1,382·8
1985-86	1,256·9	1,441·7
1986-87	1,441·4	1,609·8
1987-88	1,613·1	1,716·4
1988-89	2,062·3	2,062·3

The figures shown at constant 1988-89 prices were calculated by use of the GDP deflator index.

Figures are inclusive of expenditure on the following programmes:
Training for the Needs of Industry.
Training for the Needs of Individuals.
Improving Training Effectiveness and Efficiency.
Training Opportunities Scheme.
Skillcentre Training.
Youth Opportunities Programme.
Occupational Training.
Adult Training.
Industrial Training Organisations.
Technical and Vocational Education Initiative.
Non Advanced Further Education.
Youth Training Scheme.
Scientific and Technical Equipment in Schools (STEPS).
Employment Training and all related administration costs net of receipts.

Figures are taken from the appropriation accounts for all years except 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 for which appropriation accounts do not provide the necessary detail. For those three years the Training Commission annual report has been used.

This growth in expenditure has been taking place at a time of rising unemployment as the economy adjusts to the demands of international competitiveness. Training schemes have provided unemployed school leavers and adults with the skills necessary to assist them back to work and help the economy.

The value for money of training schemes is monitored carefully. Cost-effectiveness will be a key aspect in the development of training and enterprise councils, when payments will be increasingly geared to the achievement of specific results.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* those travel-to-work areas which have an unemployment rate of 4 per cent. and less.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available from the Library and is contained in the following table.

Unemployed claimants as a percentage of the total workforce
December 1989
(Not seasonally adjusted)

Travel-to-work areas	*Percentage rate*
Crawley	1·2
Winchester and Eastleigh	1·4
Tunbridge Wells	1·4
Newbury	1·6
Andover	1·6
Aylesbury and Wycombe	1·6
Guildford and Aldershot	1·6
Blandford	1·7
Cirencester	1·7
Basingstoke and Alton	1·7
Bury St. Edmonds	1·7
Reading	1·8
Cambridge	1·8
Bicester	1·9
Kendal	1·9
Clitheroe	2·0
Evesham	2·0
Woodbridge and Leiston	2·0
Oxford	2·0
Chichester	2·0
Windermere	2·0
Slough	2·1
Settle	2·1
Penrith	2·2
Devizes	2·3
Welshpool	2·3
Skipton	2·3
Harrogate	2·3
Chippenham	2·4
Chelmsford and Braintree	2·4
Kettering and Market Harborough	2·4
Hertford and Harlow	2·4
Worthing	2·4
Milton Keynes	2·5
Heathrow	2·5
Warwick	2·5
Malton	2·6
Watford and Luton	2·6
Bedford	2·6
Ripon	2·6
Leek	2·6
Northallerton	2·6
Pickering and Helmsley	2·6
Haverhill	2·6
Northampton	2·7
Shaftesbury	2·7
Hitchin and Letchworth	2·7
Cheltenham	2·7
Newtown	2·8
Wellingborough and Rushden	2·8
Salisbury	2·8
Macclesfield	2·8
Newmarket	2·8
Diss	2·8
Wareham and Swanage	2·8
Eastbourne	2·8
Chard	2·8
Stamford	2·8
Stafford	2·9
Trowbridge and Frome	2·9
Swindon	2·9
Ipswich	2·9
Huntingdon and St. Neots	2·9
Banbury	2·9
Melton Mowbray	3·0
Brecon	3·0
Matlock	3·0
South Molton	3·0
Stroud	3·0
Uttoxeter and Ashbourne	3·0
Rugby and Daventry	3·1
Ludlow	3·1
Pools	3·1
Honiton and Axminster	3·1

Travel-to-work areas	*Percentage rate*
Yeovil	3·1
Spalding and Holbeach	3·1
Wells	3·2
Taunton	3·2
Colchester	3·2
Aberdeen	3·2
Shetland Islands	3·2
Bath	3·3
Shrewsbury	3·3
Warminster	3·3
Ashford	3·3
Malvern and Ledbury	3·3
Exeter	3·3
Beccles and Halesworth	3·4
Sudbury	3·4
Gloucester	3·4
Loughborough and Coalville	3·4
Worcester	3·4
Carmarthen	3·5
Buxton	3·5
Sleaford	3·5
Bridport	3·5
Kidderminster	3·5
Grantham	3·5
Okehampton	3·6
Tiverton	3·6
Hexham	3·6
Whitchurch and Market Drayton	3·6
Galashiels	3·6
Fakenham	3·6
Hereford and Leominster	3·7
Torrington	3·7
Norwich	3·7
Medway and Maidstone	3·8
Thirsk	3·8
Llandrindod Wells	3·8
Llandeilo	3·8
Thetford	3·9
Gosport and Fareham	3·9
Richmondshire	3·9
Stoke	4·0
Bournemouth	4·0
Newton Abbot	4·0

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many travel-to-work areas in *(a)* England and *(b)* south-east England has an unemployment rate of (i) over 10 per cent., (ii) between 5 and 10 per cent. and (iii) below 5 per cent. in October, November and December 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available from the Library, and is contained in the following table.

Numbers of travel-to-work areas, categorised by unemployment rate[1]

South-East	*below 5 per cent.*	*5-10 per cent.*	*over 10 per cent.*
October	33	6	0
November	33	6	0
December	33	6	0
England			
October	147	73	8
November	146	74	8
December	140	79	9

[1] Work force rates, not seasonally adjusted

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has concerning the impact on people's earnings of not receiving statutory sick pay or sick benefit for the first three days of any absence from work due to illness.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available.

Private Mines

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *67*, which of the prosecutions listed followed *(a)* an accident and *(b)* routine inspections by the mines inspectorate.

Mr. Nicholls: Prosecutions at Ystrad, Lassodie, Saline, Darran, Hall of Auchincross, Wrytree Drift and Robin Rock mines followed accidents. Prosecutions at Dan-y-Graig and Nantmelyn were the result of inspections.

Research Projects

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research projects are currently being carried out under total or partial sponsorship of his Department; by whom they are being carried out; and when they will be completed and published.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* Because of the amount of information sought, I will be writing to the hon. Member.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in which 20 parliamentary constituencies the largest percentage fall in unemployment occurred in the last 12 months.

Mr. Nicholls *[pursuant to his reply, 12 January, c. 783]:* I regret that the information given in my reply of 12 January was incorrect due to problems caused by a mistake in operating the computer system from which the data were extracted. The correct information is contained in the following table. The figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Percentage change in the number of unemployed over the year to November 1989

Constituency name	*per cent.*
Montgomery	−48·7
Westmorland and Lonsdale	−45·0
South Derbyshire	−40·3
Harrow West	−40·2
Amber Valley	−39·8
Newcastle-under-Lyme	−39·3
North Wiltshire	−39·2
Stoke-on-Trent North	−39·2
Stratford-on-Avon	−38·7
Harrow East	−38·5
Old Bexley and Sidcup	−38·5
Devizes	−38·3
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	−38·1
Kincardine and Deeside	−37·9
South Worcestershire	−37·5
West Hertfordshire	−37·5
Hornchurch	−37·5
Grantham	−37·5

Constituency name	per cent.
Wyre Forest	−37·3
Mid-Staffordshire	−37·2

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chemical Weapons

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any recent representations from the International Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers' Unions concerning the development of verification techniques for a chemical weapons ban.

Mr. Waldegrave: Not directly. A report of chemical weapons prepared jointly by the International Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers' Unions and the International Confederation of Trade Unions was forwarded last October by the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress.

Romania

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during the visit of the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) to Romania, he raised the issues of *(a)* the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference and nuclear technology aid available under article IV of the treaty and *(b)* acid rain abatement technology available from United Kingdom suppliers for retro-fitting to fossil fuel power plants.

Mr. Waldegrave: Neither of these matters were raised though doubtless both will be as our relations develop. I did discuss Romania's acute environmental problems, in particular with members of the new Romanian Ecology party.

Hong Kong

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 11 January, column *697*, who gave the authorisation for force to be used against the boat people in Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: Authority to use the minimum degree of force necessary during the operation to search for weapons in the Chi Ma Wan detention centre on Lantau island on 29 December 1989 was given by Police General Orders 29-01, made by the Commissioner of Police under section 46 of the Police Force Ordinance.

112. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made in the House on 17 January at col. 291.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what level of secondary immigration he would anticipate to arise from primary immigration of 225,000 on the basis of past experience.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 12 January 1990]*. I have been asked to reply.

Experience in other contexts cannot be a basis for assessing the implications of the scheme to grant British citizenship to people in Hong Kong in a unique arrangement intended to give beneficiaries the confidence to remain there.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what time, on what day and by what means the Swiss Government were informed of the British Government's decision to enter an exemption to the ivory ban on behalf of Hong Kong; and when the CITES Secretariat learnt of the decision.

Mr. Waldegrave: The reservation was deposited with the Government of the Swiss Confederation at 10 am on Wednesday 17 January by the delivery of diplomatic notes to the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Berne and to the embassy of Switzerland in London. Notification of our decision was faxed to the CITES Secretariat by the Department of the Environment at 4.50 pm on 17 January.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with representatives of the ivory trade during his recent visit to Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: None.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has received during the last three months regarding the fate of the Hong Kong ivory stocks.

Mr. Waldegrave: We received a number of representations over the past three months, both in favour and against the entering of a reservation on behalf of Hong Kong. We took all these into consideration. We received no formal representations from other countries.

Eastern Europe

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the proposal by the Hansard Society to establish, through moneys made available in the know-how funds, a course for politicians from Poland and Hungary to learn about the British parliamentary system.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have received various proposals for training courses for politicians from Poland and Hungary to be financed by the know-how funds. We are evaluating all such proposals with a view to tailoring them to Polish and Hungarian requirements. We have recently received more specific requests from the Polish Senate for training on several aspects of the United Kingdom system: parliamentary, legal, political and administrative and educational.

The Hansard Society will be involved in organising seminars to meet these requests along with the IPU, the Great Britain Eastern European Centre, the British Council, and other appropriate bodies.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial assistance and other advice he is considering offering to the Government of Yugoslavia to aid their efforts to broaden democracy and achieve economic stability.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have been helping the Yugoslavian economy by participating in the rescheduling of the principal and interest due on debts in the Paris Club. We believe that a new agreement with the IMF will be of central importance for the future of Yugoslavia's programme of economic adjustment and liberalisation. We have agreed with our partners within the European Community that, once an IMF agreement is reached, we will be ready to examine further aid measures and increased cooperation.

Immigration

Mr. Bidwell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct the chief immigration officer at the British High Commission, New Delhi to issue immediate entry clearance to the close relatives of the late Mr. Sekhon, a constituent of the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall.

Mr. Sainsbury: I wrote to the hon. Member on 19 January advising him of the action which Mr. Sekhon's relatives should take if they wish their applications to be considered further.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the spouse of a British subject can be refused a visa to settle in Britain; which of these reasons was used in rejecting the visa application by Mrs. Pianov, who is a Polish national married to a British citizen, Oleg Pianov; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The spouse of a British citizen applying for an entry clearance to settle in this country must satisfy the relevant requirements of the immigration rules; these are set out in paragraph 50 of HC 388.

Mrs. Pianov has not been refused a settlement visa. She applied for a visit visa which has been granted.

EEC Overseas Territories

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names and populations of overseas territories of members of the EEC; if he will further indicate what plans there are to allow persons from such territories the right of abode within the EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The list of member states' overseas territories and their populations (estimates for the year in brackets) is:

	Numbers and year
United Kingdom:	
Anguilla	7,000 (1985)
Bermuda	56,000 (1985)
British Antarctic Territory	[1]Nil
British Indian Ocean Territory	Uninhabited
British Virgin Islands	13,000 (1985)
Cayman Islands	23,400 (1987)
Falkland Islands	1,916 (1986)
Gibraltar	29,692 (1987)
Hong Kong	5,736,100 (1988)
Montserrat	11,900 (1988)
St. Helena	5,564 (1987)
Tristan Da Cunha	311 (1988)
South Georgia	[2]—
South Sandwich Islands	Uninhabited
Turks and Caicos Islands	14,000 (1988)
France:	
Overseas Departments	
Martinique	336,952 (1988)
French Guiana	11,0000 (1989)
Guadeloupe	334,000 (1988)
Reunion	578,500 (1988)
Territorial Collectives	
St. Pierre et Miquelon	6,500 (1987)
Mayotte	67,000 (1985)
Overseas Territories	
French Polynesia	188,814 (1988)
French Southern Antarctic Territories	[3]Nil
New Caledonia and Dependencies	164,173 (1988)
Wallis and Futuna Islands	13,100 (1985)
Netherlands:	
Aruba	60,312 (1981)
Netherlands Antilles	175,395 (1981)
Portugal:	
Macao	500,000

[1] Populated by scientists and technicians.
[2] Army unit and staff at British Antarctic Survey, Bird Island.
[3] Population only 200 scientists and staff.

The Overseas Departments and the Territorial Collectives are part of metropolitan France and their citizens are therefore EC nationals. Gibraltar forms part of the EC and its citizens are therefore EC nationals. Citizens of the other territories listed in the table do not have rights of entry into the Community unless they hold a passport of a member state which specifically entitles them to entry.

We are not aware of any plans by other EC member states to amend the existing rights of entry to the Community for their overseas territories.

On Hong Kong, I refer my hon. Friend to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made in the House on 20 December.

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's assessment as to the number of countries in the middle east that are capable of delivering *(a)* chemical and *(b)* nuclear warheads on ballistic missile vehicles; and if he will list them.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The following middle east countries are believed to possess or to be developing ballistic missiles which would be technically capable of delivering either a chemical or nuclear warhead.

Egypt
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Libya
Saudi Arabia

Syria
Yemen Arab Republic
Yemen, People's Democratic Republic of

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's latest assessment as to the number of countries that have deployed ballistic missiles; and if he will list them.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The following countries are known or believed to have deployed ballistic missiles:

Afghanistan
Belgium
Bulgaria
China
Czechoslovakia
Egypt
France
German Democratic Republic
Germany, Federal Republic of
Hungary
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Italy
Korea, Republic of
Libya
Netherlands
Poland
Romania
Saudi Arabia
Soviet Union
Syria
United States of America
Yemen Arab Republic

In addition, North Korea, which is not recognised as a state by Her Majesty's Government, is believed to have deployed ballistic missiles.

School Fees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of allowances and the total amount paid by the Government for the day school fees in both the United Kingdom and overseas for the education of the children of *(a)* members of his Department, *(b)* members of the Diplomatic Services communications division and *(c)* the Overseas Development Administration including children of technical co-operation officers, for the latest which figures are available.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The amount paid in boarding school fees during the last academic year was £7,600,000 for 956 children of members of the Diplomatic Service (including £744,000 for 101 children of members of the communications division) and £1,613,000 for 582 children of employees of the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the schools from which receipted bills were submitted in the last convenient year to facilitate the payment of allowances for the education of the children of diplomatic staff and the number of children attending each school.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* A list follows of those boarding schools for which receipted bills were submitted in the last academic year for the education of children of members of the Diplomatic Service. A composite list of the number of children attending each school is not kept.

Name
Abbotsholme School
Aldenham School
Aldro School
All Hallows School
Ampleforth College (Giling CS)
Ardingly College
Ashdown House School
Ashford School
Ashley Moor College
Atlantic College
Badminton School
Battle Abbey School
Beaconhurst Grange
Bearwood College
Bedales School
Bedford High School
Bedford School
Bedgebury School
Bembridge School
Benenden School
Bentham Grammar School
Berkhamsted School
Berkhamsted School for Girls
Bethany School
Bishop's Stortford College
Bloxham School
Blundell's School
Box Hill School
Bradfield College
Brambletye School
Bramcote School
Brandeston Hall
Brentwood School
Brighton College
Brockhurst
Bromsgrove School
Brooke House 6th Form
Bryanston School
Burgess Hill School
Caldicott
Cambridge Arts Tutors
Cambridge Centre
Canford School
Cannock School
Cargilfield
Carmel College
Caterham School
Charterhouse School
Charters-Ancaster College
Cheadle Hulme
Cheltenham Ladies College
Christ College
Claremont Fan Court School
Clarendon School
Clayesmore School
Clifton College
Cobham Hall
Combe Bank School
Cottesmore School
Cranbrook School
Cranleigh School
Croftinloan School
Cumnor House
Dauntseys School
Dean Close School
Dollar Academy
Douai School
Dover College
Downe House School
Downside School
Dragon School
Dulwich College Preparatory School
Dulwich College
Durham School
Eastbourne College

Edgeborough
Edinburgh Academy
Edinburgh House School
Ellerslie School
Ellesmere College
Elstree College
Epsom College
Eton College
Farleigh School
Farringtons School
Feltonfleet School
Fernden School
Fettes College
Forest School
Forres School
Framlingham College
Frensham Heights School
Friars School
Friends School
Giggleswick School
Glenalmond College
Godstowe School
Gordonstoun School
Great Walstead School
Greenacre School
Greshams School
Grove School
Handcross Park School
Hanford School
Harrow School
Harrowgate College
Headfort School
Headington School
Heathfield School
Highfield School
Holmewood House School
Holy Family (Convent of the)
Hordle House
Howell's School
Hunmanby Hall
Hurstpierpoint
Hurtwood House
Indefatigable
Ipswich School
James Allen's Girls' School
Kelly College
Kent Col.
Kent College
Kilgraston School
King Edward's School
King's College
King's School
King's School (The)
Kingham Hill
King's School
Kingswood School
Lambrook School
Lancing College
Lavant House School
Lawnside School
Leys School
Lomond School
Loretto School
Maltman's Green
Malvern Girl's College
Marlborough College
Marlborough House School
Marshcourt
Mary Erskine School
Mayfield College
Merchiston Castle School
Methodist College
Michael Hall School
Mill Hill School
Millfield School
Moira House School
Monkton Combe School
Moor Park School
Morrison's Academy
New Hall School
North Foreland Lodge School
Northaw School
Notre Dame Convent School
Oakdene School
Oakham School
Oratory Prep School (The)
Oratory School (The)
Oswestry School
Oundle School
Pangbourne College
Papplewick
Parsons Mead School
Pennthorpe School
Philpots Manor School
Pierrepont School
Pilgrims' School
Pipers Corner School
Plymouth College
Polam Hall
Port Regis
Princess Helena School
Prior Park College
Prior's Field School
Priors Court
Queen Anne's School
Queen Margarets School
Queens College
Queenswood
Rannoch School
Reading Blue Coat School
Reed's School
Rickmansworth Masonic School
Rishworth School
Roedean School
Rosemead School
Rossall School
Royal Alexander and Albert School
Royal Naval School
Royal Russel School
Rugby School
Rydal School
Rye St. Antony School
Sacred Hearts School
Sandroyd School
Scarborough College
Seaford College
Sevenoaks School
Shapwick School
Sherborne School
Sherborne School for Girls
Shiplake College
Shoreham Grammar School
Sibford School
Sidcott School
Slindon College
St. Edmund's School
St. Helen's School
St. Mary's Hall School
St. Andrew's School
St. Antony's-Leweston School
St. Augustine's College
St. Bede's School
St. Bees School
St. Catherine's School
St. Christopher School
St. Christopher's School
St. Denis School
St. Edmund's College
St. Edmund's School
St. Edwards School
St. Felix School
St. George's College
St. George's School
St. George's School for Girls
St. John's School
St. Joseph's College
St. Lawrence College
St. Leonards-Mayfield School
St. Margaret's School
St. Mary and St. Annes

St. Mary's
St. Mary's Convent
St. Michael's
St. Neot's School
St. Paul's School
St. Peter's School
St. Stephens College
St. Swithuns School
Stanbridge Earls School
Stoke College
Stonar School
Stonyhurst College
Stover School
Stowe School
Strathallan School
Streete Court School
Summer Fields School
Sunningdale School
Sutton Valence School
Swanbourne House School
Taunton School
Temple Grove School
Terrington Hall School
The Blue Coat School
The Nak Centre
Tockington Manor School
Tonbridge School
Towers School
United College of the Atlantic
Upper Chine School
Victuallers School
Vinehall School
Wadhurst College
Walthamstow Hall School
Warminster School
Wellesley House
Wellingborough School
Wellington College
Wentworth Milton Mount
West Heath School
Westbourne House School
Westminster School
Westonbrit School
Winchester College
Windlesham House School
Wispers School
Wolborough Hill School
Woldingham School
Worth Abbey School
Wycombe Abbey School
Yardley Court

Holiday Visit Passages

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the approximate cost of holiday visit passages paid in respect of *(a)* children of his Department's personnel being educated in the United Kingdom and in receipt of education allowances and *(b)* members of the Diplomatic Service communications division being educated in the United Kingdom and in receipt of education allowances, and of any further travelling expenses paid for the latest available year.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The total cost, with travelling expenses, of holiday passages for the children of staff serving overseas on Diplomatic Service terms, including those of the communications division (for whom separate statistics are not kept) was £1·05 million in 1988-89.

THE ARTS

Curatorial Staff

30. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what percentage of public musuem and gallery curatorial staff have received recognised curatorial training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is unavailable at present. I understand that the newly established museums training institute is currently researching the training needs of museums and galleries staff as part of its overall review of training requirements.

Arts Council

32. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Arts Council; and what was discussed.

Mr. Luce: I meet Mr. Palumbo regularly to discuss various matters of mutual interest.

Admission Charges

31. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he has met the chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission to discuss the Education, Science and Arts Select Committee's report on charging for admission to national museums.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission on a regular basis to discuss matters of mutual interest. I have not met him since the Select Committee's report was issued on 10 January 1990.

33. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to reply to the report of the Education, Science and Arts Select Committee on charging for national museums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister for the Arts when he plans to respond to the Education, Science and Arts Committee's report on charging for admission to national museums.

Mr. Luce: I am studying the report and will issue a response in the near future.

36. **Mr. Dennis Turner:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his policy on admission charges to national museums.

39. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards charges for admission to national galleries and museums.

40. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his policy on charging for admission to national museums.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Wrexham, (Dr. Marek).

Disabled People (Access)

34. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Minister for the Arts, what steps he is taking to increase access to the arts by disabled people.

Mr. Luce: I announced in December 1988 that I was giving £150,000 to the ADAPT fund which the Carnegie Trust is setting up to improve the accessibility of arts venues for disabled people. I am pleased to say that the work of the trust is now well under way. In addition to this initiative, the Arts Council has a disability officer to ensure that the needs of disabled people are taken fully into account in the work of the council and its clients.

Wilding Report

35. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to publish his response to the Wilding report on funding of the arts.

45. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to announce his reponse to the Wilding review of arts funding.

Mr. Luce: I expect to make an announcement as soon as possible after I have had an opportunity to consider the responses to the report.

41. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many responses he received to the proposals in the Wilding report on altering the boundaries of regional arts associations.

Mr. Luce: I have received nearly 5,500 responses which include comment on this issue.

42. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has had from the east midlands on the Wilding report on arts funding.

Mr. Luce: I have received a number of representations from individuals and organisations in the east midlands area about the Wilding report.

43. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received concerning the amalgamation of the east and west midlands arts organisations.

Mr. Luce: I have received a number of representations from individuals and organisations on this matter. I have met the chairmen and directors of the two organisations to hear their concerns.

44. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Minister for the Arts, what representations he has received on proposed reorganisation of regional arts associations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I have received almost 6,000 responses to the Wilding report of which approximately 4,500 are postcards. I shall be announcing my response to the report as soon as possible.

Tours

37. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what steps he is taking to encourage arts bodies to tour both at home and abroad.

Mr. Luce: The Arts Council is responsible for actively encouraging touring within the United Kingdom. The council has established a Great Britain touring fund to encourage arts bodies to tour throughout the country. The fund's budget has gone up from £1·5 million last year to £2 million for this year and for 1990-91. Support for overseas touring is the responsibility of the British Council.

Uniform Business Rate

38. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make special provision for the arts in London to take account of the revaluation of business premises and the impact of uniform business rate.

Mr. Luce: The aim of my three-year settlement is to give arts bodies a clear view of the Government resources available, so that they have a firm basis on which to plan their activities and meet their final commitments. I see no reason to make special additional provisions to take account of the revaluation of business premises and the unified business rate.

Arts Funding

46. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what increase in the funding of the Arts Council is proposed for the next two financial years.

Mr. Luce: I announced in November that next year the Arts Council's grant-in-aid will be set at £175 million, an increase of 12·5 per cent. over 1989-90. In 1991-92 that will rise by a further 4·6 per cent. to £183 million. Over the next three years, the overall increase will be 22 per cent.

Museums and Galleries (Refurbishment)

47. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what increase there has been in provision for the refurbishment and maintenance of museums and galleries for the year ahead.

Mr. Luce: I am providing £48 million in the current financial year for the building and maintenance programmes at the national museums and galleries which I sponsor. I announced on 16 November last year that this provision will increase by 19 per cent. to £57 million, in 1990-91.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half year ended 31 December 1989 of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax or capital transfer tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed in the matter of allocation by testators or executors; whether he will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of inheritance tax or capital transfer tax; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the information given in his reply.

Mr. Luce: The information the hon. Member requests is as follows:

Items allocated	*To whom allocated*	*Conditions/wishes expressed*
Portrait of Sir Alexander Carew attributed to Gheerhaerdts	The National Trust	Conditional upon remaining in Antony House, Cornwall
Painting by Pissaro	University of Manchester	Conditional
Eight Islamic Pottery tiles	British Museum	Wish expressed that they be allocated to the British Museum
Items accepted but not yet allocated		*Date of acceptance*
"Allée à Chantilly" by Cezanne		23 March 1989

A press notice is being issued.

Works of Art (Exports)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art during the half year ended 31 December 1989, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was eventually exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; whether he will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the information given in his reply.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry accepted my recommendation, following consideration by the reviewing committee on the export of works of art, to defer making for a specified period a decision on an export licence application in respect of the items listed. Details of the items listed were given in press notices issued at the time the Secretary of State decided to accept the recommendation; however, a further press notice will be issued.

Description of item	*Valuation (£)*	*Outcome*
A painting "The Fall of Phaeton" by Rubens	2,046,939	Export licence granted
Album of early photographs collected by Reve Calvert Jones 1839-44	234,150	Export licence granted
Two decorated colt percussion revolvers	475,000	Decision deferred for 3 months until 10 March 1990
"The Three Graces" by Canova	7,600,000	Decision deferred for additional 3 months until 12 March 1990
George II Royal Wine Coolers, Makers mark of Paul de Lamerie overstruck by Paul Crespin	750,000	Retained. One each acquired by the National Museums of Scotland and the Victoria and Albert Museum

Museums and Galleries (Attendance)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1989 reported by the national museums and galleries in England for which he is responsible, broken down into the individual institutions but including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1988.

Mr. Luce: The estimated number of visitors during 1989 to the 11 national museums and galleries for which I am responsible are as follows:

	Estimated attendance in 1989	*Percentage change from 1988*
British Museum	4,686,454	+12·3
British Museum (Natural History)	1,549,676	− 7·3
Imperial War Museum	1,204,310	+10·8
National Gallery	3,368,217	+ 4·3
National Maritime Museum	423,858	−40·1
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	1,348,570	−11·6
National Portrait Gallery	625,197	− 2·1
Science Museum	2,607,724	−32·5
Tate Gallery	1,940,004	− 7·2
Victoria and Albert Museum	1,378,546	− 3·6
Wallace Collection	129,010	−18·1
Total	19,261,566	

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Servants (Resignations)

52. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many civil servants of grade 7 and above have left the Civil Service in the last three years to take jobs in industry.

Mr. Luce: This information is not available in the form requested.

Crown Allegiance

53. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what response he has made to the representations of the First Division Association protesting about the new guidelines on allegiance to the Crown and Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Luce: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

Civil Service Unions

54. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what discussions he has had with Civil Service trade union leaders in Nottingham.

55. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what recent meetings he has had with Civil Service trade unions; and what matters were discussed.

57. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met the Civil Service unions; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher).

Code of Conduct

56. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he has any plans to change the present Civil Service code of practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

NATIONAL FINANCE

Privatised Businesses

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the major businesses privatised since 1979 were in profit in 1979.

Mr. Lilley: Of the 29 major businesses privatised since 1979, the following were in profit in 1979: British Petroleum, British Aerospace, Cable and Wireless, National Freight Consortium, Britoil, Amersham International, Associated British Ports, Sealink, British Telecom, British Gas, British Airways, Royal Ordnance, Rolls-Royce, BAA, Northumbrian Water, South West Water.

Public Sector Pensions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those instances in which a retrospective amendment has been made to public sector pension schemes.

Mr. Ryder: A distinction has to be drawn between, first, amendments where the effect is backdated to cover the elapses of time between agreement on, or the announcement of, a change and the making of regulations to give effect to it and, secondly, amendments which have effect prior to an agreement on, or announcement of, a change.

There have been many amendments of the first kind. They are acceptable because they ensure that scheme members are not deprived of agreed improvements in benefits for the time that it may take to finalise the necessary amendment of the scheme's rules. It would entail disproportionate cost to provide a complete list of such amendments.

It has rarely been possible to amend schemes to provide for retrospection of the second kind because of the costs that may be involved and considerations of equity and administration. It has, therefore, been the policy of successive Governments not to allow such retrospection, save in the most exceptional circumstances. In the past 20 years, the only major instances of which I am aware have been the amendments made in the 1970s to bring the public services generally into line with the Civil Service by allowing war service to count at half rate for pension purposes; and, in 1979, for the armed forces pension scheme to provide pensions for pre-1950 widows.

Commercial Accounting and Auditing

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *576*, which specific sectors of the public sector in which normal accountancy and auditing methods *(a)* are already employed, *(b)* are being developed and *(c)* are considered to be inappropriate.

Mr. Ryder: The position in different parts of the public sector is as follows:

(a) Government Departments

Some Departments already produce commercial-style accounts. These include the existing trading funds (The Royal Mint, Her Majesty's Stationery Office and The Crown Suppliers) and some other Departments with major trading functions, for example, Ordnance Survey, ECGD and the Forestry Commission.

The Government's White Paper "The Financing and Accountability of Next Steps Agencies" sets out plans for the future. The arrangements proposed for agencies which become trading funds are described in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.13. The arrangements proposed for those which remain under full Vote accounting are described in paragraphs 5.14 to 5.17. Normally only cash-based appropriation accounts will be published for Departments or parts of Departments which do not become next steps agencies.

(b) Non-departmental public bodies (NDPBS)

NDPBs are bodies which have a role in the process of national Government—but which are not Government Departments. Many NDPBs which are classified as executive bodies already produce commercial-style accounts on an accruals basis. The expenses of NDPBs which are classified as advisory and judicial bodies are generally brought to account in the cash-based appropriation accounts of their sponsoring Department.

(c) National Health Service

In the National Health Service accounting has been developed along more commercial lines over recent years, with the exception of accounting for capital. It is intended to implement capital accounting, including the preparation of balance sheets for the financial year 1991-92. It is planned that the Audit Commission should take over the audit of the NHS under the provisions proposed in the NHS and Community Care Bill, and the Local Government and Housing Bill.

(d) Local Authorities

In February 1989 the local authority associations and CIPFA published "Capital Accounting in Local Authorities", containing proposals to change the way local authorities account for capital receipts and expenditure, and to secure improvements in local authority accounting. These proposals could form the basis of a code of practice for local authority capital accounting which would apply to all authorities from 1991-92. The proposals would move local authority accounting closer to commercial accounting principles. But they reflect legal constraints: for example, those applying to grants and rates, which do not apply to the private sector.

(e) Nationalised Industries

Nationalised industries produce accounts on a commercial basis.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* first-time buyers in the first five years of home onwership and *(b)* other home owners, would be expected to benefit from an increase in the ceiling for mortgage interest tax relief above the current £30,000

limit; what percentage of all home buyers in each category this would represent; and what would be the cost of the increased benefit to each group were the ceiling to be raised to (i) £35,000, (ii) £40,000 and (iii) £50,000, respectively;

(2) what would be the cost of adjusting the maximum ceiling for mortgage interest tax relief to *(a)* £35,000, *(b)* £40,000, *(c)* £45,000 and *(d)* £50,000, on the assumption that (i) relief continues to be available at the higher marginal tax rate where applicable, and (ii) that relief is restricted to the standard 25 per cent. rate of income tax.

Mr. Lilley: I regret that information on mortgage interest relief for first-time buyers in the first five years of home ownership is not available. Provisional estimates of the costs of increasing the ceiling are given in the table. All estimates exclude behavioural effects, which would be substantial for the higher ceilings.

Direct revenue costs at 1989-90 income levels of raising the ceiling for mortgage interest relief

Ceiling	*Relief at marginal tax rate £ million*	*Relief at basic rate of 25 per cent. £ million*
£35,000	320	−140
£40,000	580	90
£45,000	770	270
£50,000	900	390

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the additional average relief receivable by those people with incomes of *(a)* up to £5,000 a year, *(b)* between £5,000 and £10,000 a year, *(c)* between £10,000 and £15,000 a year, *(d)* between £15,000 and £20,000 a year, *(e)* between £20,000 and £25,000 a year, *(f)* between £25,000 and £30,000 a year, and *(g)* over £30,000 a year if the ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief were to be raised to (i) £35,000, (ii) £40,000, (iii) £45,000, and (iv) £50,000; and how many beneficiaries there would be in each income band, assuming *(x)* that relief would continue to be available at the higher marginal tax rate where applicable and *(y)* that relief was restricted to the standard, 25 per cent. rate of income tax.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is given in the table. All estimates exclude behavioural effects which would be substantial for the higher ceilings.

Increasing the ceiling for mortgage interest relief 1989-90

Total Income £	*Number of beneficiaries thousands*	*Average gain if ceiling is increased to £35,000 £*	*£40,000 £*	*£45,000 £*	*£50,000 £*
Up to 5,000	20	160	250	290	330
5,000—10,000	140	130	230	290	320
10,000—15,000	360	150	260	330	380
15,000—20,000	520	160	270	360	410
20,000—25,000	400	160	290	390	450
25,000—30,000	220	160	290	390	470
Over 30,000	390	190	350	470	580
TOTAL	2,050	160	280	380	440

If relief was restricted to the basic rate at the same time as the ceiling was increased, the number of beneficiaries with incomes above £30,000 would be reduced. About 190,000 basic rate taxpayers would still benefit, and about 70,000 higher rate taxpayers with mortgages above £48,000 would be net beneficiaries if the ceiling were raised to that level or above.

Capial Loss Relief

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to change the availability of capital loss relief for transactions in oil rights and oil assets.

Mr. Lilley: For disposals made on or after today, the Government intend two changes to stop unwarranted loss relief being available on certain oil assets. These are assets of an essentially wasting nature, whose value in 1982 was very high because of the high oil price at that date but where no actual loss compared with acquisition cost arises. First, unquoted shares deriving the larger part of their value from United Kingdom and United Kingdom continental shelf oil rights and assets will no longer be eligible for an election that rebasing to 1982 for capital gains tax purposes shall apply to all disposals. Secondly, in certain circumstances where oil assets, rights and unquoted shares are disposed of, indexation allowance will be calculated on the acquisition cost rather than the 1982 market value. The necessary legislation will be included in the 1990 Finance Bill. Further details are in a press release being issued by the Inland Revenue.

SCOTLAND

Radioactive Waste Disposal

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the implications of the findings of the European Commission's PAGIS study into the suitability of Scottish geology for high-level radioactive waste disposal for the search by Nirex to establish a deep disposal facility for intermediate-level and low-level radioactive wastes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on Thursday 18 January at column *363* by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside.

Teenage Smoking

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department is planning any additional expenditure during the current year for a teenage smoking prevention programme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In Scotland the main responsibility for promotion of health education and prevention of ill health lies with the Scottish health education group. It currently expects to spend about £297,000 on anti-smoking material and campaigns during the current financial year—an increase of £17,000 over its original estimate for the year. The Scottish committee for Action on Smoking and Health will receive grant-in-aid of £40,000 in 1989-90. Both organisations undertake anti-smoking initiatives directed at teenagers.

Forestry

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the Scottish Development Department's draft circular on indicative forestry strategies.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have placed a copy of the draft circular and related material in the Library. I am most grateful for the many valuable comments received from a wide range of interests on this proposed advice on the preparation of indicative forestry strategies by regional authorities in Scotland. This confirms the value of these strategies as a framework for future decision-making on forestry planting. The final version of the circular and related technical advice, taking into account the comments received, will be issued shortly. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Hospital Building

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the five largest hospital building projects in Scotland currently under construction; and what is the projected cost of each.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

	£ million
Royal Cornhill hospital, phase 1, Aberdeen	8·5
Perth Royal Infirmary, Perth	21·2
Western Isles hospital, Isle of Lewis	22·1
Acute hospital, Ayr	23·8
St. John's hospital, phase 11, West Lothian	30·1

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the five largest hospital building projects completed in Scotland since 1979; and what is the cost of each.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

	£ million
St. John's hospital, phase I, West Lothian	30·4
Raigmore district general hospital, Inverness	31·0
Borders district general hospital, Huntlyburn	32·2
Glasgow Royal infirmary phase I, Glasgow	55·3
Royal Alexandra hospital, Paisley	56·5

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1989 reported by the national museums and galleries in Scotland, broken down into the individual institutions but including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1988.

Mr. Lang: The information is as follows:

	1989	*Percentage change since 1988*
National Galleries of Scotland	709,582	+39·0
National Museums of Scotland	899,351	+30·7

Attendance figures for the national museums of Scotland for 1989 are inclusive of visitors to the Scottish United Services museum at Edinburgh castle which were not previously attributed to the museums. In 1988 there were 156,614 visitors to the Scottish United Services museum.

The national galleries of Scotland comprise the National Gallery of Scotland, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The national museums of Scotland comprise the Royal Museum of Scotland buildings at Chambers street and Queen street, Edinburgh, the Scottish Agricultural museum, the Scottish United Services museum, the Museum of Flight and the Shambellie Museum of Costume.

Pesticide Alternatives

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress is being made in the use of sea-lice and ctenolabrus rupestris as alternatives to pesticides.

Mr. Lang: A full evaluation of the Sea Fish Industry Authority's initial trials of gold sinny wrasse to reduce sea lice infestation is not expected until the end of the year. Further trials may be needed before commercial viability could be established.

Work on the development of a possible vaccine treatment, which is being co-ordinated by scientists from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, is also at a very early stage.

Lupus Group

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking as a result of the Fife, Lothian and Borders Lupus group letter to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I responded to the points raised in this letter in a reply which I sent to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 17 November 1989. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Kelvin Central plc

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has granted financial assistance to the management team of Kelvin Central plc in its bid to purchase the company; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Financial assistance has been offered by the Scottish Transport Group to the

management-employee buyout team led by the managing director of Kelvin Central Buses Ltd. The assistance, which will not exceed £48,750, will cover 75 per cent. of professional advisers' fees up to £65,000. In the event of the bid being successful, no assistance will be paid.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide to the employee-led consortium the equivalent financial assistance to that provided to the management-led consortium in its bid for Kelvin Central plc; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Financial assistance is being made available by the Scottish Transport Group to one management-employee buyout team per company. In the case of Kelvin Central Buses Ltd. this assistance has been offered to the management-employee team led by the managing director.

Conveyancing

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Scottish-based organisations which have supported his proposals for reform of the law and procedures related to conveyancing; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following Scottish-based respondents to the consultation paper "The Legal Profession in Scotland" expressed support for some or all of the proposed changes to the conveyancing market in Scotland:

Citizens Advice Scotland
Clydesdale Bank plc
Confederation of British Industry, Scotland
Dunfermline Building Society
National Association of Estate Agents, Scottish Branch
Scottish Consumer Council
Stuart Wyse Ogilvie, Estate Agents

All representations on the proposals for reform were taken fully into account before the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill was introduced.

New Building Regulations

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what grounds it was decided not to introduce the new building regulations concerning the conservation of fuel and power in Scotland in April 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The building regulations which will come into effect in April 1990 were made under the Building Act 1984, which applies only to England and Wales. I have included similar improvements for the conservation of fuel and power in a major revision of all parts of the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations, made under the Building (Scotland) Act 1959, which I intend to lay before Parliament later this year.

Land and Property Holdings

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he is yet in a position to publish a schedule of the land and property holdings of the South of Scotland Electricity Board and the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board.

Mr. Lang: I have no plans to publish such a schedule.

Eastern Scottish Bus Company

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to privatise the Eastern Scottish bus company.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sales of the subsidiaries of the Scottish Bus Group will begin soon and it is expected that the whole programme will be completed early in 1991. It is not possible to say at this stage when Eastern Scottish Omnibuses Ltd will be offered for sale.

Cerebral Palsy

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned to investigate the causes of cerebral palsy.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Home and Health Department has not funded any research specifically to investigate the causes of cerebral palsy. It has funded some research which might be relevant to this condition. Funds are available and applications for soundly based research will be sympathetically considered.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his Department is taking to monitor trends in cerebral palsy.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health boards monitor the numbers of children with cerebral palsy who are less than 16 years old. The information is held by the information services division of the Scottish Health Service's common services agency in the handicapped children's register.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of children born in Scotland, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available, who have been diagnosed as having cerebral palsy.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Children with cerebral palsy new registrations in year ending 31 December

Year	*Number*
1978	79
1979	n/a
1980	69
1981	78
1982	124
1983	75
1984	69
1985	100
1986	70
1987	92

Homelessness

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made on the latest annual report by Shelter on homelessness in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: The reported results of Shelter's recent survey on homelessness in Scotland have been given careful consideration within my Department. Shelter does not make it clear the basis on which the statistics it presents have been collected, and its figures do not accord with those provided by local authorities to the Scottish Office. Nevertheless, both Shelter's and our own figures show that the number of households applying to local

authorities under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, and the number of them assessed as being homeless or potentially homeless, has remained fairly stable over the last three years.

The figures quoted by Shelter represent its estimate of the number of applications made to local authorities over a full year. Most of those households are found accommodation by local authorities, and others arrange their own accommodation. The figures are not an indication of the number of households without a home at any one time.

Court of Session

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meetings he has attended with Lord President Hope since 1 November 1989; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Rifkind: Since 1 November 1989 I have had one meeting with the Lord President of the Court of Session, at which a range of matters were discussed.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date he was informed that Lord Dervaird was resigning from the Court of Session; and who informed him.

Mr. Rifkind: By letter dated 21 December 1989, Lord Dervaird advised me that for personal reasons he wished to resign his appointment as a Court of Session judge from 1 January 1990.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what part the Lord Advocate took in initiating by advice or otherwise the meeting between Lord President Hope and senior members of the Scottish media.

Mr. Rifkind: None.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions, and on what dates, the Lord Advocate held with the Lord President of the Court of Session about impending vacancies in the membership of the court.

Mr. Rifkind: The Lord Advocate has regular discussions on judicial matters with the Lord President of the Court of Session.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent meetings he has held with judges of the Court of Session.

Mr. Rifkind: I have meetings with judges of the Court of Session from time to time.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent meetings the Lord Advocate has had with judges of the Court of Session.

Mr. Rifkind: The Lord Advocate has meetings with judges at the Court of Session from time to time.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether any recent information has been given by Crown Office officials to the Lord President of the Court of Session.

Mr. Rifkind: Information on a wide range of matters is made available on a regular basis by officials of the Lord Advocate to the Lord President of the Court of Session and to his officers of court.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether being a practising homosexual within the law bars the nomination and appointment of persons to the Court of Session, or requires resignation from among those presently appointed.

Mr. Rifkind: There is no such legal bar.

Inward Investment

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each of the announcements made by his Department on new planned jobs locating in Scotland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lang: Details of every inward investment decision cannot be published as information is supplied by some companies on a commercially confidential basis.

The following table gives information on inward investment in Scotland for the years 1984-85 to 1988-89, as previously announced. The planned job figures are based on company forecasts.

	Number of projects	*New jobs*	*Safeguarded jobs*	*Total jobs*
1984-85	69	8,169	1,274	9,443
1985-86	58	4,663	3,554	8,217
1986-87	50	4,106	978	5,084
1987-88	84	6,363	4,856	11,219
1988-89	55	4,846	2,243	7,089

The figures for the years 1987-88 and 1988-89 relate only to projects where there was direct involvement by Locate in Scotland or the Industry Department for Scotland. Locate in Scotland is aware of a further four projects which came to Scotland in 1987-88 without such involvement and of a further five in 1988-89.

Civil Service Relocation

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the number of actual jobs created in each of the last five years by new companies and organisations or Government Departments locating in Scotland;

(2) what is the number of civil service posts relocated to Scotland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lang: The information on non-Government employment is not available for the first question and the information on Government Departments is not available in the form requested for both questions.

In the five years since 1985 around 1,490 posts were transferred to Glasgow under the Government's earlier dispersal programme; of these, 1,400 were in the Ministry of Defence and the remainder in the Passport Office. In

addition there have been some minor moves by Departments to Scotland taken on their own initiatives, but no central records are kept.

Mentally Ill Patients

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the cost of undertaking an individual assessment of the needs of all long-term mentally ill patients in Scotland over a two-year period.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost of undertaking an individual assessment of the needs of long-term mentally ill patients will vary depending on the particular circumstances of the person involved and it is not possible to give an estimate of the costs.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that all long-term mentally ill patients in Scotland will have an assessment made of their individual needs within the next two years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: People with mental illness have individual care plans to meet their needs while they are receiving treatment in hospital. The White Paper "Caring for People" indicates that health boards and local authorities will be required to complete an assessment of the needs of each person with a long-term mental illness due to be discharged from hospital and prepare joint care programmes for them. The intention is to introduce these care programmes from 1 April 1991.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what extra resources will be available to local authorities to pay for the individual needs assessments for long-term mentally ill patients in Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what extra resources will be made available to local authorities to develop community care for long-term mentally ill patients in Scotland;

(3) what new resources are currently being planned to offset the reduction in long-term beds for patients who are mentally ill.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave on 16 January 1990 to his earlier questions on the same subject. (*Official Report*, Vol. 165, col. *208-09*.)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the proportion of long-term mentally ill patients currently in Scottish hospitals that could satisfactorily be cared for in a community context.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Whether a long-term mentally ill inpatient could be satisfactorily discharged into the community is a matter of clinical judgment. No comprehensive estimates of the likely proportion involved are currently available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to develop a system of bridging finance to develop services for the provision of community care of long-term mentally ill patients in Scottish hospitals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the arrangements set out in the White Paper "Caring for People", health boards and local authorities will each prepare a community care plan. As a basis for these plans, the White Paper recognises a need for planning agreements between boards and authorities setting out shared assumptions and objectives. A key requirement of planning agreements will be funding agreements setting out the basis on which health and social care will be funded. The details will be the subject of consultation in due course.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to establish an independent body to undertake any needs assessment of individual long-term mentally ill patients in hospitals in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None. The needs assessment of mentally ill patients in hospital is a matter for the relevant health boards. The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland has a statutory duty to inquire into any case where there appears tc be any deficiency of treatment or care and to follow this up as appropriate.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he proposes to take to reduce the number of inappropriate hospital admissions for patients who are mentally ill.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposals in the White Paper "Caring for People" are designed to help the mentally ill to be cared for in a community setting and to ensure that they are admitted to hospital only where, on the basis of clinical judgment, it is necessary for the purposes of treatment.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he plans to develop systems of community and institutional care for long-term mentally ill patients in hospitals in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The White Paper "Caring for People" sets out in detail the Government's proposals for the provision of comprehensive community facilities for the long-term mentally ill and other priority groups. At the same time we are providing the necessary resources to develop and improve hospital facilities for those whom this remains the most appropriate form of care.

Judges

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Lord Advocate will initiate a review of the system of appointment and of the terms of service of Scottish judges.

Mr. Rifkind: There are no plans to do so.

Businesses

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of new businesses registered and bankruptcies in Scotland in each year since 1984.

Mr. Lang: The table shows the number of new companies registered in Scotland and the number of liquidations notified for Scottish registered companies in each year between 1984 and 1989. The table shows the number of bankruptcies. Bankruptcies are awards of sequestration and relate solely to individuals, partnerships, clubs etc and exclude limited companies.

Companies registered and liquidated and bankruptcies in Scotland

Year	New companies registered[1]	Liquidations[1]	Bankruptcies[2]
1984	4,976	757	296
1985	5,417	757	298
1986	5,999	762	437
1987	5,860	636	[3]826
1988	6,879	651	1,420
1989	6,779	674	2,294

[1] Source Companies House
[2] Source Accountant and Bankruptcy Office
[3] New legislation was introduced in 1986, which affected the number of sequestrations.

Living Elsewhere Grants

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students receive grants based on living elsewhere than in the parental home; and what proportion this is of the number of students receiving grants.

Mr. Lang: The latest available figures are for the academic session 1988-89, when 31,981 Scottish domiciled students received the elsewhere rate of maintenance grant. This represented 65·8 per cent. of the total number of students receiving a maintenance grant.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effect of the imposition of the poll tax on the workload of sheriff officers; and if he anticipates a need for any increase in the number of sheriff officers as a result of the poll tax.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sheriff officers are independent contractors and it is for them to consider how best to respond to requests for their services.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many summary warrants were issued by Scottish regional councils for non-payment of the poll tax at the most recent date for which figures are available; and what was the equivalent number of summary warrants issued by Scottish regional councils for non-payment of rates on the same date in the previous year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* Information on the total number of persons subject to summary warrant procedure for non-payment of domestic rates or community charge is not held centrally. The use of the summary warrant procedure is a matter for regional councils.

HEALTH

Teaching Hospitals

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what exercises have been carried out by his Department to determine the excess costs of teaching hospitals; and how often these exercises have been repeated.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the last 15 years the Department has several times sought to determine the excess costs of teaching hospitals, and to establish what proportion of this excess is attributable to teaching—as opposed to research, the tendency to treat more complex cases, or other factors. Exercises have been undertaken on four occasions: for the Resource Allocation Working Party (RAWP) in 1975, and again in 1976, and subsequently during reviews of the RAWP formula in 1978-80 and 1986-88.

For the future, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has accepted a recommendation from the Steering Group on Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education that the basis and level of the service increment for teaching (SIFT), which is intended to compensate hospitals for those excess costs, should be re-examined in 1992.

Service Increments for Teaching

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the changes in the service increment for teaching formula since 1980.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The formula used to calculate the service increment for teaching (SIFT) has been changed on two occasions in this period; following the work of, first, the Advisory Group on Resource Allocation which reported in 1980, and the NHS Management Board's review of the Resource Allocation Working Party (RAWP) formula, which reported in 1988. The changes on each occasion were:

In 1980-81:
Expansion to cover new medical schools at Cambridge, Leicester, Nottingham and Southampton;
Expansion of the number of teaching hospitals covered by the formula;
Replacement of the previous method of compensating for higher London costs; introduction of the London weighting addition in its place;
Introduction of separate recognition for dental hospitals' excess service costs—equal to 85 per cent. of their average outpatient expenditure.

Recommendations of the RAWP Review: to take effect in 1990-91:
Increase in the proportion of excess service costs met by medical SIFT from 75 per cent. to 100 per cent.;
Recalculation of the average amount by which teaching hospitals' service costs exceed those of other hospitals, on the basis of an updated survey;
Recalculation of dental SIFT in recognition of increased costs in dental hospitals, relative to the rest of the NHS.

In addition to these changes to the formula, in November 1989 important new advice was issued to the regional health authorities on the principles which should govern their allocation of SIFT to individual hospitals.

AIDS

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year for the last eight years, for each regional health authority, the number of people who have died from AIDS; and if he will show in his answer, their sex and age by categories *(a)* aged under 20 years, *(b)* aged 20 to 30 years, *(c)* aged 31 to 40 years, *(d)* aged 41 to 50 years and *(e)* aged over 50 years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In line with the procedure followed in reports under the AIDS (Control) Act, to safeguard confidentiality numbers below 10 in tables showing AIDS data are represented by an asterisk. A table showing the breakdown requested would include so many asterisks that it would be uninformative. The data have therefore been aggregated to some extent.

AIDS cases by region of report and year of death for those known to have died to 31 December 1989

Region of report	Year of death									
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Unknown
Northern	0	0	0	*	*	10	*	*	*	0
Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	*	*	14	14	11	0
Trent	0	0	0	0	*	*	*	10	11	0
East Anglia	0	0	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	0
North West Thames	0	*	*	19	53	103	125	135	142	16
North East Thames	0	*	*	*	23	51	73	57	70	*
South East Thames	0	*	*	*	11	22	32	49	60	0
South West Thames	0	0	*	*	*	*	14	20	11	0
Wessex	*	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	12	0
Oxford	0	0	*	0	*	*	*	10	11	0
South Western	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0
West Midlands	0	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	*	0
Mersey	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0
North Western	0	0	0	*	*	*	14	21	14	*
WALES	0	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	12	0
SCOTLAND	0	*	0	*	*	*	12	17	23	*
NORTHERN IRELAND	0	*	0	0	*	0	*	*	*	0
CHANNEL ISLANDS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	0
TOTAL	*	*	16	47	118	260	335	383	420	25

AIDS United Kingdom:
Age distribution of AIDS cases known to have died by 31 December 1989

Age group (years)	Male	Female	Total
0-19	18	10	
20-29	251	26	
30-39	609	14	
40-49	423	11	
50 plus	213	*	
Unknown	29	*	
Total	1,543	69	1,612

Vaccine-damaged Children

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children receiving immunisations have suffered vaccine damage, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; how many received compensation; and what was the total amount of compensation paid each year.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the last 10 years over 25 million childhood vaccinations have been given. Over the same period there were 556 successful claims for a vaccine damage payment. The table sets out the numbers of awards and the expenditure of the scheme.

Vaccine Damage Payments Scheme:
Number of Awards and Expenditure 1980 to 1989

Year	Awards	Expenditure (£)
1980	[1]273	2,730,000
1981	[1]109	1,090,000
1982	[1] 45	450,000
1983	42	[2]670,000
1984	29	[2]440,000
1985	26	[2]220,000
1986	15	[2]240,000
1987	10	[2]290,000
1988	4	[2]140,000
1989	3	[2] 70,000

[1] Figures are for the number of payments made in these years.
[2] Includes payments in respect of awards made in earlier years.

Vaccine damage payments are not compensation—that is an entirely separate matter to be pursued in the courts.

Chernobyl

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received any communication from his counterpart in Norway concerning new evaluations by the Norwegian Food Control Authority over the health effects of Chernobyl radioactive fall-out.

Mr. Freeman: No, neither the Department nor the National Radiological Protection Board have received any information from the Norwegian Food Control Authority about new evaluations of the health effects of Chernobyl fall-out.

Environmental Medicine Foundation

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department makes any funds available to the Environmental Medicine Foundation.

Mr. Freeman: No funds are provided to this foundation by the Department of Health.

Community Care

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of his report to Parliament on the development of community care services to be published under section 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultations Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Freeman: The report was laid in draft before Parliament on 21 December last year. Copies will be placed in the Library as soon as they are printed.

Personal Stereos

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the dangers to public health of loud music played on personal stereos.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on 15 January at *column 89*.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the national ambulance service raised by public donation in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not held centrally on the extent to which the individual ambulance services raise money by public donation.

Hospital Cleaning Standards

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he proposes to take to ensure that adequate cleaning standards are guaranteed at *(a)* Guys hospital, Southwark, *(b)* Battle hospital, Reading and *(c)* St. John's hospital, Chelmsford.

Mr. Freeman: The setting of such standards, and their maintenance, is a matter for the health authorities concerned.

Cervical Screening

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority, the family practitioner committees that do not issue the Health Education Authority's leaflet, "The Cervical Smear Test, Why You Need It", to accompany the invitation letter sent to women for a National Health Service cervical cytology screening.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority, the percentage of women who did not attend for a cervical cytology screening when invited for the last year for which he has figures, under the categories *(a)* inaccessability, *(b)* ineligibility, *(c)* unsuitable, *(d)* failed communication, *(e)* incorrect classification and *(f)* refused to attend.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Although the information will not be available in exactly the form requested, it is hoped shortly to be able to give information about women screened in 1988-89 following the introduction of a new cancer screening return from April 1988.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to reduce the interval time between cervical cytology screening to three years for all women.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have recommended to health authorities a maximum interval of five years between tests, which we know can reduce deaths among women screened by more than 80 per cent. We know that the majority of women who die from cervical cancer have never had a smear test. We therefore believe that it is more important to achieve as a first priority a high response rate from all women in the eligible age group rather than aim to reduce the interval between screening. The recommended recall interval is kept under review.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority, those district health authorities that do not send notification to women who have had a cervical cytology screening, when the results are negative.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority, those district health authorities that do not offer cervical cytology screening at the age range recommended by his Department; and if he will show in his answer the age range applied by each such district health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have asked district health authorities to invite all women aged 20 to 64 for cervical cancer screening by March 1993, unless their general practitioner has indicated that they should be excluded. We do not have information on the age ranges currently being invited in each district health authority.

Kent Contract

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which the Kent contract for general practitioners conforms with the Statutory Instruments approved by Parliament.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Kent contract for general practitioners conforms with the Statutory Instruments approved by Parliament.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Some reports have appeared in the medical press which appear to suggest that Kent FPC is proposing to remunerate its GPs and modify its terms of service in accordance with a local contract rather than the contract approved by Parliament. Such suggestions are inaccurate. There is no question of any FPC drawing up an alternative contract to that set out in the NHS (General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations as amended last year. Kent FPC has always understood that and is making its preparations on that basis.

Paramedics

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether ambulance paramedics trained under local schemes such as that operated by Torbay health authority will qualify for the £500 award.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Only staff with extended training to NHS training authority standard and required to use paramedical skills will be entitled to an additional payment of £500 a year under the terms of the management side's final offer. But the management side has also offered to discuss with the staff side recognition of staff with intermediate training with any payment agreed backdated to 1 April 1989.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report* those health authorities in the South East Thames regional health authority which *(a)* maintain a full breast screening service and *(b)* do not do so.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have asked health authorities to implement breast cancer screening services over the three years to 1990 and services will be provided to all district health authority areas. The table shows the three screening centres serving South East Thames regional health authority, the districts presently served, and the districts to which services will be extended in 1990.

Screening centre or consortium		*Districts served*
Camberwell		Camberwell
		West Lambeth
		Lewisham and North Southwark
	to be extended to	Greenwich
	to be extended to	Bexley
	to be extended to	Bromley
Canterbury		Canterbury and Thanet
	to be extended to	South East Kent
	to be extended to	Maidstone
	to be extended to	Tunbridge Wells
	to be extended to	Medway
	to be extended to	Dartford and Gravesham
East Sussex		Brighton
	to be extended to	Eastbourne
	to be extended to	Hastings

Psychiatric Hospital Land

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much land used by psychiatric hospitals in the South West regional health authority and Wessex regional health authority areas was sold in each year from 1985 to 1989; how much money was realised from each of these sales; what proportion of the proceeds was allocated to community care programmes and facilities for people with mental health problems; what these programmes and facilities were; and what the remaining proceeds were spent on;

(2) what land presently occupied by psychiatric hospitals in the South West and the Wessex regional health authority areas is to be sold over the next five years; what timetable is planned for these sales; and what plans are in place for the utilisation of the moneys produced.

Mr. Freeman: Property transactions are delegated to regional health authorities and information on sales and future sales of surplus NHS property and land is not collected centrally by functional group. To do so by means of a special exercise would involve disproportionate cost. The instruction to health authorities set out in "Property Transactions in the NHS" (a copy of which is in the Library) is that closures of hospitals for the mentally ill and handicapped must be preceded by the provision of comprehensive alternative services and that proceeds must be used specifically for the development of the alternative services.

Severn Clinic

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the request by the charity MIND for an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the closure of the Severn clinic at Wrington near Bristol and the operations of the owning company, Britannia Health Care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department wrote to MIND on 5 January and that letter has been copied to the hon. Member. Health authorities' responsibility for private hospitals is limited to ensuring that there has been no breach of registration requirements. They are not empowered to investigate financial stability.

Chiropractors

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints his Department received in the last full year for which there are records about chiropractic treatments; and how many of the complaints related to *(a)* qualified and *(b)* unqualified chiropractors.

Mr. Freeman: The Department received one complaint during the past year. It is understood that the practitioner concerned holds a chiropractic qualification.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from members of the public calling for compulsory registration of chiropractors.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 13 December 1989 at columns 675-76.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications are required of anyone who advertises treatment as a chiropractor.

Mr. Freeman: No qualifications restrictions are placed on chiropractors who are free to offer their services privately to the public subject only to those provisions of statute and civil law which apply.

Back Pain

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated annual cost to the National Health Service of providing treatment to sufferers from back pain.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not available centrally.

Medicines Directive

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to incorporate the provisions of the European Community directive 89/381/EEC into United Kingdom legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: EEC directive 89/381, which is binding on all member states, was adopted on 14 June 1989 and requires member states to take measures necessary to comply with its provisions before 1 January 1992. We are currently examining what measures are necessary to give effect to the directive by that date.

Bioethics

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Council of Europe's ad hoc committee of experts on bioethical issues (CAHBI) and the countries from which they come.

Mr. Freeman: The membership of the Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Bioethics (CAHBI) is a matter for the member states concerned. At the last meeting in December 1989 the members were:

Austria
Dr. Renate Kausek
Mme Ingrid Djalinous

Belgium
M. Philippe Meire
Professor Armond Andre

Cyprus
Mrs. Frosso Parrisiadou

Denmark
Mr. Ulrich Horst Petersen

Finland
Ms. Paula Kokkonen

France
M. Christian Byk
M. Georges David

Federal Republic of Germany
M. G. Fieberg
Dr. Lydia Mathy

Greece
Mrs. Panagiota Dalla-Vorgia

Iceland
Dr. Orn Bjarnason

Ireland
Dr. Niall Tierney

Italy
M. Giovan Battista Ascone
M. Salvatore Puglisi

Luxembourg
M. Arsen Betz

Malta
Rev. Prof. Charles G. Vella
Dr. Joseph Louis Grech

Netherlands
Mrs. Johanna H. W. Kits Nieuwenkamp

Norway
Mr. Kare Berg
Mrs. Grete Gjertsen

Portugal
Dr. Luis Mendes Graca

Spain
Dr. Octavi Quintana-Trias

Sweden
Ms. Lena Jonnson
Mr. Goran Hermeren

Switzerland
Mr. Hansjakob Muller
M. Franz Furger

Turkey
Dr. Yaman Ors

United Kingdom
Dr. Jeremy Metters

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those who represented the United Kingdom at the Council of Europe's first symposium on bioethics held in Strasbourg in December 1989; and if he will place in the Library papers presented and records of the proceedings.

Mr. Freeman: There were no formal representatives of the UK. However, Dr. Jeremy Metters, deputy chief medical officer, Department of Health, attended as chairman of CAHBI. There were in addition a number of independent participants from the United Kingdom at the symposium.

Papers and records of the proceedings have not yet been published by the Council of Europe. As soon as they become available they will be placed in the Library.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the procedures for appointment by member states of the Council of Europe of members of the CAHBI committee.

Mr. Freeman: Members are appointed by the member states of the Council of Europe.

Council of Europe

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been Her Majesty's Government's response to Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1100; and whether it has passed through the Council of Europe's internal consultative machinery.

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty's Government have not yet been asked to respond to Recommendation 1100 of the Parliamentary Assembly which is still being considered within the Council of Europe's internal consultative machinery.

Medico-ethics

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any proposals have been submitted by the European Commission on harmonisation of medico-ethical questions following the Ulburghs report adopted by the European Parliament Document A2-78/88.

Mr. Freeman: The European Commission has not made any proposals on harmonisation of medico-ethical questions following the Ulburghs report.

Meningitis

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of meningitis have been diagnosed in *(a)* under 18's and *(b)* over 18's in each of the last five years for which figures are available in (i) Suffolk, (ii) Norfolk, (iii) Essex, (iv) England and (v) the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available in the form requested. However, the available information on meningitis notifications is set out in the table.

Notifications of all forms of meningitis 1984 to 1988

	East Anglia regional health authority	*North East Thames regional health authority*	*England, Wales and Scotland*
1984			
Up to 14 years	27	39	884
Up to 24 years	32	60	1,082
25+ years	6	27	260
1985			
Up to 14 years	36	35	1,030
Up to 24 years	43	54	1,293
25+ years	13	38	349
1986			
Up to 14 years	32	61	1,600
Up to 24 years	39	77	1,941
25+ years	8	21	384
1987			
Up to 14 years	36	80	1,827
Up to 24 years	46	109	2,192
25+ years	10	45	470
1988			
Up to 14 years	42	85	1,976
Up to 24 years	52	114	2,432
25+ years	13	41	656

Northern Ireland
(Information is not centrally collected by age groups)

Year	*All ages*
1984	182
1985	149
1986	162
1987	102
1988	[1]154

[1] Provisional.
Source: OPCS.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the notification and action procedure for all doctors in a health authority area once a case of meningitis has been diagnosed.

Mr. Freeman: By regulations made under section 13 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984, doctors are obliged to notify cases of meningococcal meningitis or septicaemia to the Medical Officer for Environmental Health or proper officer. The Chief Medical Officer wrote to all regional medical officers on 2 February 1988 asking them to ensure that they had action plans to deal with meningitis (PL/CMO (88)1). He also wrote to all doctors on 3 February 1988 to pass on expert advice on the epidemiology, early management and prevention of the spread of meningococcal infection. A copy of the Gloucester health authority leaflet on meningitis was enclosed with the letter (PL/CMO (88)2).

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice to parents his Department issues about meningitis *(a)* in general and *(b)* once a case has been confirmed.

Mr. Freeman: It is for health authorities to determine their own policy on issuing parents with advice about meningitis.

The Department recommends Gloucester health authority's "About Meningitis" leaflet and the Meningitis Trust's "Meningitis—the Facts". Both leaflets contain useful and clearly written information on meningitis and include a list of signs and symptoms of the disease. The Department values the work the Meningitis Trust does in promoting awareness of the disease, and the support it gives to sufferers' families.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department will take to curtail a suspected outbreak of meningitis in Suffolk and Essex.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the local directors of public health who are taking action in accordance with guidance issued by the Department's Chief Medical Officer.

Air Ambulance

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total monthly running costs for the Cornwall Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally. I understand that the running costs for air ambulance vary from month to month. The total annual cost is reported to be around £350,000.

Cerebral Palsy

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned to investigate the causes of cerebral palsy.

Mr. Freeman: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council. However, the following research, funded by Department of Health, includes investigation of causes into cerebral palsy together with other impairments.

The Oxford region child development study was funded by the Department between April 1983 and September 1989. It is a population-based register of pre-school impairment, including cerebral palsy. Data collected in this study established the prevalence rate of cerebral palsy and the register provides a framework for satellite studies which may look at causes of cerebral palsy. This register is currently funded by Oxford region health authority.

The Department has been funding the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, Oxford, which coordinates clinical trials as part of its functions, since 1989. Children who as babies participated in some trials have been followed up, enabling study of the causes of cerebral palsy.

A study at University College London (jointly funded by DH and MRC) is focusing on neurodevelopmental disorders in very small babies.

A study in Liverpool is looking at the long-term outcome in small babies.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to monitor trends in cerebral palsy.

Mr. Freeman: The Department does not monitor trends in cerebral palsy on a national basis. However, we observe the results of local population based studies of such trends. Whether or not we need to monitor more closely is being considered in the larger context of the development of child health surveillance policies.

Ambulance Dispute

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which health authorities have *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the police, *(c)* the Red Cross and *(d)* St. John Ambulances been deployed on ambulance duties.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 8 January 1990]: (a)* On 15 January 1990 military vehicles were deployed in the following regional health authorities.

Trent RHA
North West Thames RHA
West Midlands RHA
Wessex RHA
North East Thames RHA
South West Thames RHA (including London)
Oxford RHA

(b) The police are assisting the ambulance services in the above authorities, and also in:

Northern RHA
Mersey RHA
Yorkshire RHA
South East Thames RHA

(c) Information on the assistance provided to health authorities by the Red Cross and St. John Ambulance service is not held centrally.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date *(a)* the Army and *(b)* the police began performing ambulance duties.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 8 January 1990]:* The Army began ambulance duties on 7 December 1989 and the police on 23 October 1989.

DEFENCE

Laser Weapons

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations his Department has carried out, or is aware of, into the effects of laser or other dazzle light on the eyes and brain functions of human beings; and what are the results of such investigations.

Mr. Neubert: MOD research establishments have studied the effects of lasers and other high power light sources on human eyes. This research is continuing, with particular reference to quantifying the impact of such sources, and to devising techniques to counter these effects.

Faslane

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident in early December when a Royal Navy vessel was damaged and had to return to Faslane; and whether any inquiry has been instigated.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No Royal Navy vessel returned to Faslane due to damage during December.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans to insert a magnetic facility in the middle of the loch at Faslane; for how long this facility would be in use per annum; and what restrictions will apply to those who live on boats or sail yachts on the loch.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In order to remove the magnetic signature, which is acquired by all steel-hulled vessels, submarines are required to undergo periodic treatments. While existing arrangements meet the present requirement, these will be incapable of treating the larger Vanguard class of submarine. A new magnetic treatment facility is, therefore, required and this will be permanently located at a position in the Gareloch some 305 metres off Rowmore Point which meets the operational requirement and is sufficiently far away from other constructions with a steel content.

Following completion, which is planned for the end of 1992, up to 30 treatments per year are expected to be necessary with each treatment likely to last up to two days. It will be necessary to establish an exclusion zone around the facility of 160m to the west and north. To the east, the exclusion zone will join the existing prohibited zone around the Faslane base. The resulting proposed amendment to the Ministry of Defence byelaws will be the subject of consultation and advertisement in the normal way. Outside the prohibited zone, it is not expected that there will be any restrictions on those who live on boats or sail yachts on the loch; a residual channel will allow navigation to and from Garelochhead.

Gareloch

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans, and for what purpose, his Department has to dredge a channel at the mouth of Gareloch; and what effect this will have upon Rhuspit site of special scientific interest.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work has started on improving the existing access channel to the Clyde submarine base Faslane through the Rhu Narrows. The work is necessary in order to permit safe transit in all tidal states by the larger Vanguard class submarines being introduced as part of the Trident programme. The dredging will have no detrimental affect on the nearby site of special scientific interest.

Soviet Nuclear Test Site

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any invitation from his counterpart in the Soviet Union to visit the Soviet nuclear test site at Semipalatinsk.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Flora and Fauna

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's participation in the project to film a major wildlife documentary series on the fauna and flora of the defence estate.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence takes its responsibilities towards the conservation of its estate very seriously. The diversity of habitats means that many rare and uncommon species are to be found on defence land and a number of wildlife documentary programmes have either already been made, or are in the process of production. It is hoped, in due course, to complement these individual programmes with a major series.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the £9 million increase in his Department's budget relating to the costs of privatisation of the Property Services Agency; and if he will give details.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The £9,182,000 increase in the Ministry of Defence's cash limit for 1989-90 to which the hon. Member refers is not connected with the decision to privatise the Property Services Agency announced on 26 October 1989. It is the share borne on Class 1, Vote 4 of additional expenditure arising from the reorganisation of the PSA on more commercial lines in preparation for Government Departments being untied for works services from 1 April 1990. The principal areas of expenditure covered information technology support, the setting up of the Business Development Directorate and the taking over of some functions of the Crown Suppliers such as the Government car service.

Tynedale Hunt

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action is to be taken following an entry by the Tynedale hunt through Albermarle barracks, Stamfordham, on 1 January.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. The Tynedale hunt has a licence to hunt in this area.

Trooper Wayne Cross

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will exercise clemency to give early release to Trooper Wayne Cross, found guilty of being absent without leave at a court martial at Tidworth barracks on 16 January.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Trooper Wayne Cross presented a petition to the confirming officers against the sentence of the court-martial court. His case is therefore under consideration by the appropriate military authorities.

Absences Without Leave

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average term of imprisonment imposed on service men found guilty of being absent without leave over the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been no cases in recent years of a court-martial awarding imprisonment for absence without leave. The usual punishment is military detention, which is a form of corrective training, with or without dismissal from Her Majesty's service.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rights of appeal there are for service men found guilty of being absent without leave.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A soldier found guilty of absence without leave may present a petition against finding and/or sentence to the confirming officer before confirmation. After confirmation, he has the further right to present a petition to the reviewing authority in respect of finding or sentence or both. Finally, he has the right to petition against finding to the Army Board of the Defence Council as a first step to having his case heard by the courts-martial appeal court. A soldier who is convicted by court-martial is required by Queens Regulations to be given a pamphlet explaining his rights of petition and appeal. Comparable appeal arrangements exist for the other two services.

Ships (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications of the recent experiment on the Black sea, in which short-range passive methods were used to supplement long-range detectors to verify the presence of nuclear weapons on board surface ships for the policy by successive United Kingdom Governments neither to confirm or deny the presence of such weapons on board United Kingdom vessels.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no implications for our policy neither to confirm nor to deny the presence of nuclear weapons in particular ships at particular times.

Namibia

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any request from the new Government of Namibia to provide training for Namibia's armed forces.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 10 January at column *939*.

Military Training

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are issued to those participating in mud runs in relation to heat stress.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* All participants in diver training will have been instructed on the recognition and first aid treatment of heat-related illness, and other preventive measures include regular reminders to instructors of the problems associated with heat exhaustion and heat stroke; a minimum interval of two hours between normal physical training and training across mud; the participants' being bareheaded as an aid to body cooling; and the provision of a standby vehicle in case urgent medical evacuation should be necessary.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what representations have been received calling for the cessation of mud runs; and what advice he has received regarding their value and purpose;

(2) whether mud runs are being used in *(a)* aptitude tests and *(b)* training in the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* There may be a requirement, in operations, for divers in the Royal Navy and the Army to cross mud at speed or carrying heavy equipment, and their training necessarily reflects this. Moreover, this form of training is valuable in developing the qualities required generally of military divers, whose work is arduous and potentially dangerous. However, mud runs are no longer used during aptitude tests.

I am not aware of any representations calling for the cessation of mud runs having been received in 1989, but one letter on this subject has been received from an hon. Member this year.

Procurement

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's major procurement purchases which have followed competitive tendering in each year since 1984.

Mr. Alan Clark *[pursuant to his reply, 16 January 1990, c. 136]:* The following further information is now available:

1989 'AS90' Self Propelled Howitzer.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action has been taken by the EEC to fulfil its general agreement on tariffs and trade commitment to participate in substantial progressive reductions in agricultural support and protection.

Mr. Curry: The Community, in common with other GATT members, has tabled proposals for reform of agricultural policies. Negotiations in the GATT round are continuing.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the trend in common agricultural policy support prices, expressed in national currencies, for cereals and dairy products in each member state over the past three years.

Mr. Curry: The buying-in prices for common wheat and the intervention prices for butter over the last three years are given in the table. Prices are in national currencies per tonne, applicable at the start of each marketing year. No figures are supplied for Portugal, since cereals and dairy products are not supplied to intervention in that country.

	Common wheat			*Butter*		
	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
United Kingdom £	110·67	110·67	114·75	2,084·52	2,084·52	2,125·83
Belgium/Luxembourg BF	8,107·43	8,107·43	7,900·53	150,482·26	150,482·26	145,246·99
Denmark DK	1,476·73	1,476·73	1,461·10	27,420·56	27,420·56	26,861·65
Germany DM	404·46	400·36	388·36	7,549·59	7,472·60	7,070·39
France FF	1,260·98	1,260·98	1,259·49	23,414·42	23,414·42	23,155·19
Greece Dr	22,631·60	22,631·60	31,250·40	470,661·30	470,661·30	496,307·96
Ireland Irish £	140·22	140·22	133·60	2,606·19	2,606·19	2,577·14
Italy Lir	269,371·73	269,371·73	273,730·23	5,051,916·00	5,051,916·00	5,059,456·00
Netherlands Fl	453·39	448·82	435·36	8,463·60	8,333·90	7,934·65
Spain Pta	26,011·66	26,011·66	25,231·77	487,921·75	487,921·75	468,604·28

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the EEC proposal in the current general agreement on tariffs and trade negotiations that an agricultural price freeze is sufficient to meet its short-term commitment to reduce agricultural support and protection levels in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom expects reforms in the CAP which have been agreed in recent years to result in aggregate levels of support in 1990 consistent with the Community's short-term GATT obligations.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the EEC uses the producer subsidy equivalent for the purpose of calculating total agricultural support; and why its outline proposals for agricultural reform tabled in the general agreement on tariffs and trade Uruguay round, measure reductions against a 1986 starting level.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission uses an aggregate measure of support known as the support measurement unit which is based on the OECD's producer subsidy equivalent. A 1986 starting level reflects agreement that credit is to be given for measures taken since the current GATT round was launched.

Fish Disease

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of *(a)* dab, *(b)* flounder, *(c)* cod, *(d)* herring and *(e)* plaice caught in water around the United Kingdom showed evidence of disease for each of the ad hoc surveys conducted since 1980 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, together with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland.

Mr. Curry: Since 1980, the Department's surveys for fish diseases in water around the United Kingdom have shown wide differences in prevalence between fish species. For dab and flounder, external diseases are recorded at higher prevalence rates than in cod, herring or any other species.

The prevalence rates of disease vary not only between species but in relation to abundance, size, sex, spawning state and food availability. For dab and flounder, up to 10

per cent. prevalence would be expected in some areas, and then fluctuations would be expected according to the season. For cod, diseases are noted only when the migrations occur inshore during the autumn. At this time approximately 10 per cent. has been recorded, but this figure varies between years. Diseases in herring are rare, that is, less than 1 per cent. in all our surveys.

Monitoring prevalence of disease in marine fish is only useful when it is made over an extended time period, and when all biological and physical parameters have been taken into account. We know that all current diseases in the above species have been documented since the turn of the century.

Grants

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total cost of grants to farmers from the Agricultural Development Advisory Service for each of the past 10 years, together with equivalent figures in other European Community nations.

Mr. Curry: Grants to farmers in the United Kingdom under common agricultural policy and United Kingdom national schemes for the years 1984-85 to 1988-89 (forecast) are set out in the publication "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1988". Figures for preceding years are contained in the annual review of agriculture White Papers. Forecasts for 1989-90 are contained in the Supply Estimates. No comparable figures are available for other European Community nations, but any schemes which they operate have to comply with the appropriate EC legislation or be approved by the Commission under articles 92 to 94 of the treaty.

Radioactive Contamination

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department will introduce monitoring of the levels of radioactive contamination in sheep sold from derestricted areas bordering those areas where bans have been in operation.

Mr. Maclean: Periodic surveys are carried out immediately outside the restricted areas in England and Wales to confirm the continuing validity of the boundaries set. There is no case for special, additional, monitoring of sheep sold from outside the restricted areas.

Milk Lorries

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet representatives of the Direct Sellers Co-operative Limited to discuss milk lorries.

Mr. Curry: I have no such plans.

Cattle Offal

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what restrictions he has imposed on the export of cattle offal from the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have imposed no restrictions on the export of cattle offal from the United Kingdom. Within the limits of Community rules where they apply, it is up to importing countries to determine the conditions under which such imports may take place.

Microwave Ovens

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he will conduct his own research into the effects of microwave oven heating on food containing amino acids; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will conduct his own research to ascertain the chemical effects of microwave oven heating on milk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: No. I gave a clear explanation of my Department's views of Professor Lubec's research on 13 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *698*. I have no new information at this time that would justify my Department conducting its own research in this area.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the amount which the European Economic Community is spending per week on the storage, destruction and dumping of food surpluses; what is the comparable sum actually spent per week, five and 10 years previously; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: European Community expenditure in 1990 on storage, withdrawal and export refunds for agricultural products is expected to be about £9,000 million, or £173 million per week. Comparable figures for 1985 are £6,965 million (£134 million per week) and for 1980 £4,610 million (£89 million per week).

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reasons for refusing the Cumbria county council trading standards department details of the movements in Cumbria of cows found to be suffering from bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: The handling and, if necessary, the investigation of cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy is the responsibility of the Ministry. Details of individual cases are held in confidence.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the extent of the use of bovine products in the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries; whether such use includes the use of offals banned from human consumption; whether he has any estimate of the amount of such products; and whether there are any controls, either current or proposed, to regulate such use.

Mr. Maclean: Returns from the pharmaceutical industry confirm that only a small percentage of their products include materials of bovine and other animal origin. I have no comparable information about the cosmetic industry. Bovine offals account for only a small proportion of the animal material and they are mainly imported from countries where bovine spongiform encephalopathy has not been detected. The Southwood committee concluded that the risk of transmitting bovine spongiform encephalopathy via medicines appears remote and theoretical, but as a precautionary measure, special

guidelines from the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Veterinary Products Committee on the use of bovine materials in the production of medicines were circulated to pharmaceutical companies last March. If any evidence were to be found that a medicinal product might be unsafe, Ministers have powers under the Medicines Act to revoke or suspend the licence.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those animal species which are currently or proposed to be researched with a view to determining susceptibility to spongiform encephalopathy from scrapie of bovine spongiform encephalopathy sources.

Mr. Maclean: The following animal species are currently or proposed to be the subject of transmission experiments to determine their susceptibility to bovine spongiform encephalopathy:

Cattle
Sheep
Goats
Pigs
Chickens
Marmosets
Mink
Hamsters
Mice

Research on species' susceptibility to scrapie is being funded at the AFRC/MRC neuropathogenesis unit through the science budget.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will detail work being undertaken to develop a diagnostic test for bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the live and clinically affected animal.

Mr. Maclean: Bovine spongiform encephalopathy is currently diagnosed on the basis of histopathology in the brain of clinically infected animals. MAFF is funding research to develop diagnostic tests in the live, pre-clinical affected animal using molecular biological techniques. This research is being carried out at MAFF's central veterinary laboratory, Weybridge and the AFRC-MRC neuropathogenesis unit in Edinburgh. Relevant slow virus research is being funded at the neuropathogenesis unit through the science budget.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is currently researching into the effects of scrapie-infected material being incorporated into feeding compounds for pigs and chickens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Southwood working party pointed out that no naturally occurring spongiform encephalopathies had been recorded in pigs and poultry and did not suggest that action was necessary to stop the use of ruminant protein in their feed. However, it was suggested that further research should be carried out and MAFF is conducting transmission experiments to investigate the susceptibility of pigs and poultry to bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends researching into the infectivity of organs and tissues from bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected cattle other than those currently banned from human consumption; and which such organs he regards as his research priority.

Mr. Maclean: MAFF will be funding research into the infectivity of the full range of organs and tissues from bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected cattle not currently banned from human consumption.

Priority will be given to those organs and tissues consumed by humans in significant quantities, to confirm their safety as currently assessed from research on scrapie. Tissues of possible relevance in the transmission of the disease in cattle will also be tested.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he received the interim report of the Tyrell committee on research into bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and why he decided not to make the report immediately available to the public.

Mr. Maclean: The report was received on 16 June 1989. It makes many recommendations on a wide range of research topics which necessitated detailed, and inevitably time-consuming, study to enable a properly considered response in respect of the work to be done and its funding. There have, however, been no delays and a good deal of the most important research is already under way.

Enzymes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy for meat which has been treated with proteolytic enzymes, or which is derived from an animal that has been so treated, to be labelled with the words treated with vegetable enzymes.

Mr. Maclean: I have no plans to do so. The hon. Member's suggestion does not seem to offer any particular improvement in terms of consumer understanding over the present requirement to describe meat so treated as "tenderised".

Veterinary Manpower

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will make a decision on the Page report on veterinary manpower.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Minister will be making an announcement shortly.

Standing Veterinary Committee

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the standing veterinary committee of the EEC is constituted; and how he ensures that Her Majesty's Government's views are represented at this committee.

Mr. Maclean: The arrangements for the operation of the standing veterinary committee are contained in a Council decision of 15 October 1968. Attendance by Government officials ensures that the views of the United Kingdom are fully represented.

Agricultural Products (Trade)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what EEC provision the West German Government have banned the import of beef from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The German Government have not banned imports of beef from the United Kingdom. I do not consider that the conditions they have imposed on such imports are consistent with Community rules.

Tyrell Committee

64. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy towards the recommendations of the Tyrell committee that the results of all research should be open for scrutiny and published at the appropriate time.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 16 January col. *217*.

Scrapie

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research is currently being undertaken into the incidence of scrapie; and whether he has any programme to reduce such incidence.

Mr. Maclean: Scrapie has existed in this country for many years and no specific research into its incidence is currently being undertaken. Advice is available to farmers from ADAS on the control of the disease and flock owners may participate in a monitoring scheme under the Ministry's sheep and goat health scheme. Work is being undertaken at both the central veterinary laboratory and the neuropathogenesis unit to develop a diagnosis test. Work is being funded through the science budget to evaluate the genetic predisposition of sheep to scrapie. In addition, MAFF continues to fund work on a scrapie-resistant flock to assess the potential of breeding programmes for control and reduction of the incidence of scrapie in sheep.

Cattle Semen (Exports)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what restrictions currently apply to the export of semen from British cattle.

Mr. Maclean: The animal health conditions covering the export of semen are established by negotiation with the importing country. These may include confirmation of freedom from certain disease in relation to the collection centre and the donor, its herd of origin or the country as a whole and specific requirements in relation to the method of collection. In almost all cases the importing country will require the semen to be accompanied by an export health certificate signed by an official veterinarian to confirm that the necessary conditions have been met.

The United States, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and Iran have currently suspended imports of bovine semen from Great Britain because of concerns about bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

North Sea Conference

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the proposals he will be putting to the North sea conference later in the current year.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

One of the main objectives of the third North sea conference is to review the work undertaken by member states in implementing the recommendations of the second North sea conference held in London 1987. As with its predecessor, the third conference will review all the major activities with an impact on the marine environment, including discharges of dangerous substances via rivers and the atmosphere, nutrients, dumping, shipping and offshore installations. The United Kingdom has taken a very full part in preparations for the conference and I am confident that the conference declaration, which will be the product of work by all the North sea states, will include valuable new measures, including a number proposed by the United Kingdom.

Cetaceans

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made an assessment of the reason for the deaths within the last 12 months of seals in the Liverpool bay area.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

An assessment carried out by Liverpool university department of veterinary pathology on the basis of post-mortem examinations shows that viral or bacterial pneumonia was the commonest cause of death in seals washed ashore in this period.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what species of cetaceans are known to inhabit the Liverpool bay area; whether any species previously logged within the last 25 years are now thought to have disappeared from the area; and if he will provide any readily accessible information to indicate changes in estimated population levels of all species of cetaceans in the Liverpool bay area over the past 25 years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

In United Kingdom waters generally there is as yet no reliable population and status information on small cetacean species although valuable data are available from sightings and strandings reporting schemes. Recent reports do not suggest that cetaceans are resident in Liverpool bay, but migratory animals are reported. In the last five years Liverpool university department of veterinary pathology has examined stranded animals from the following species:

Pilot whale
Bottle-nosed dolphin
White-beaked dolphin
White-sided dolphin
Common porpoise

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether dead seals from the Liverpool bay area within the last 12 months showed evidence of blocked uterine ducts.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that work carried out by Liverpool university department of veterinary pathology indicates that two out of a total of 12 dead seals washed ashore in the Liverpool bay in the last 12 months have been found to have blocked uterine ducts. There is no evidence that this contributed to the animals' death.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Hardship Payments

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people under 25 years have received hardship payments from his Department's office in Durham since October 1988.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list by month since 1986 to date, for his Department's offices in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Wath on Dearne (i) the number of independent living fund payments made and (ii) the amounts paid;

(2) if he will list by year since 1986 to date for his Department's offices in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Wath on Dearne what surplus has remained from the independent living fund.

Mr. Scott: The independent living fund was established in June 1988. It is a charity which is administered centrally from Nottingham under the guidance of its trustees. Information on the number of payments and amounts paid is not available by local office area.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether any reviews are being made by his Department of the independent living fund.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 10 January at column *657*.

Actors

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from actors reluctant to accept contracts in excess of eight weeks for fear of losing full entitlement to the payment of mortgage interest if subsequently unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Department has no record of any such representations.

Mrs. I. E. Hart

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he hopes to make a decision with regard to the back payment of the widow's pension for Mrs. I. E. Hart of 21 Greenswood road, Brixham, Devon; and if he will make a statement as to the reason for the delay.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing this matter to my attention. Mrs. Hart's case is a complicated one which involves inquiries going back a number of years. However, I have to say that there has been an unacceptable delay in the handling of her case, and for this I offer Mrs. Hart my apologies. Urgent action is now being taken to put this right. A member of the Department's management at Torbay local office will visit Mrs. Hart today to explain the reasons, and apologise for the delay. The local office manager will write to my hon. Friend as soon as the case has been resolved.

Budget and Crisis Loans

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number of claimants on income support were repaying a budgeting or crisis loan for each month since January 1989; and what number of *(a)* one-parent families, *(b)* sick and disabled claimants, *(c)* pensioners and *(d)* unemployed claimants on income support were repaying a budgeting or crisis loan for each month since January 1989.

Mr. Scott: The information available is given in the table. The figures represent the number of loans being repaid on the last day of each month.

	Number of IS claimants *000s*	*Lone parents* *000s*	*Disabled*[1] *000s*	*Pensioners* *000s*	*Unemployed* *000s*
Budgeting loans					
1989					
January	243	106	24	12·0	86
February	265	117	24	13·0	95
March	284	126	25	14·0	104
April	301	135	25	15·0	110
May	314	141	25	15·0	111
June	326	148	25	15·0	120
July	332	152	25	16·0	122
August	336	154	24	16·0	125
September	339	157	24	16·0	124
October	344	161	24	16·0	125
November	351	167	23	16·0	128
December	344	166	22	16·0	124
Crisis loans					
1989					
January	40	8	1	0·5	27
February	45	9	1	0·5	30
March	47	9	1	0·5	36
April	48	10	1	0·5	33
May	48	9	1	0·5	33
June	49	10	1	0·5	33
July	49	10	1	0·5	34
August	50	10	1	0·5	34
September	50	11	1	0·5	33

	Number of IS claimants 000s	Lone parents 000s	Disabled[1] 000s	Pensioners 000s	Unemployed 000s
October	52	11	1	0·5	35
November	53	11	1	0·5	36
December	47	10	1	0·5	32

[1] Applicants receiving a disability premium. It is not possible to identify separately applicants who are sick and not receiving a disability premium.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of budget or crisis loans to claimants on income support for each month since January 1989.

Mr. Scott: The information available is set out in the table. The information represents the amounts outstanding on the last day of each calendar month.

	Budgeting loans £ million	Crisis loans £ million
January 1989	46·491	4·485
February 1989	51·897	5·132
March 1989	56·595	5·751
April 1989	60·944	6·330
May 1989	63·596	6·789
June 1989	65·893	7·189
July 1989	66·549	7·583
August 1989	66·958	8·055
September 1989	67·111	8·388
October 1989	68·173	8·840
November 1989	71·201	9·619
December 1989	70·095	9·523

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has concerning the impact on people's incomes of not receiving sick benefit or statutory sick pay during the first three days of any absence from work due to illness.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Advertising

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the total cost of advertising by his Department in 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90; and what is his planned expenditure for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The total cost of advertising in the year 1987-88 was £0·82 million; in 1988-89 it was £4·57 million. In 1989-90 the planned expenditure is expected to be £7·16 million; the estimate for 1990-91 is £4·1 million. The forecast for 1991-92 is £7·4 million.

Social Fund (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many local Department of Social Security offices have reported overspending on money allocated for social fund payments in Wales in each county; and which offices have overspent by more than 10 per cent.

Mr. Scott: No social security office has overspent its allocation for social fund loans and grants for 1989-90.

Earnings Limit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether unemployed people were given advance warning of the effect that the £43 earnings limit might have on their benefit entitlement if they worked for one or more days in the week preceding 10 December 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: People are only required to declare their earnings at the end of the benefit week in which they work. It would not have been possible to identify individuals who may have had earnings in the week commencing 3 December 1989 prior to the declaration of these earnings in week commencing 10 December 1989.

Pension Fund Surpluses

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he estimates has been the level of aggregate pension fund surpluses each year since 1979.

Mr. Lilley: I have been asked to reply.

Information is not available in the form requested. The table gives information on large self-administered pension funds reporting to the Inland Revenue action which they propose to take to remove surpluses following the provisions of the Finance Act 1986.

Large self-administered schemes

Schemes reporting in	Number of schemes with surplus over 5 per cent.	with surplus under 5 per cent.	wound up	Aggregate value[1] £ million
1987-88	127	176	12	530
1988-89	481	853	26	2,040
April—December 1989	443	596	15	1,830

[1] Surplus for those reporting on surplus of over 5 per cent.

Note: The amounts shown in the final column represent figures for schemes reporting to the Inland Revenue in each year. They do not provide a basis for estimating the aggregate level of pension fund surpluses.

ENVIRONMENT

Chemical Discharges

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reply to the letter of 27 November 1989, from the hon. Member for Stretford in his capacity as honorary secretary of the north-west group of Labour hon. Members of Parliament, requesting a meeting with him and a delegation from that group to discuss accidents involving the discharge of harmful chemicals; and if he intends to meet a delegation.

Mr. Trippier: I have written to the hon. Member today.

Hylands Park, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to the answer on 15 January concerning the date of the public inquiry on the Hylands park, Chelmsford, planning application, what negotiations he is referring to in his answer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The negotiations are being undertaken by Chelmsford borough council with the Sue Ryder Foundation and other parties, in the light of the objections to the present planning applications, and with the aim of submitting revised proposals. Those revised proposals are expected to reduce the issues which need to be considered at the public inquiry, with savings on its duration and costs.

Catnip

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking concerning the smoking of the herb catnip.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

None. The herb catnip is not a controlled drug and I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that it gives rise to such harmful effects that it ought to be considered for control under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the average delays for elderly people waiting for housing benefit determinations; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that information is not collected in the form requested. Local authorities have statutory responsibility for determining housing benefit claims. Returns for the financial year 1988-89 have not yet been received from all local authorities, but the information available indicates that 75 per cent. of all claims for housing benefit have been processed within 14 days.

Source: Housing benefit management information system.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated level of unified business rate payments due to metropolitan district councils in 1990-91; and what was the income from the business rate in 1989-90.

Mr. Chope: Tables placed in the Library on 11 January show that under our proposals business rates payable to metropolitan district councils from the non-domestic rate pool total £2·4 billion in 1990-91. The estimated amount to be raised from non-domestic properties in metropolitan districts in 1989-90 is £2·1 billion.

Electrical Contractors

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reach a conclusion about the proposals of the Electrical Contractors Association for reciprocal recognition of electrical contractors in the single European market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: We are considering the proposals put forward by the association and hope to reach a conclusion shortly.

Energy and Environment Research Unit

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he, or any ministers in his Department, have any plans to meet the director and staff of the energy and environment research unit at the Open university.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to visit the energy and environment research unit at the Open university in the immediate future.

Private Bills

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his discussions with the Nature Conservancy Council on the use of private Bills to circumvent planning issues.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend has had no discussions with the Nature Conservancy Council on the use of private Bills to circumvent planning issues. The Government's initial response to the Joint Committee's report on private Bill procedures (HC 625, Session 1987-88) was given by the Leader of the House in the debate on 20 April 1989.

Conservation Programmes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what curtailment has taken place in the programmes for *(a)* marine conservation and *(b)* urban nature conservation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The development of marine and urban nature conservation programmes is primarily for the Nature Conservancy Council. It is for NCC to decide where its priorities lie and to implement them in accordance with its corporate plan, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Drinking Water

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his proposals for the protection of drinking water in the light of the recommendations of the report of the Lowermoor incident health advisory group.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Following publication of the report of the Lowermoor incident health advisory group

(LIHAG), the Department wrote to all the water undertakers in England drawing their attention to its conclusions and recommendations. The substance of LIHAG's recommendation No. 8 requiring a water undertaker to notify the relevant health authorities without delay of any incidents such as Lowermoor had already been included in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 (SI. No. 1147). The water undertakers were asked to confirm that the remaining recommendations, Nos. 7 and 9, relating to water supply had been or were being incorporated into their standard procedures. I am pleased to report that they have confirmed that these recommendations had been or were being implemented.

Environmentally Friendly Building Materials

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce an incentive scheme for developers, builders and specifiers to use environmentally friendly materials and techniques when maintaining the existing building stock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to introduce such a scheme.

Occupiers of domestic, commercial and industrial buildings are increasingly demanding evidence of the "green" credentials of their properties. Many of the nation's major developers, builders and specifiers have recognised this and are responding to this market demand.

Compensation

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the time scale for making changes to current compensation arrangements for those individuals and institutions affected by road and rail building projects.

Mr. Moynihan: We are currently considering proposals for changes in land compensation arrangements in the light of the responses received to the Department's consultation paper of 7 March 1989. Any proposals to change the law will be introduced at the earliest suitable opportunity.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what accounts and bill-paying functions are currently performed by the Property Services Agency at Hastings; how many staff are engaged on this work; and what arrangements are being considered for the future of this work and the staff.

Mr. Chope: Currently 366 staff are employed on the following accounts and bill-paying functions by the Property Services Agency at Hastings:

a. Payment of contractors' accounts for construction and maintenance work at civil central Government properties and defence establishments, including United States bases, in the United Kingdom.
b. Payment of fees to consultants engaged by PSA and suppliers of materials and equipment.
c. Payment of gas, water and electricity accounts for the central Government civil estate.
d. Payment of rents for leasehold civil estate properties.
e. Calculation and payment of salaries to PSA and DOE non-industrial staff.
f. Payment of travelling etc claims to PSA employees.
g. Invoicing clients for works services supplied on payment terms, tenants for rents and services charges, and government departments for accommodation, gas, water and electricity charges on the civil estate.
h. Maintenance of costing, management information and vote accounting records, the latter incorporating expenditure by PSA overseas.
i. Supply of information about expenditure on properties and projects, administration cost budgets, vote subheads to PSA divisions.
j. Supply of expenditure information to other departments.
k. Operation of resource costing management information systems, and supply of information.

Firm decisions have not yet been taken about the location of the accounting functions which will support the operating divisions of PSA Services and Property Holdings, but it is likely that some functions will be dispersed to local units of the operating divisions. Responsibility for the payment of gas, water and electricity accounts is currently being transferred to Departments. The agency will make every effort to find other posts, in PSA or in other Departments, for staff whose posts are no longer required as a result of these changes.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what work DITMOS is carrying out for the Property Services Agency; how many staff are engaged on this work; when the work will be complete; and what arrangements will be made to find alternative work for DITMOS staff.

Mr. Chope: PSA's directorate of information technology management and office systems (DITMOS) provides the agency with a range of IT and business support services. Its headquarters is in Hastings and it currently has some 490 staff in post. This number is likely to reduce over the next two to three years. It will then stabilise at a level reflecting the need for continuing systems support.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to keep open the option of compulsorily transferring the Property Services Agency's executive, administrative and support staff to the Government-owned company.

Mr. Chope: If PSA is incorporated as a Government-owned company it is intended that the staff in it will be transferred by a scheme under clause 1 of the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill. The PSA will use its best endeavours, in advance of that incorporation, to find other posts within Government for staff who do not wish to transfer.

Politically Restricted Posts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date local authorities must complete the list of politically restricted posts referred to in section 2(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: By section 2(4) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, local authorities must deposit their first list under section 2(2) with the proper officer of the authority by 29 January. Thereafter they must maintain the list, and from time to time deposit any necessary modifications with the proper officer.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he issued the consultation document

"Restrictions on Public Political Activity by Senior Local Government Staff", what was the last date for submissions on the document; and when he will issue his response.

Mr. David Hunt: The answers are as follows: 2 October 1989; 27 November 1989 (although we agreed to consider later submissions); soon.

Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Government amendments were made to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: The figure is 1,037.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 was published.

Mr. David Hunt: The date was 6 December 1989.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the regulations to be made under section 1(5) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: As soon as possible.

Sellafield (Waste Discharges)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consents are held by British Nuclear Fuels plc for the discharge of non-radioactive toxic wastes from Sellafield; what is the annual volume of each such waste discharged from Sellafield; and what changes in consents have been necessitated by the Water Act 1989.

Mr. Trippier: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

BNFL Plants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are taken to ensure that British Nuclear Fuels plc plants at Sellafield, Springfields, Capenhurst and Chapel Cross are operated within the appropriate regulations under the Alkali Works Regulation Act 1906, the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, the Nuclear Installations Act 1965, the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Control of Pollution (Special Wastes) Regulations 1980 and the Treaty of the European Atomic Energy Community (the 1957 Euratom Treaty).

Mr. Trippier: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Radioactive Waste (Clifton Marsh)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what volumes of radioactive waste are currently disposed of at Clifton Marsh; what radionuclides are deposited; how many bequerels of *(a)* gamma, *(b)* beta and *(c)* alpha radioactivity are at the site; and when disposal of radioactive waste was first begun at Clifton Marsh.

Mr. Trippier: Radioactive wastes disposed of at Clifton Marsh originate from British Nuclear Fuels plc's plant at Capenhurst and Springfields and are measured by weight (tonnes) not by volume. In 1988 a total of 10,000 tonnes was disposed of which equates to approximately 6,600 sq. m.

Uranium and its short-lived daughter radionuclides are authorised for disposal at Clifton Marsh.

It is estimated that for the period up to 1988 0·7 terabecquerels of alpha activity and less than or equal to 0·7 terabecquerels of beta/gamma activity have been disposed of at Clifton Marsh.

Disposals at Clifton Marsh commenced in 1974.

Community Charge

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the highest sums *(a)* per local authority and *(b)* per community charge payer, being paid under the safety net arrangements to (i) a London borough and (ii) non-London local authorities in England; what is the sum being paid or received in the London borough of Newham (1) in total and (2) per community charge payer; and if he will illustrate his calculations relating to the levels of each of these receipts or payments.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* Under our proposals the highest sums to be paid under the safety net arrangements to a London borough is £32·96 million to Greenwich; and to a non-London local authority in England is £38·57 million to Sheffield.

When divided by relevant population, the highest amounts paid are £212 to Greenwich and £138 to Calderdale.

The London borough of Newham would contribute £3·06 million to the safety net, a payment of £19 per charge payer.

A description of the calculation of the safety net contributions and receipts can be found in the annex to the revenue support grant transition report (England) laid before the House on 11 January 1990.

Standard Spending Assessments

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local education authority in England the standard spending assessments in the categories and sub-categories *(a)* education, *(b)* under-fives, *(c)* primary schools, *(d)* secondary schools, *(e)* 16 to 19-year-olds and *(f)* other.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* I have today placed in the Library a table showing 1990-91 standard spending assessments for under-fives education, primary education, secondary education, post-16 education, other education and all education services; for each local education authority in England.

Lancashire County Council

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount his Department estimated Lancashire county council should have collected from commerce and industry in rates during 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The amount expected to be raised by Lancashire county council from commercial and industrial ratepayers in 1989-90 is £101 million.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his best estimate of the total cost in 1990-91 of exempting all YTS trainees from liability to pay the poll tax.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The gross cost of exempting all YTS trainees before any allowance for community charge benefit would be about £20 million. This assumes a total of 73,250 YTS trainees liable to pay the community charge.

Virtually all non-employed trainees, and a proportion of employed trainees, would be entitled to community charge benefit.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 January 1990

DEFENCE

Nuclear Accidents

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what accidents with nuclear weapons involving United States military forces, aircraft or ships and submarines afforded operational rights on United Kingdom territory have taken place on United Kingdom territory or in United Kingdom territorial waters since 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There has never been an accident in United Kingdom territory involving damage to a United States nuclear weapon.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many low-flying sorties by military jet aircraft of the NATO air forces, were carried out for the last year for which he has figures; and what were the figures for *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago;

(2) how many low-flying sorties by military jet aircraft of the Royal Air Force were carried out for the last year for which he has figures; and what was the figure *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. Neubert: Central records are not held in a form which would allow the information requested to be readily provided. Of the total number of low-flying sorties carried out in the United Kingdom low flying system in 1988, 84 per cent. were carried out by British military aircraft, 15 per cent. by United States aircraft based in the United Kingdom and under 2 per cent. by other NATO aircraft and others by special agreement.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are *(a)* the minimum and *(b)* the maximum heights authorised by his Department for low-flying sorties by military jet aircraft over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Neubert: Low-flying training by military jet aircraft in the United Kingdom low flying system normally take place between the heights of 2,000 ft and 250 ft. A limited amount of training by military jet aircraft is also authorised down to 100 ft in three specially designated areas in northern Scotland, central Wales and the Borders.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the criteria laid down by his Department for low-flying sorties by military jet aircraft over the United Kingdom, carried out by *(a)* the Royal Air Force and *(b)* other NATO air forces.

Mr. Neubert: The United Kingdom low flying system is primarily reserved for low-flying training by British military and United Kingdom-based United States air force aircraft. Other NATO air forces carry out some limited low-flying training in the United Kingdom, normally associated with exercises or on an exchange basis, but this element accounts for under 2 per cent. of the total low-flying activity in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any increase in the amount of low-flying activity over the Hexham constituency during the past year and during the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: Central records are not held in a form which would allow the information requested to be provided. The overall amount of low-flying activity in the United Kingdom did, however, increase in the years up to 1986, largely as a result of the introduction into service of the Tornado GR1 aircraft, but has been reasonably constant since then. I have no reason to believe that this position was not reflected in the Hexham constituency.

Ethnic Minority Recruitment

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is able to make a statement on the outcome of the study into ethnic minority recruitment into the armed services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A copy of the report by independent consultants has today been placed in the Library of the House.

The report was commissioned by the MOD after a survey had revealed that only 1·1 per cent. of recruits to the armed forces during 1987-88 came from the ethnic minorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) made clear at the time his wish to see more members of the ethnic minorities joining the services and asked the consultants to advise on why comparatively few applied to the services, why their applications were less likely to succeed and how the situation could be improved.

The report falls into three parts. The first deals with the results of research designed to establish attitudes towards employment generally and towards employment in the armed forces in particular. The results suggest that in most respects the attitudes of young people from the ethnic minorites are not markedly different from those of their white counterparts. However, they are less likely to consider a career in the armed forces for a number of reasons, including in many cases the fear that they will encounter racial discrimination.

The second part of the report reviews the services' existing recruitment criteria and practices as they affect the ethnic minorities. It concludes that the selection process is thorough and objective, conforming generally to the Commission for Racial Equality's code of practice and the Institute of Personnel Management's equal opportunities code. However, the report identifies scope for building upon existing good management practice and also some possible areas where indirect discrimination could arise, though there was no evidence that this was happening.

The third part of the report suggests ways in which the situation might be improved. It proposes a long-term marketing strategy to encourage a more positive attitude towards the services by young people from the ethnic minorities; a short-term marketing strategy to target recruiting efforts more effectively towards members of the ethnic minorities who are interested in a career in the services; an internal strategy for improving selection procedures; and some organisational changes intended to

achieve a more co-ordinated and effective implementation of these strategies. In all the report contains 23 separate recomendations.

We welcome the report and have accepted all but two of the recommendations. We intend to adopt a policy of giving positive encouragement to applications from members of the ethnic minorities. This will involve, among other things, projecting a more positive message in our advertising, making recruiting offices more welcoming, special training for recruiting staff, greater use of recruiters from the ethnic minorities in selected areas and the building up of more contact between the services and young people from the ethnic minorities. In addition, we will be introducing a more detailed form of ethnic monitoring of applicants to help us identify where special difficulties are being encountered during the selection process and we shall be looking critically at a number of the selection tests employed to ensure that any possibility of indirect discrimination is eliminated.

We are concerned at the finding that fear of racial discrimination deters members of the ethnic minorities from applying to join the services. The services are equal opportunity employers, under the terms of the Race Relations Act, and we will continue to make it clear that no form of racial discrimination will be tolerated and that all complaints will be properly investigated. Many service men and service women from the ethnic minorities are already pursuing successful careers in all three services: we intend to give greater publicity to their achievements as an encouragement to others.

Implementation of the report will be closely monitored by Ministers, who attach great importance to increasing the number of recruits from the ethnic minorities, while recognising, as does the report, that a sustained effort will be required if attitudes are to be changed and that dramatic increases in the number of ethnic minority recruits are unlikely in the short term.

This last point is confirmed by the provisional results of the 1988-89 survey of applicants by ethnic origins, which show very little change from the 1987-88 results: 1·6 per cent. of applicants and 1·1 per cent. of successful recruits identified themselves as belonging to the ethnic minorities.

Copies of the final results of the 1987-88 survey and the provisional results of the 1988-89 survey have been placed in the Library of the House. As last year, the provisional 1988-89 results will be published in the Statement on the Defence Estimates.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Kevin Taylor

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department is he will order an immediate inquiry into the handling of the investigation and prosecution of Mr. Kevin Taylor, formerly of Wood Road lane, Summerseat, Bury, by Greater Manchester police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) on 22 January 1990 at column *514*.

Immigration

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by nationality the numbers of people who have immigrated to the United Kingdom during the last 12 months for which he has figures.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of people accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in 1988, analysed by individual nationality, is published in table 2 of the Home Office volume, "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1988" (Cmd 726). An analysis by geographical and nationality group of those accepted in the 12 months ending 30 September 1989 is published in table 1 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Issue 45/89, "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Third Quarter 1989". A copy of both these publications is in the Library.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, in the *Official Report*, the total number of immigrants accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom for each year since 1974 inclusive, specifying how many in each were dependants of immigrants already settled in the United Kingdom from *(a)* the new Commonwealth, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* United Kingdom colonies.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information for the groups requested is shown in the following table. The figures of acceptances of spouses and dependants relate to the nationality of the spouse or dependant, not of the sponsor. They include spouses and dependants of sponsors born in the United Kingdom as well as of those who were themselves accepted for settlement, either at an earlier stage, or at the same time as the spouse or dependants. Information on spouses and children from Pakistan, along with those from India and Bangladesh, distinguishing those where the sponsor was born in the United Kingdom and those where he or she has earlier been accepted for settlement, is published in tables 3, 7 and 10 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Issue 44/89, "Immigration from the Indian Sub-Continent 1988", a copy of which is in the Library. However, corresponding information is not available for the other nationality groups requested.

Acceptances for settlement in total, and for spouses and dependants of certain nationalities

Numbers of acceptances

	Total acceptances (all nationalities)	*Acceptances of spouses and dependants*					
		New Commonwealth[1]		*Pakistan*		*Hong Kong BDTCs*[2]	
		Spouses and children	*Elderly and other dependants*	*Spouses and children*	*Elderly and other dependants*	*Spouses and children*	*Elderly and other dependants*
1974	68,880	14,690	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	1,140	[3]—
1975	82,410	24,940	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	1,610	[3]—
1976	80,740	25,940	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	1,500	[3]—

	Total acceptances (all nationalities)	Acceptances of spouses and dependants					
		New Commonwealth[1]		Pakistan		Hong Kong BDTCs[2]	
		Spouses and children	Elderly and other dependants	Spouses and children	Elderly and other dependants	Spouses and children	Elderly and other dependants
1977	69,310	16,760	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	1,090	[3]—
1978	72,330	18,870	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	880	[3]—
1979	69,670	17,210	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	1,040	[3]—
1980	69,750	16,490	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	1,160	[3]—
1981	59,060	14,440	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	980	[3]—
1982	53,870	14,260	[3]—	n/a	[3]—	680	[3]—
1983	53,460	13,430	[3]—	5,830	[3]—	680	[3]—
1984	50,950	13,050	[3]—	4,910	[3]—	790	[3]—
1985	55,360	14,160	[3]—	5,970	[3]—	700	[3]—
1986	47,820	11,460	[3]—	4,800	[3]—	520	[3]—
1987	45,980	11,220	[3]—	3,330	[3]—	550	[3]—
1988	49,280	11,900	1,750	3,610	450	660	120

[1] excluding Hong Kong.
[2] British Dependent Territory Citizens.
[3] Figures for elderly and other dependents are shown for 1988, but for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.
n/a = not available.

Litter

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there were for dropping litter in the last 12 months.

Mr. John Patten: In 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 1,760 prosecutions for litter offences in England and Wales. Information on prosecutions in 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Horse Racing

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he has reached a decision on an inquiry into racing finances; how the review of betting shop hours of opening, announced by the Department of Trade and Industry on 21 December 1989, fits into the general inquiry; and what is the likely timetable of this review;

(2) whether he is still considering the Lloyds bank report on the privatisation of the horserace totalisator board; and when he proposes to start an inquiry into opening hours of betting shops; and whether he will mount a wide-ranging inquiry into every aspect of racing finances.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As to an inquiry into the financing of horse racing and greyhound racing, and the deregulation review of the opening hours of licensed betting offices, I refer my hon. Friend to my reply on 17 January to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt). Advice from Lloyds merchant bank on the feasibility of privatising the horserace totalisator board remains under consideration.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what definition his Department uses of a replica firearm.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Controls on imitation firearms are contained in the Firearms Act 1982. The 1982 Act provides that any imitation firearm which has the appearance of being a firearm to which section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 applies and is so constructed as to be readily convertible to fire live ammunition, is subject to the same controls as those imposed on actual firearms by the Firearms Act 1968.

Under the 1982 Act, the test of whether an imitation firearm is readily convertible to fire live ammunition is whether it can be so converted without special skill on the part of the person converting it and the work involved does not require tools or equipment other than such as are in common use by persons carrying out construction and maintenance works in their homes.

Gun Clubs

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further steps are proposed to impose tighter controls on gun clubs.

Mr. Waddington: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on 14 November at column *208*, which set out proposals to amend the criteria applied to gun clubs approved by the Secretary of State under section 15 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. I said that before reaching a final decision on the proposed new controls I would ask the firearms consultative committee for its views. I have now received and carefully considered the advice of the committee.

As I originally proposed, I have decided on the grounds of public safety that any club which operates a scheme of uncontrolled day or temporary membership shall no longer be approved by me. However, in response to representations which have been made to me, by the committee and by many members of the shooting community, I accept that some provision should be made to ensure that the continued recruitment of new members to gun clubs is adequately safeguarded. I shall therefore permit novice members to receive instruction in an approved club in the safe handling of firearms, but without access to ammunition, on no more than four occasions a year. Such arrangements for a novice must be made by the club secretary at least 48 hours in advance. Approved clubs will also be allowed to hold guest days, on no more than four occasions per year, when limited numbers of people known to the club may be invited to visit the club by its secretary. On these limited occasions guest members would, under constant personal supervision, be allowed to

handle firearms and ammunition. Clubs will be required to give reasonable prior notice to the local police of when they intend to hold such guest days. The police have statutory powers of inspection of approved clubs under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988.

I have also decided to implement my proposals, which the committee fully endorsed, that probationary members of approved clubs, when in possession of firearms or ammunition, must be under constant personal supervision by a range master or by a full member of the club who holds a firearm certificate, and that they should undergo a probationary period of not less than six months, during which they should receive a course of instruction on the safe handling and use of firearms. The committee will be providing further advice to me on the nature and standards of such instruction. I have also decided to implement my proposal that the number of probationary members of a club should not exceed the number of full members. Full members of approved gun clubs will continue to be allowed to become members of other approved clubs.

I have also decided that probationary members should be sponsored by one current full member of the club and one person who knows the applicant personally.

In considering individual applications by clubs for my approval, variations from these criteria may be permitted in exceptional circumstances, but considerations of public safety will always remain paramount.

I am satisfied that these new criteria for club approvals are justified in the interests of public safety.

The new criteria will be implemented with immediate effect in respect of any new applications for approval. Clubs currently approved will be advised of the changes and permitted a reasonable time in which to comply with the revised criteria.

I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will adopt the same policy for his approval of clubs.

National Joint Unit Records

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many searches of the national joint unit records were undertaken following a request by police officers at ports of entry in each year from 1980 to 1989, inclusive.

Mr. Waddington *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* The information requested is not recorded separately. The number of searches of national joint unit records following requests from police officers either at ports of entry or elsewhere was as follows:

	Number
1980	48,090
1981	50,687
1982	44,696
1983	44,906
1984	47,779
1985	55,328
1986	59,481
1987	81,060
1988	77,472
1989	101,766

It is thought that the majority of these searches were carried out in response to requests by police officers at ports.

PRIME MINISTER

Romania

Q19. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received on recent political and economic developments in Romania.

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations, all of which have welcomed the end of Ceausescu's tyranny and the prospect of democracy in Romania. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, recently visited that country. The Government have donated 1·8 tonnes of medical supplies and have so far contributed £1·42 million towards food and medium-term economic aid to Romania through the European Community.

Q120. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Romania.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Czechoslovakia

Q26. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Czechoslovakia.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Q152. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she will make an official visit to Czechoslovakia.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Bournemouth

Q44. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Bournemouth during 1990.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Drugs

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what allocations he has made to local education authorities for initiatives aimed at combating

the misuse of drugs in the latest available year in terms of *(a)* education support grant and *(b)* in-service training programmes.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Allocations to local education authorities under the new education support grant for preventive health education, and the associated LEA training grants scheme national priority area, both of which give priority to education about drugs, are as follows:

Allocations to Local Education Authorities for Preventive Health Education in 1990-91

	Education Support Grant	*LEA Training Grant Scheme*
London Boroughs	£'000	£'000
Barking and Dagenham	16·8	10·0
Barnet	25·0	17·0
Bexley	25·0	14·0
Brent	25·0	14·0
Bromley	25·0	15·0
Camden	25·0	8·0
Croydon	25·0	18·0
Ealing	26·2	15·0
Enfield	28·5	16·0
Greenwich	23·0	14·0
Hackney	25·0	10·0
Hammersmith & Fulham	23·0	7·0
Haringey	25·0	11·0
Harrow	25·0	13·0
Havering	20·0	15·0
Hillingdon	25·0	13·0
Hounslow	32·7	13·0
Islington	25·0	9·0
Kensington and Chelsea	25·0	5·0
Kingston-upon-Thames	30·8	8·0
Lambeth	26·6	11·0
Lewisham	25·0	13·0
Merton	25·0	9·0
Newham	53·1	15·0
Redbridge	25·0	13·0
Richmond-upon-Thames	25·0	7·0
Southwark	38·0	12·0
Sutton	18·9	10·0
Tower Hamlets	25·0	10·0
Waltham Forest	25·0	13·0
Wandsworth	25·0	11·0
Westminster	25·0	7·0
Metropolitan Districts		
Barnsley	25·0	14·0
Birmingham	140·9	72·0
Bolton	25·0	19·0
Bradford	45·9	35·0
Bury	24·2	11·0
Calderdale	25·0	14·0
Coventry	27·0	21·0
Doncaster	27·2	21·0
Dudley	25·0	20·0
Gateshead	25·0	12·0
Kirklees	32·0	26·0
Knowsley	72·0	11·0
Leeds	59·7	44·0
Liverpool	44·0	33·0
Manchester	38·8	31·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	29·8	17·0
North Tyneside	25·0	13·0
Oldham	26·2	16·0
Rochdale	25·0	15·0
Rotherham	25·0	18·0
St. Helens	25·0	14·0
Salford	25·0	15·0
Sandwell	25·0	21·0
Sefton	32·7	19·0
Sheffield	44·2	31·0
Solihull	23·6	14·0
South Tyneside	25·0	11·0
Stockport	25·6	19·0
Sunderland	23·0	21·0
Tameside	25·0	15·0
Trafford	25·0	13·0
Wakefield	27·4	20·0
Walsall	25·0	19·0
Wigan	29·4	23·0
Wirral	51·0	22·0
Wolverhampton	—	17·0
Shire Counties		
Isles of Scilly	0·5	—
Avon	80·0	57·0
Bedfordshire	42·7	36·0
Berkshire	54·3	47·0
Buckinghamshire	52·5	39·0
Cambridgeshire	54·6	41·0
Cheshire	51·0	66·0
Cleveland	32·5	41·0
Cornwall	33·8	29·0
Cumbria	42·0	32·0
Derbyshire	48·4	59·0
Devon	75·0	58·0
Dorset	46·3	35·0
Durham	42·0	40·0
East Sussex	40·0	35·0
Essex	61·5	97·0
Gloucestershire	42·9	34·0
Hampshire	90·7	94·0
Hereford and Worcester	54·9	43·0
Hertfordshire	58·0	65·0
Humberside	62·6	58·0
Isle of Wight	25·0	8·0
Kent	74·5	95·0
Lancashire	100·0	94·0
Leicestershire	43·4	59·0
Lincolnshire	40·0	36·0
Norfolk	58·6	45·0
North Yorkshire	35·9	43·0
Northamptonshire	42·6	40·0
Northumberland	18·4	20·0
Nottinghamshire	48·5	64·0
Oxfordshire	41·5	32·0
Shropshire	33·5	27·0
Somerset	36·1	29·0
Staffordshire	66·5	69·0
Suffolk	51·4	39·0
Surrey	44·1	53·0
Warwickshire	40·0	32·0
West Sussex	51·8	39·0
Wiltshire	44·9	36·0
Total	4,000	3,000

Access Funds

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's estimate of *(a)* the average and *(b)* the maximum amount payable from the access funds; and whether any such estimates were taken into account when calculating the amount of money allocated to the funds.

Mr. Jackson: The amount payable to individual students will be at the discretion of the higher and further education institutions which will be administering the access funds from this autumn. It is not therefore possible to make estimates of the sort requested. The overall provision for the funds reflects the Government's judgment of what is affordable and appropriate to meet the funds' objectives.

Disabled Students Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of the disabled students listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Exeter of 16 November, *Official Report*, columns *382-83*, received no disabled students' allowance because they were in receipt of minimum grant.

Mr. Jackson: Information about the amount of grant actually received by students who qualify for the disabled students allowance is not collected centrally.

In 1987-88, the latest year for which figures are available, 25 per cent. of all mandatory award holders received no maintenance payments from their local education authorities because their parents', their spouses' or their own assessed contribution was sufficient to cover the entire grant entitlement. It is not known whether the same proportion applies to students qualifying for the disabled students allowance.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total expenditure in each of the last three years by his Department on the disabled students allowance.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not available in the form requested.

In the academic years 1985-86 to 1987-88, the latest year for which figures are available, amounts assessed in respect of the disabled students allowance were as follows (cash prices):

	£
1985-86	106,036
1986-87	192,123
1987-88	157,586

The sums actually paid by LEAs will be less than this because parental, spouses' and students' own contribution to the grant will in some cases be sufficient to cover a proportion of the assessed disabled students allowance.

Student Loans

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much of the access funds associated with individuals' difficulties caused by student loans will be allocated to Scotland.

Mr. Jackson: The access funds are intended to help students who are in financial difficulties in spite of the availability of top-up loans, not because of them. A total of £1·4 million has been allocated to the Scottish Education Department for distribution to students at non-university higher and further education institutions in Scotland. Universities in Scotland will receive an allocation for their students from the Universities Funding Council. The council's total allocation is £5·6 million and it is for it to decide how much to allocate to individual universities.

Polytechnic Colleges

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has yet reached a decision on the creation of a new category of polytechnic colleges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend is close to completing his consideration of this question and expects to write to the PCFC with his conclusions very shortly.

Local Education Authorities

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to abolish local education authorities.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No.

National Curriculum

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to set up the national curriculum working parties in *(a)* music, *(b)* art and *(c)* physical education; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I hope that an announcement will be made soon.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration has been given to the introduction of road safety into the national curriculum.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Aspects of road safety are or will be covered within national curriculum foundation subjects. It is for schools to decide how best to provide road safety education.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the sufficiency and adequacy of supply of books and equipment appropriate to deliver the national curriculum.

Mr. MacGregor: Since the national curriculum builds on current best practice, large-scale replacement of books and equipment should be unnecessary. The adequacy of current stocks for the national curriculum will vary between LEAs and schools. The Government are using the education support grant mechanism to support expenditure on books and equipment for this purpose. Otherwise, it is for each local education authority to determine how to deploy the total resources available to it in order to meet the requirements of the national curriculum, including for books.

Haberdashers' Aske's Schools

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on the payment of capital costs in respect of the establishment of a Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college in Deptford while it remains open to the governors of the present Haberdashers' Aske's schools to withdraw the notices to discontinue these schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: No capital grant payments have yet been made by my right hon. Friend for the establishment of a Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college. The timing of payments, and what capital costs they meet, will depend on a number of factors including the power of the governing body of the schools to withdraw notice to discontinue the schools.

School Funding

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimates he has made of the amount of money raised by parents to fund basic school costs.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government are aware that many parents are willing to contribute additional financial support to schools, and welcome that. But my Department does not collect data on the scale of such contributions, or the uses to which they are put. Her Majesty's inspectorate collects some information as part of its routine inspection of schools, but not on a systematic basis. Its most recent assessment is set out in paragraph 56 of the senior chief inspector's first annual report, "Standards in Education 1987-88". A copy is available in the Library.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total number of surplus school places available for removal represented by decisions made by him or pending in respect of proposals for the closure or reorganisation of schools for each year from 1986-87 to the latest available year.

Mr. MacGregor: The information in respect of proposals on which my or my predecessors' decision to approve has been made, or which local education authorities have, in the absence of local objections, determined to implement themselves, is given in the following table; figures in respect of proposals on which a decision is still pending are not available. The figures are in respect of the calendar years in which the decisions were made.

Calendar year	*Number of places*
1986	62,828
1987	45,326
1988	27,170
1989	41,831

Eastern European Studies

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received the report on eastern European studies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I have received a copy of the report that was made to the Universities Funding Council, the successor body to the University Grants Committee that commissioned it. I shall respond to the report when I have completed my consultations with other Government Departments and organisations to which some of its recommendations relate.

Computers

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received from parents objecting to their children using computers as part of their school lessons.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of representations from parents who are members of the Brethren. They object to their children using some applications of information technology such as computers, and are seeking the right to withdraw their children from the IT aspects of the national curriculum. The Government's view is that IT education is a vital part of preparing pupils for adult life and employment, and should therefore be a requirement rather than an option under the national curriculum in maintained schools. It remains open to parents with objections to aspects of the national curriculum to make alternative educational arrangements.

Pupils' Dress

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what advice he has issued to local education authorities concerning the admission to schools of pupils wearing dress reflecting religious belief; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has on the policy of city technology colleges concerning the admission of children wearing dress reflecting religious belief; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Uniform and dress rules are matters for determination by individual local education authorities and schools, including city technology colleges. We look to LEAs and governing bodies, in devising these rules, to take account of the cultural and religious backgrounds of pupils. The Commission for Racial Equality has recently issued a code of practice for the elimination of racial discrimination in education, which my right hon. Friend has commended to school and college governing bodies. It includes guidance on dress and uniform.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many complaints he has received in each of the years 1985 to 1989 that a local education authority was in breach of its duty to identify and assess a child with special educational needs, as laid down in sections 4 and 5 of the Education Act 1981; on how many of these occasions he has used his default powers under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Higher Education (Fees)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the outcome of his consultations on the introduction of differential fees in higher education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The Department's consultation paper, "Shifting the Balance of Public Funding of Higher Education to Fees", issued on 25 April last year, proposed a two-stage plan for increasing the responsiveness of higher education institutions to student demand.

In the light of responses, we confirmed last July the first stage increase in the maximum fee for full-time undergraduate students met through the award arrangements from £607 to £1,675 for the academic year 1990-91.

The consultation paper set a later deadline for responses to the second stage proposal for differential fees. Such fees would apply the market force of student demand more evenly across courses of different costs. Again, the overwhelming majority of the responses supported this proposal. A significant number of those consulted stressed the advantages of setting three fee levels, broadly on the same basis as those set for fees for overseas students, rather than the four proposed.

The Government have accordingly decided to introduce differential full-time undergraduate maximum

tuition fees to be met through mandatory student awards for most first degree and designated comparable courses in publicly funded institutions from the academic year 1991-92 onwards. At 1990-91 prices, these fees will be set for three band levels as follows:

Band		£
1	Classroom-based courses	1,675
2	Laboratory/workshop-based courses	2,500
3	Clinical courses	4,500

We shall now consult the funding bodies and representatives of universities, polytechnics and colleges about the detailed arrangements for allocating courses to bands and the consequent adjustment between institutional grant and fees provision within the agreed expenditure plans in respect of the student numbers to which they relate.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Eastern Europe

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the special programme of aid for ex-Communist countries in eastern Europe.

Mrs. Chalker: We already have a know-how fund for Poland of £50 million, and a similar fund for Hungary of £25 million will come into operation from April. We have announced that we shall extend these funds to cover other east European countries once they are fully committed to reform.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Lord President of the Council what steps he is taking to ensure the strict enforcement of the parking restrictions in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand that, following two recent incidents, security staff have been instructed to ensure that the roadways through the inner courtyards are not blocked by vehicles making deliveries and that no unauthorised parking takes place.

Manchester Evening News

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will make inquiries as to why copies of the *Manchester Evening News* are no longer regularly available in the Tea Room and Smoking Room.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Until recently six copies of the *Manchester Evening News* were suplied free of charge and delivered by hand to the House by the publisher. Under new arrangements introduced by the publisher, three copies are now posted to the House.

The authorities of the House have discussed these new arrangements with the publisher, who has agreed to re-provide six copies and to see what can be done about speeding up delivery arrangements. Meanwhile, copies of the *Manchester Evening News* will be placed in the Tea and Smoking Rooms as soon as they are received.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Barlow Clowes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes any investigation into the role of Spicer and Pegler, now Spicer and Oppenheim, in the Barlow Clowes affair.

Mr. Redwood: No. The terms of reference of the Companies Act 1985 inspectors investigating the affairs of Barlow Clowes Gilt Managers Limited and the affairs of James Ferguson Holdings plc enable them to inquire into the role of Spicer and Oppenheim if they consider it necessary for the purpose of their investigations.

GATT

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Her Majesty's Government support the view of the EEC Commission, in the current General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations, that there can be no negotiations on the United States proposal for ending agricultural dumping within five years; what assessment he has made of the impact of this view on the prospects for a successful outcome of the negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The proposals tabled by the United States on agriculture in the current Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations, including that to eliminate export subsidies within five years, would cause a number of difficulties for the European Community. However, these proposals, like the others which have been tabled, including those by the Community, will be the subject of further negotiation. The Government are urging the Community to respond positively to proposals for more open trade in all areas and are keen to see a good liberal settlement for the Uruguay round as a whole. I am hopeful that a settlement can be reached in the agriculture negotiations which satisfies all parties, as this is likely to be an important element for the successful conclusion of the Uruguay round, and one to which the United Kingdom attaches great importance.

Public Safety

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to introduce legislation to provide exemption from penalty under the Official Secrets Act for any scientist who speaks openly on matters affecting public safety.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has no plans to introduce such legislation.

Methanol

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the end uses of methanol for the most recent year for which figures are available and the number of United Kingdom manufacturers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: ICI is the only company which manufactures methanol in the United Kingdom.

The main use for methanol is as a feedstock for the production of a wide range of other chemicals.

The majority of methanol consumed in the United Kingdom is used in the production of formaldehyde (a

component of melamine resin), methyl tert butyl ether (an octane enhancer for unleaded fuel), acetic acid, chloromethanes, methyl methacrylate (a resin), and methylamines (solvents and photographic developers).

Insider Dealing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list what current inquiries his Department are carrying out into suspected insider dealing rings in the City of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* Investigations into possible insider dealing offences are not normally announced. However, an announcement may be made in a particular case if it is considered to be in the public interest to do so. There are at present 18 cases where inspectors have been appointed by my Department to investigate possible insider dealing offences. In only one of those cases was the appointment announced. That investigation concerns possible offences with respect to the securities of Consolidated Gold Fields plc in the period from 3 August 1988 to 20 September 1988.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General how many people used the legal advice and assistance green form scheme analysed by numbers of bills paid to the Legal Aid Board during the years commencing 1 April 1987 and 1 April 1988; and whether legal aid is reaching more people than ever before.

The Attorney-General: The Legal Aid Board did not take over the administration of the legal aid schemes until 1 April 1989. The figures requested for 1987-88 are available in appendix 1A of the Law Society's legal aid annual report for 1987-88. In 1987-88, 1,077,454 bills were paid and the figure for 1988-89 was 994,606.

The number of full civil legal aid certificates issued compared with figures for five and 10 years ago indicates that more people than ever before are taking up legal aid. The figures are as follows:

	Number
1979-80	190,677
1984-85	221,209
1989-90	[1]259,000

[1] Estimated.

Over the same period, expenditure on legal aid as a whole increased some fivefold.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have been refused social fund loan applications by social fund offices in each of the ILOs of Redcar, Eston, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Hartlepool, on the grounds that the applicants could not afford to repay such loans.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 12 January 1990]:* The precise information requested is not available. Social fund officers may refuse an application for one or more reasons and each reason given is recorded. The information in the table gives the number of occasions between 1 April 1989 and 1 December 1989 when "inability to repay" was recorded as a (but not necessarily the only) reason for refusal:

Social Security local office	*Number of refusals*
Redcar	61
Eston	8
Middlesbrough	131
Stockton	108
Hartlepool	74

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Namibia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what considerations were taken into account by the international contact group of nations on the question of the exclusion of Walvis bay from incorporation into the independent state of Namibia.

Mr. Sainsbury: In view of the apparently irreconcilable views of the parties concerned on the status of Walvis bay, the five Governments in the contact group decided not to include any provision on this question in their proposal for achieving Namibian independence.

Bulgaria

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Bulgaria.

Mr. Sainsbury: We are pleased with recent moves towards democracy in Bulgaria, including the decision to restore their rights to the minorities in that country. We hope to have closer and more fruitful relations in future.

Hong Kong

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received concerning Government plans to allow Hong Kong's ivory stockpiles to be exempted from the agreed worldwide ban on ivory trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have received a number of representations, both in favour of and against the entering of a reservation on behalf of Hong Kong. We took all these into consideration. We received no formal representations from other countries.

Whaling

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last made representations to the Japanese Government concerning its research whaling agreements; what representations he has made to them about a total ban on whaling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised the

Japanese scientific research whaling programme with Foreign Minister Nakayama on 12 January, as did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister with Prime Minister Kaifu. The Japanese Government are well aware of our views on whaling.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the chemical industry regarding the implementation of a chemical weapon convention.

Mr. Sainsbury: Officials of this Department and other Government Departments concerned meet regularly with representatives of the United Kingdom chemical industry to discuss issues involved in the chemical weapons convention under negotiation in Geneva.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any groups or individuals that are independent of the chemical industry will be invited to assist with the work of the national authority, established under the chemical weapon convention.

Mr. Sainsbury: The structure and procedures of any national authority which might be established under a chemical weapons convention have yet to be decided.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the oversight of the implementation of the verification procedures under the terms of a chemical weapon convention will involve any personnel or organisations that are independent of the chemical industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is currently envisaged in the negotiations in Geneva for a chemical weapons convention that the implementation of verification procedures will be carried out by an international technical secretariat established by the convention.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on the renunciation of the present reservation to retaliate in kind if subjected to chemical weapon attack, under the terms of the Geneva protocol 1925 *(a)* before a chemical weapon convention is signed, *(b)* upon the signing of a chemical weapon convention and *(c)* at some stage during the implementation of a chemical weapon convention.

Mr. Sainsbury: The United Kingdom, in common with a number of other states parties to the 1925 Geneva protocol, entered a reservation in the interests of national security, permitting retaliation in kind if subjected to attack with chemical weapons. This remains the United Kingdom's position.

On the second and third parts of this question, I refer the hon. Member for Western Isles to the answer given to his earlier question on 11 December last year.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when Mr. Muhammad Jamshed, who has re-applied to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad to join his wife in the United Kingdom (Ref: IMM/80967), is to be interviewed; and why Mr. Jamshed, at the interview relating to his first application, was interviewed in Pahari;

(2) when Ruksana Riaz (serial number: 66429), who applied to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad to join her family in the United Kingdom on 5 July 1989, is going to be interviewed.

Mr. Sainsbury: In accordance with the guidelines on the handling of representations by Members of Parliament in immigration cases, issued to Members on 14 December 1988, I have referred the questions to the correspondence unit of the migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The hon. Member will receive replies from the unit as soon as possible.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information the Department has concerning the policy of *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan, *(c)* Israel, *(d)* Argentina, *(e)* Brazil and *(f)* Libya towards (i) the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and (ii) the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Sainsbury: Of the countries listed in the hon. Member's question, Libya is a party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), and its nuclear facilities are under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. The other countries are not parties to the treaty. All of them have nuclear installations, some of which are under IAEA safeguards while others are not.

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has concerning the policy of *(a)* France and *(b)* the People's Republic of China towards the nuclear non-proliferation treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Both France and the Republic of China remain non-parties to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT).

School Fees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of allowances and the total amount paid by the Government for boarding school fees in both the United Kingdom and overseas for the education of the children of *(a)* members of his Department, *(b)* members of the Diplomatic Services communication division and *(c)* the Overseas Development Administration including children of technical co-operation officers for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* An allowance towards the cost of their children's day school education at boarding schools in the United Kingdom is paid to very few members of the diplomatic services during home postings. Details of the amounts paid are subsumed in the overall figures for boarding school allowances. Separate statistics are not kept.

Only limited information is kept by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on schools used overseas. Each mission maintains its own list of authorised schools.

A total of £1,784,000 was paid in overseas education allowances for children of diplomatic services officers

(including £79,000 for the communications division) and £286,000 to employees of the Overseas Development Agency (including technical co-operation officers) in the financial year 1988-89. Details of the total number of children for whom such allowances were paid are not available.

South Africa

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been received on behalf of Sibusiso Senele Masuku and Oupa Josias Mbonane currently under sentence of death in South Africa for their alleged involvement in offences arising out of political protest; and what action he has taken about these cases.

Mr. Maude [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January 1990, c. *165-67*]: We have in fact received a number of representations about Mr. Sibusiso Senele Masuku and Oupa Josias Mbonane. We consider intervening, exceptionally, in such cases only when all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Our criteria are that the case must be clearly political and there must be strong extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process. We are not prepared to make appeals in cases involving indiscriminate terrorism. With legal avenues yet to be exhausted, we have not intervened with the South African Government in these cases.

WALES

NHS (Wales)

124. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the proposed reorganisation of the National Health Service in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The Government's proposals for the further improvement of the National Health Service in Wales are set out in the White Paper "Working for Patients" (Cm. 555) and in my right hon. Friend's published letter of 1 August 1989 to health authority and family practitioner committee chairmen. Insofar as the proposals require legislation, provision is included in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill which is presently before the House.

Prescriptions

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many prescriptions were issued in each of the years from 1980 for *(a)* psychotropic drugs and *(b)* hypnotic drugs.

Mr. Grist: Information on number of prescriptions by type of drug is readily available only by therapeutic class. Hypnotic drugs are a class on their own, but psychotropic drugs are included in classes comprising sedatives, tranquillisers and anti-depressants.

Number of prescriptions (Thousands)

	Hypnotics	*Sedatives/ tranquillisers/ anti-depressants*
1980	1,149	1,925
1981	1,138	1,931
1982	1,129	1,885
1983	1,103	1,692
1984	1,137	1,598
1985	1,104	1,514
1986	1,216	1,493
1987	1,211	1,513
1988	1,139	1,383

Welsh Language Studies

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how he intends to implement those recommendations in the Welsh Language Board's strategy document, "The Welsh Language.—A Strategy for the Future," directly relating to the responsibilities of his Department;

(2) what formal response he has made to the strategy document prepared by the Welsh Language Board and entitled "The Welsh Language—A Strategy for the Future" and its proposals for recommendations.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The proposals in the Welsh Language Board's strategy document are being considered together with other related proposals made by the board.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how his Department proposes to implement the recommendations and policy contained in the Welsh Language Board's document, "A Bilingual Policy—Guidelines for the Public Sector;"

(2) if he will arrange to review the Welsh language policy of each body of which the Welsh Office is the sponsor Department;

(3) if he will issue guidance to local authorities in Wales based on the Welsh Language Board's document entitled, "A Bilingual Policy—Guidelines for the Public Sector."

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Language Board has already invited every public body in Wales to review its Welsh language policy having regard to the board's voluntary guidelines. The Welsh Office is among those currently considering its response. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider whether there is need for further guidelines in the light of the overall response.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what criteria he will use in considering applications from schools to be excluded from the Welsh language teaching requirements of the national curriculum.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Secretary of State has been considering this issue in the light of the responses to his consultation on proposals for Welsh in the national curriculum. As a result of that consultation the Secretary of State is publishing today a draft order in accordance with section 21(3) of the Education Reform Act, prescribing attainment targets and programmes of study for Welsh, together with an explanatory statement and an account of the consultation. Copies have been placed in the Library. Consultation on the draft order ends on 28 February and the Secretary of State intends to make a final order in April.

The draft order and its associated document set out attainment targets and programmes of study which are designed to be achievable in schools of different kinds throughout Wales. Nevertheless there may be circumstances where a school may need to be exempted at least

temporarily. The Secretary of State has powers to make regulations under section 17 of the Act to prescribe exceptions from the national curriculum. He will be consulting soon on proposals for such regulations.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all suggestions he has received from the Welsh Language Board regarding statutory and administrative changes designed to enhance the use and status of the Welsh language, together with his response.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Language Board's main proposals are those contained in its strategy document, its voluntary guidelines for the public and private sectors, and its draft Welsh Language Bill. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the practical implications of the board's proposals before he responds. In addition, there has been considerable progress on a range of other matters concerning legislation and administrative practice which have been raised by the board.

Circulars

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many circulars and circular letters have been issued by his Department's education division since 1 January 1989; and how many were *(a)* in Welsh and *(b)* bilingual.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Forty-seven circulars and circular letters have been issued, of which 13 were bilingual. None was issued in Welsh only.

Language Studies

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he has invited the national language unit to undertake any specific tasks with regard to the teaching of Welsh and French in the national curriculum in Wales;

(2) if he will make a statement on the role of the national language unit in the implementation of the national curriculum in Wales;

(3) when the national language unit was last subject to inspection by Her Majesty's inspectorate.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The national language unit is one of the agencies involved in preparing Welsh language materials for the national curriculum. Grants have been given to enable the unit to employ development officers for Welsh and modern foreign languages including French. The language unit has not been the subject of a report by Her Majesty's inspectorate.

Simultaneous Translations

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all meetings between his Department and outside bodies at which simultaneous translation has been used, indicating the language used, since January 1989.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There are numerous such meetings, but the Department holds no central record of such meetings.

Appointments

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the organisations to which he has the right to make appointments and *(b)* the appointments to public bodies and other organisations made by him and his predecessor since 1979.

Mr. Peter Walker: *(a)* The organisations to which I have the sole responsibility for making one or a majority of ministerial appointments are listed in the table:

Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales
Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee Panel of Chairmen—Wales
Agricultural Valuation Committee (Wales)
Agricultural Wages Committee
All Wales Advisory Panel on the Development of Services for People with Mental Handicaps
Ancient Monuments Board for Wales
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Committee on Opportunities for Volunteering
Committee for the Welsh Scheme for the Development of Health and Social Research
Community Health Councils
Court and Council of the National Library of Wales
Court and Council of the National Museum of Wales
Curriculum Council for Wales
Development Board for Rural Wales
District Health Authorities
Family Practitioner Committees
Forestry Commission Reference Committee Panel—Wales
Health Policy Board
Health Promotion Authority for Wales
Historic Buildings Council for Wales
Housing for Wales
Land Authority for Wales
Library and Information Services Council (Wales)
Local Government Boundary Commission
National Parks Committees
Place Names Advisory Committee
Rent Assessment Panel
Saundersfoot Harbour Commission
South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Sports Council for Wales
Standing Working Group of the Wales Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education
Teamcare Valleys Steering Group
Training Enterprise and Education Advisory Group
Urban Investment Appraisal Panel
Wales Tourist Board
Welsh Committee for Post Graduate Pharmaceutical Education
Welsh Committee on Drugs Misuse
Welsh Development Agency
Welsh Health Common Services Authority
Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board
Welsh Language Board
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

The following organisations are those for which I have sole responsibility for a minority of ministerial appointments:

Council of University Colleges, Lampeter
Court and Council of University College of Wales, Aberystwyth
Court and Council of the University of Wales, Bangor
Court of the University College, Swansea
Parliamentary Boundary Commission

(b) This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Welsh Language

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the representations he has received against the Welsh Language Board's practical options for the use of Welsh in business;

(2) if he will take steps to encourage businesses located and operating in Wales to implement the Welsh Language Board's practical options for the use of Welsh in business.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Businesses in Wales will wish to consider their own response to the board's guidelines for the private sector. No formal representations have been received following their publication.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total direct expenditure by his Department in support of the Welsh language in each financial year between 1980-81 and 1989-90.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Direct Government support for the Welsh language is provided through grants for developments in bilingual education and for assistance to the Welsh language. The figures are shown in the following table:

Year	*£*
1980-81	893,000
1981-82	1,611,630
1982-83	1,755,726
1983-84	2,002,136
1984-85	1,986,825
1985-86	2,421,507
1986-87	2,527,755
1987-88	2,823,188
1988-89	3,345,987
[1]1989-90	4,431,000

[1]Provision (outturn figures for other years).

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on his approach to the principle of equal validity in respect of the Welsh language;

(2) what consultations he is undertaking with interested people and organisations on the Welsh Language Board's recommendations for legislation for the care of the Welsh language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Language Board has presented my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State with proposals for legislation based on the principles of equal validity. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering with the board the practical implications of these proposals.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that Welsh-speakers should have the right to require all public bodies to deal with them, in writing and verbally, in Welsh whenever practicable.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This is one of the features of the Welsh Language Board's legislative proposals which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently considering.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the supplement to attract students to Welsh medium initial teacher training courses has been effective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The incentive supplement was introduced in 1988 as a two-year pilot project aimed at increasing the supply of Welsh medium teachers in the secondary sector. The supplement was available only to those students who it is thought needed extra tuition in Welsh so that they have the confidence to pursue their studies and classroom training through the medium of Welsh.

In 1988, 30 students received a supplement and 26 of these subsequently obtained teaching posts in Wales. Forty-three students received supplements in 1989.

I have concluded that the supplement appears to have been successful in encouraging Welsh-speaking graduates to pursue Welsh medium initial teacher training courses. However, in order that a more detailed evaluation of the scheme can be undertaken, I have decided that the pilot should be extended for a further two years.

The demand for Welsh medium teaching in Wales continues to increase in both primary and secondary phases. To ensure that this demand is met, I have asked my officials to discuss with the relevant initial teacher training institutions ways in which a supplement might be provided to increase the number of students attending Welsh medium initial teacher training primary courses.

Welsh Language Board

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library copies of all correspondence between his Department and the Welsh Language Board.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) on how many occasions he has met the chairman of the Welsh Language Board to discuss the affairs of the board;

(2) when he last held discussions with the chairman of the Welsh Language Board; what was discussed; on how many occasions he has met the Welsh Language Board; and when his officials will next meet representatives of the Welsh Language Board to discuss the board's suggested legislation.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have had one formal meeting with the chairman of the Welsh Language Board and his board. We have discussed issues relating to the board with the chairman on numerous occasions. Welsh Office officials meet representatives of the board as and when the need arises.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to make further appointments to the Welsh Language Board to restore the board to its original size.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to make further appointments.

Pharmacists

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to expand the definition of pharmaceutical services in order to use the expertise of pharmacists in matters like health education, supervision of dispensing in residential homes, preventive work, and services to people in sheltered accommodation in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The Government's policy on developing the role of the community pharmacist was set out in chapter 6 of "Promoting Better Health" (Cm 249).

The majority of the measures proposed in the White Paper have now been implemented. For example, new allowances have been introduced for pharmacists who participate in schemes to provide advice to residential homes, and also for those who maintain records of medicines supplied to certain patients on long-term medication. Funds have also been made available to support the enhancement of the health educational role of the community pharmacist.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he intends to make in Wales to cover the responsibilities currently undertaken by the rural dispensing committee.

Mr. Grist: In line with the new management arrangements for family practitioner services, it is

proposed that family practitioner committees will take all decisions of first instance in relation to dispensing. We shall be consulting the professions about the detailed arrangements for dealing with appeals as soon as possible.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the income of pharmacies *(a)* in Wales generally and *(b)* in rural areas of Wales comes from dispensing.

Mr. Grist: Pharmacies' income can be derived from a variety of sources in addition to the dispensing of NHS prescriptions. The only information held centrally refers to NHS payments. In 1988-89 pharmacies in Wales received £143 million for providing pharmaceutical services.

No separate statistics are collected centrally in respect of rural pharmacies.

Community Charge

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice has been given to employers in Wales about their responsibility for collecting cash from poll tax defaulters.

Mr. Peter Walker: Attachment of earnings is one of the remedies which is available to a charging authority that has obtained a liability order from a magistrates court in respect of a individual who has failed to pay the community charge. The attachment order served on employers will contain all the information necessary for the correct deduction to be made.

Community charge practice note No. 15, "Enforcement of the Community Charge", sets out a model form and explanatory notes which a local authority may use in correspondence with individual employers. Employers will be entitled to deduct £1 towards their administrative expenses each time an attachment is made.

Low Pay

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has commissioned research concerning new policies to lessen the incidence of low pay in *(a)* Clwyd, *(b)* Gwynedd, *(c)* Powys, *(d)* Mid Glamorgan, *(e)* South Glamorgan, *(f)* West Glamorgan, *(g)* Dyfed and *(h)* Gwent.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. Economic expansion and new investment are increasing earnings in Wales. Between 1988 and 1989 the average weekly earnings for full-time adults in Wales increased by 9·9 per cent., which was a higher increase than in six of the other nine regions of Great Britain.

Welsh College of Agriculture

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of students attending full-time courses at the Welsh college of agriculture, Aberystwyth, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The total number of full-time students attending courses at the Welsh college of agriculture, Aberystwyth for each year since 1979-80 is shown in the following table:

Academic year	*Number of students*
1979-80	229
1980-81	262
1981-82	288
1982-83	281
1983-84	282
1984-85	272
1985-86	276
1986-87	271
1987-88	225
1988-89	181

West Wales General Hospital

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beds there were available for use by patients at West Wales general hospital, Glangwili, Carmarthen, at the end of each calendar month from 31 March 1989 to 31 December 1989; and what are the projected figures for 31 January, 28 February and 31 March 1990.

Mr. Grist: Information on bed availability is collected on a quarterly basis and the information for the first three quarters of 1989 is shown in the following table. No projections of available bed numbers are made centrally.

West Wales General hospital
Average daily available beds[1]

Quarter ending	*Number*
31 March 1989	509·4
30 June 1989	510·8
30 September 1989	500·4

[1] Includes mental illness and mental handicap beds.

General Practitioners

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications he has received for the creation of fund-holding general practitioner practices.

Mr. Grist: A booklet explaining the fund-holding initiative was issued to all Welsh GPs on 5 January. Included with the booklet was a form enabling practices to express interest in becoming fundholders. It is far too early to put a realistic figure on the level of potential interest from the inquiries that have come in since 5 January.

Teacher Training

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the recruitment to teacher training courses in 1988 and 1989 in the public sector and the University of Wales colleges.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Details of teacher training students recruited in 1988 and 1989 are as follows:

	1988	*1989*
Public sector		
BEd Primary	580	709
BEd Secondary	69	66
PGCE Primary	167	161
PGCE Secondary	97	89
Total	913	1,025
University sector		
PGCE Primary	136	206

	1988	1989
PGCE Secondary	425	447
Total	561	653

Recruitment to courses in the public sector increased by 12 per cent. and to courses in the University of Wales by 16 per cent.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many self-employed persons have been taken into account in recalculating the unemployment percentages for each of the employment offices in Wales; and what was the source of these figures of self-employment and the date to which they refer.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply as the methodology used to calculate unemployment rates in the United Kingdom is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

The smallest areas for which unemployment rates are calculated are travel-to-work areas. Local rates calculated as a percentage of the total work force were introduced for these areas and for counties in October 1989. These calculations incorporate local allowances for the self-employed based upon census of population and labour force survey results. The latest estimates relate to June 1988 and will be updated in the light of forthcoming information. These local self-employment estimates are sufficiently reliable to be used only as a small component of the work force denominator. Estimates of the total work force for these areas are available in the Library.

TRANSPORT

A1 (Accidents)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of accidents, serious injuries and deaths, involving heavy lorries on the sections of the *(a)* A1(M) and (b) A1 that runs through South, West and North Yorkshire during the last five years, giving the location of such accidents; and if he will show in his answer (i) the approximate time of the accident and (ii) what type of cargo the vehicle was carrying or equipped for.

Mr. Atkins: Not all the requested information is available. Details of cargo are not held on the road accident report form. The table below gives the number of accidents by time of day, and the number of casualties by severity:

Accidents involving heavy goods vehicles in south, west, and north Yorkshire A1 and A1(M) By hour of day, 1984-1988

Hour	A1	A1(M)
Beginning:		
00:00	5	0
01:00	7	0
02:00	6	0
03:00	1	1
04:00	7	0
05:00	11	1
06:00	14	4
07:00	26	3
08:00	27	4
09:00	23	3
10:00	32	2
11:00	23	5
12:00	34	1
13:00	29	6
14:00	22	2
15:00	21	1
16:00	19	3
17:00	17	4
18:00	11	1
19:00	9	1
20:00	5	0
21:00	2	1
22:00	1	2
23:00	6	0
Total	358	48

Casualties in these accidents

	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total
A1	44	186	355	585
A1(M)	1	12	53	66
Total	45	198	408	651

As over 400 accidents are involved, I shall write to the hon. Member, giving details of the time of accident, the Ordnance Survey grid reference of the accident locations, and in the case of accidents near junctions, the number of the intersecting road.

London Air Traffic Control

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is yet in a position to identify all the alternative sites for LATCC-2.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that the Civil Aviation Authority has identified a number of possible sites for its new en route air traffic control centre, including one near Fareham in Hampshire, but that no decision has yet been taken.

Road Humps

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the new regulations controlling road humps will be brought into force; and how soon the local authorities will be allowed to make road humps legally enforceable as a consequence of the new regulations.

Mr. Atkins: These representations are in the final stages of preparation and will be laid before the House very shortly. We have now incorporated the additional relaxations designed to allow road humps in a wider range of circumstances and at lower cost, that were canvassed in our consultation exercise and widely supported.

Electronic Road Pricing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his study into electronic road pricing will consider the privacy implications of the ability to monitor the movement of vehicles; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend has made it clear that he sees major practical difficulties with the implementation

of road pricing. The maintenance of individuals' rights of privacy would be an important consideration. There are no plans to introduce road pricing at the present time.

London Road Assessment Studies

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the consultation period on the London road assessment studies until 31 March.

Mr. Atkins: No.

Oil Tankers, Fawley

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to make public the findings and recommendations of the inquiries into the three incidents at Fawley involving the bulk carriers MV Worthy, SS Mobil Petrel and SS British Resolution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: As the incident concerning the Mobil Petrel resulted in damage to the ship, it is being investigated by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch as a marine accident. A report of the findings will be published in due course. The MAIB is not involved in the incidents concerning the Worthy or British Resolution as they were not classified as marine accidents.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the incidents involving bulk carriers at Fawley in the last four months, he has any proposals to change the way in which the port state control regulations are working; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The way in which port state control is effected and inspections are carried out is subject to continual review. Account will be taken of any lessons to be learnt from the incidents at Fawley, when investigations have been completed.

A66

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to start work on improvements to the A66 between Scotch Corner and Penrith.

Mr. Atkins: Work on improvements to the A66 between Bowes and the Durham county boundary is planned to start later this year. A scheme to improve the section from Stainmore to Banksgate in Cumbria is planned to start in April 1992.

Road Accidents

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has by which to meet his target of reducing road accidents by one third by the year 2000.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply of 9 January to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) Col. *584-85*.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has made available the inspector's report of the public inquiry for the Birmingham northern relief road to serious prospective tenderers; and whether the report will be made available to the eventual concessionaire.

Mr. Portillo: This report has not been made available to prospective tenderers, nor will it be made available to the concessionaire. It is not relevant to the private sector proposals.

A2

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it the policy of his Department to provide lighting on all sections of the A2 which are of dual carriageway standard in Kent.

Mr. Atkins: No. Provision of lighting on sections of trunk road is considered on the merits of the cases, and reflects safety, economic and environmental factors. We have plans to light the following lengths of the A2:

London boundary to M2
Brenley to Harbledown
Shepherdswell

Lorries

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has given any general guidance to the local highway authorities and others concerned in dealing with the environmental problems caused by lorry traffic in residential areas and town centres.

Mr. Parkinson: I am pleased to be able to announce today the publication of two documents that address the problems that lorries can cause to local communities. "Lorries in the Community" and the "Lorries and Traffic Management" manual have been produced following a lorry management study co-sponsored by my Department, the Civil Trust and the County Surveyors Society. Copies of these documents have been placed in the House Libraries.

"Lorries in the Community" describes problems that can be caused by lorries and possible solutions, in an easily readable form. The traffic management manual gives comprehensive advice to professional practitioners and planners on the types of measures available to deal with such problems.

Free copies of both publications are being sent to all local highway and planning authorities in England.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Allowances

128. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing information available to him on the tax allowances and tax reliefs given to single people and one and two-earner married couples in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* Italy, *(c)* France, *(d)* United States of America and *(e)* Holland with those in the United Kingdom together with the income band at each income tax rate chargeable.

Mr. Lilley: Available information is given in the tables, which are supplemented by notes. All amounts have been converted to sterling using the latest available purchasing power parities.

Tax allowances

	Year of income	Single £	One-earner married couple £	Two-earner married couple £
Germany	1990	1,421	2,841	2,841
Italy	1989	Nil	1,930	1,930
France	1989	1,425	2,850	2,850
United States of America	1989	3,072	5,543	5,543
Netherlands	1990	1,162	2,324	2,324
United Kingdom	1989-90	2,785	4,375	7,160

Notes:

1. In Germany and France there are no personal allowances as such, but the tax tables incorporate a zero rate band. The figures given are the maximum amounts of income subject to tax on which no tax is due.
2. In Germany there is also an employment deduction of £496.
3. In Italy there are no personal allowances as such, but a married man may deduct £193 from tax due and therefore is not a net taxpayer unless income exceeds £1,930. In addition, employees receive an earned income credit of £215 on tax due. Thus, married employees are not net taxpayers unless their income exceeds £3,312, and single employees are not net taxpayers unless their income exceeds £2,150.
4. In France employees may also deduct 20 per cent. of earned income and 10 per cent. for employment-related expenses.
5. The Netherlands has a 4 per cent. employment income deduction (minimum £52, maximum £258).

Income band at each income tax rate chargeable

Year of income	Taxable income bracket £	Rate per cent.
Germany 1990	see Note 1	
Italy 1990	0– 2,671	10·0
	2,671– 5,300	22·0
	5,300– 13,272	26·0
	13,272– 26,586	33·0
	26,586– 66,402	40·0
	66,402–132,846	45·0
	over 132,846	50·0
France 1989	0– 2,850	0·0
	2,850– 2,980	5·0
	2,980– 3,531	9·6
	3,531– 5,582	14·4
	5,582– 7,176	19·2
	7,176– 9,009	24·0
	9,009– 10,903	28·8
	10,903– 12,579	33·6
	12,579– 20,959	38·4
	20,959– 28,826	43·2
	28,826– 34,097	49·0
	34,097– 38,787	53·9
	over 38,787	56·8
United States of America (single) 1989	0– 11,175	15·0
	11,175– 27,048	28·0
	27,048– 56,084	33·0
	over 56,084	28·0
(married, joint returns) 1989	0– 18,645	15·0
	18,645– 45,090	28·0
	45,090– 93,566	33·0
	over 93,566	28·0
(married, separate returns)	0– 9,322	15·0
	9,322– 22,545	28·0
	22,545– 71,021	33·0
	over 71,021	28·0
Netherlands 1990	0– 10,718	35·1
	10,718– 21,436	50·0
	over 21,436	60·0
United Kingdom 1989-90	0—20,700	25·0
	over 20,700	40·0

Notes:

1. In Germany tax rates rise gradually from 19 per cent. to a top rate of 53 per cent. The top rate is reached at a taxable income of £29,787 (single) and £59,574 (married couple, joint return).
2. The incomes given for France are halved in the case of a single person.

Taxation

Sir Hal Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much income tax receipts would be reduced in a full year, at 1989-90 income levels, with a 5p reduction in the basic rate of tax, assuming the basic rate limit was reduced from £20,700 taxable income to £12,000;

(2) how much income tax receipts would be reduced in a full year, at 1989-90 income levels, with a 5p reduction in the basic rate of tax, assuming the basic rate limit was reduced from £20,700 taxable income to £15,000.

Mr. Lilley: The direct revenue cost in a full year, at 1989-90 income levels, of a 5p reduction in the basic rate of tax and, at the same time, a reduction in the basic rate limit from £20,700 taxable income to £12,000 is estimated to be £3 billion. If the basic rate of tax was reduced by 5p and the basic rate limit reduced to £15,000, the cost is estimated to be £5·5 billion.

The estimates include the change in receipts of advance corporation tax and on consequent liability to mainstream corporation tax, but exclude the effects on capital gains tax and possible behavioural effects. They are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the auditors to each company in which the Government maintain *(a)* a golden share and *(b)* an equity investment.

Mr. Lilley: The auditors to each company in which the Government maintain (a) a special share or (b) a residual shareholding following privatisation (where different) are as follows:

	Auditors
(a)	
Britoil	Peat Marwick McLintock
Cable and Wireless	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
Jaguar	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
Sealink	Touche Ross
British Telecom	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
British Aerospace	Peat Marwick McLintock
VSEL Consortium	Peat Marwick McLintock
British Gas	Price Waterhouse
Rolls-Royce	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
BAA	Touche Ross

	Auditors
British Steel	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
Anglian Water	Price Waterhouse
Northumbrian Water	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
North West Water	Price Waterhouse
Severn Trent	Price Waterhouse
Southern Water	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
South West Water	Price Waterhouse
Thames Water	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
Welsh Water	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
Wessex Water	Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
Yorkshire Water	Price Waterhouse
(b)	
BP	Ernst and Young
British Airways	Ernst and Young

Excise Duties

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the price of the most widely selling category of cigarettes is accounted for by excise duties, including value added tax; what are the comparable percentages for other dutiable goods, petrol, spirits, beers and wines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The burden of excise duty and value added tax as a percentage of the price for the range of dutiable goods specified in the question is as follows:

	Total tax as percentage of price
Cigarettes—20 king-size	72·7
Petrol—4 star leaded—per litre	63·4
Petrol—unleaded—per litre	59·3
Spirits—75 cl bottle	69·9
Beer—pint	32·6
Cider—½ pint bottle	20·1
Wine—still table—1 litre bottle	59·1

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development seeks advice and information from think tanks and academics who support the creation of free market economies.

Mr. Ryder: In the current discussions to establish the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Government are encouraging any measures which will assist the bank in promoting the creation of free market economies in central and eastern Europe.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to the Government of mortgage interest relief in *(a)* 1987-88, *(b)* 1988-89 and *(c)* 1989-90, estimated; and what proportion of this accrues to higher-rate taxpayers.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is given in the table. Estimates are based on projections of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes. The figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 are therefore provisional.

Year	*Cost of mortgage interest relief*	*Percentage of relief at excess over basic rate*
	£ million	*Per cent.*
1987-88	4,900	9
1988-89	5,400	6
1989-90	7,000	6

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the income which would accrue to the Government from restricting mortgage interest relief to the basic rate of income tax.

Mr. Lilley: The additional yield to the Exchequer from restricting mortgage interest relief to the basic rate of income tax is estimated to be £430 million at 1989-90 levels of income.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Government of increasing the maximum limit for mortgage interest relief to *(a)* £35,000, *(b)* £40,000 and *(c)* £45,000.

Mr. Lilley: Provisional estimates of the direct revenue costs of increasing the ceiling for mortgage interest relief are *(a)* £320 million, *(b)* £580 million and *(c)* £770 million. These estimates are at 1989-90 levels of income and current interest rate levels and exclude behavioural effects, which would be substantial for the higher ceilings.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total income to the Government from capital gains tax in the years *(a)* 1987-88, *(b)* 1988-89 and *(c)* 1989-90, estimated; and what is his estimate of the income forgone through the existence of rollover relief in each year.

Mr. Lilley: Receipts of capital gains tax in financial years since 1987-88 have been as follows:

	£ million
1987-88	1,379
1988-89	2,323
1989-90	[1]2,000

[1] forecast

These figures exclude receipts from capital gains of companies taxed within corporation tax. I regret that an estimate of the total cost of rollover relief is not available.

HMSO

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the expenditure to date on consultants engaged on the grading structure study in Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Mr. Ryder: A total of £127,000 in 1988, and £95,000 in 1989.

National Savings

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to develop the role of the Department for National Savings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 19 January to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), *Official Report*, column *437*.

SCOTLAND

Batteries and Accumulators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps his Department has taken to promote research aimed at reducing the dangerous substance content and increasing the use of less polluting substitute substances in batteries and accumulators and into methods of recycling;

(2) what steps his Department has taken to reduce the volume of spent batteries and accumulators in household waste.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs on Friday 19 January, volume 165, column *444*.

Colliery Closures

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make any special provision for the development of rural areas affected by colliery closures.

Mr. Lang: Substantial support is made available through the Scottish Development Agency and British Coal Enterprise. This will be continued under the Scottish Enterprise proposals. The Government are pressing for the inclusion of all mining areas in Scotland in the European Commission's RECHAR initiative.

Offences Against Children

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many men have been prosecuted for *(a)* rape and *(b)* sexual offences against children including incest, in each case of the last five years in Scotland; how many have been convicted in each of these years; of these, how many have not been sent to prison; and how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of not less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years and over 10 years, respectively.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is set out in the table. Information which separately identifies sexual offences against children is not held centrally.

Prosecutions for rape 1984–88

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Persons proceeded against	43	80	65	64	82
Persons with charge proved	20	39	29	34	47
Custodial sentence	19	39	26	33	45
Less than three years	2	8	6	5	8
Three years up to five years	5	7	3	5	14
Five years up to 10 years	8	19	12	19	19
10 years and over	3	2	4	3	4
Indeterminate sentence	1	3	1	1	—
Other sentence	1	—	3	1	2

Gynaecological Facilities

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has held with Grampian and Highland health boards for the improvement of maternity, obstetric and gynaecological provision in Grampian west unit prior to the development of local facilities; and when he expects a final agreement to be reached.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Grampian health board has improved maternity, obstetric and gynaecology provision in Grampian west unit by increased consultant visits, more clinics and improved emergency arrangements. In addition agreement has been reached on the transfer of obstetric, gynaecology and paediatric services for patients west of the Spey to Highland health board.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to announce a decision on the development of maternity, obstetric and gynaecological facilities in Moray subsequent to the option appraisal exercise carried out by Grampian health board and the recent recommendation made by the board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: When I receive Grampian health board's formal submission of its recommended option I will give it due consideration.

School Governors

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the new system of appointment for governors of further education colleges in Scotland; what scrutiny there is of appointments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Apart from the college principal, who is a member ex officio, members of college councils will be appointed by education authorities by 1 August 1990 after consulting such employer, trade union or other organisations as appear to them to represent interests relevant to the work of the college, and after considering any nominations by individual employers. I am sure the education authorities will scrutinise carefully candidates' suitability for appointment.

Core Curriculum

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the guidelines issued by the Scottish Education Department about the core curriculum for pupils in S3 and S4 in Scotland from 1992 are mandatory or optional; what choice will be available to pupils outside the core curriculum; whether the proposed core curriculum will apply to private schools in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The current guidelines on the secondary curriculum were prepared by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum and recommended to education authorities in Scottish Education Department circular No. 7/89. Schools are expected to adopt the guidelines with such variation of detail as may be appropriate to local circumstances. The core curriculum recommended for S3 and S4 occupies about 70 per cent. of available teaching time, thus leaving some 30 per cent. for optional courses. The guidelines have been made available to the independent schools, but it is for those schools to decide what use, if any, they will make of them.

Crofters

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will adjust the levels of grant and loans available under the crofters building grants and loan scheme in line with inflation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The levels of grant and loans are currently being reviewed and revised rates will be introduced in 1990-91.

Mentally Ill Patients

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure a co-ordinated approach between health boards and social health departments in Scotland on the provision of proper community care for long-term hospital patients who are mentally ill along the lines of that adopted in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lang: As stated in the White Paper "Caring for People", we intend to secure close co-operation between local authorities and health boards in the provision of appropriate community care services through the development of community care plans based on planning agreements. The National Health Service and Community Care Bill includes a provision placing a duty on local authorities to prepare such plans while the same result will be secured in the case of health boards by administrative means. We intend to monitor carefully the progress made in the implementation of plans through the reports which each local authority and health board will be required to provide.

Training

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent by central Government on *(a)* the employment training scheme and *(b)* YTS in Scotland in each year since the scheme's inception at constant 1988-89 prices.

Mr. Rifkind *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The amounts spent by central Government on employment training and YTS in Scotland in each year since the inception of the schemes are set out in the tables at constant 1988-89 prices.

(a) Employment training
Spend (1988-89 prices)

	£ million
[1]1988-89	25·9

[1] Half year September to March only.

Note: This figure does not include training allowances or income support costs as such information is not recorded on a regional basis.

(b) YTS
Spend (1988-89 prices)

Year	£ million
1983-84	93·5
1984-85	95·3
1985-86	90·3
1986-87	102·2
1987-88	102·2
1988-89	102·8

Student Allowances

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether students of 16 years and older at the commencement of the course at a Scottish central institution who qualify for extra allowances under the SED scheme will continue to receive their allowances, following introduction of the student loan scheme; and whether they will continue to be uprated annually.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Supplementary allowances will continue to be available to all eligible students under the student allowances scheme after the introduction of student loans in session 1990-91.

The level of supplementary allowances for session 1991-92 and subsequent years will be considered at the appropriate time in the light of all the circumstances, including available resources.

Health Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the review of health education has been completed; and when it will be published.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Touche Ross management consultants submitted their report on the review of health education in Scotland on 21 December 1989. Their conclusions are currently being considered and I expect to announce the Government's views shortly.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the latest details from the YTS leavers survey showing *(a)* the range and average wages earned, *(b)* the hours worked and *(c)* the types of jobs done by those leavers for those (i) in full-time work with the same employer, (ii) in full-time work with a different employer and (iii) in part-time work, giving the information separately for male and female and Great Britain totals.

Mr. Nicholls: The 100 per cent. follow-up survey of YTS leavers does not gather information about wages earned or specific number of hours worked.

The tables show the numbers and proportion of leavers who found full-time and part-time work in each occupational group. The information is given separately for all leavers, male and female.

Type of work found for leavers in a job during the period August 1987 to July 1989

Occupational classification	*Total*	*Full-time job with same employer*		*Full-time job with different employer*		*Part-time job*	
		Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
TOTAL							
A. Administrative and clerical occupations	65,344	33,504	51·27	31,073	47·55	767	1·17
B. Creative, educational and recreational service occupations	4,511	2,298	50·94	1,918	42·52	295	6·54
C. Health, community and personal services occupations	11,508	3,887	33·78	5,662	49·20	1,959	17·02
C40. Hairdressing occupations	32,253	12,651	39·22	15,035	46·62	4,567	14·16
D. Selling and storage occupations	15,975	6,619	41·43	8,345	52·24	1,011	6·33
E. Scientific occupations	1,807	897	49·64	886	49·03	24	1·33
F. Catering, food preparation and processing occupations	16,329	4,368	26·75	9,247	56·63	2,714	16·62
G. Agriculture and related occupations	6,756	3,377	49·99	3,108	46·00	271	4·01
J. Transport operating occupations	3,717	1,718	46·22	1,716	46·17	283	7·61
K. Construction and civil engineering occupations	21,136	11,209	53·03	9,751	46·13	176	0·83
M/N. Engineering occupations	21,470	11,525	53·68	9,861	45·93	84	0·39
P. Motor vehicle repair and maintenance occupations	10,304	7,282	70·67	2,966	28·78	56	0·54
Q. Non-metal processing occupations	6,581	2,467	37·49	4,033	61·28	81	1·23
R. Printing occupations	3,204	1,574	49·13	1,596	49·81	34	1·06
S. Clothing and textiles manufacturing occupations	8,821	3,177	36·02	5,566	63·10	78	0·88
T. Security services occupations	3,525	201	5·70	3,290	93·33	34	0·96
Y. Other occupations	18,071	5,293	29·9	11,371	62·92	1,407	7.79
Total in a job	246,043	112,763	45·83	120,188	48·85	13,092	5·32
MALES							
A. Administrative and clerical occupations	13,558	7,475	55·13	5,971	44·04	112	0·83
B. Creative, educational and recreational service occupations	2,303	1,240	53·84	930	40·38	133	5·78
C. Health, community and personal services occupations	1,310	299	22·82	845	64·50	166	12·67
C40. Hairdressing occupations	530	327	22·82	197	37·17	6	1·13
D. Selling and storage occupations	15,289	6,311	41·28	7,981	52·20	997	6·52
E. Scientific occupations	1,121	589	52·54	522	46·57	10	0·89
F. Catering, food preparation and processing occupations	6,974	2,197	31·50	4,166	59·74	611	8·76
G. Agriculture and related occupations	5,171	2,683	51·89	2,341	45·27	147	2·84
J. Transport operating occupations	3,199	1,518	47·45	1,468	45·89	213	6·66
K. Construction and civil engineering occupations	20,775	11,073	53·30	9,537	45·91	165	0·79
M/N. Engineering occupations	19,976	11,185	55·99	8,727	43·69	64	0·32
P. Motor vehicle repair and maintenance occupations	10,157	7,210	70·99	2,897	28·52	50	0·49
Q. Non-metal processing occupations	5,575	2,304	41·33	3,233	57·99	38	0·68
R. Printing occupations	2,395	1,221	50·98	1,160	48·43	14	0·58
S. Clothing and textiles manufacturing occupations	1,671	535	32·02	1,122	67·15	14	0·84
T. Security services occupations	3,099	159	5·13	2,913	94·00	27	0·87
Y. Other occupations	10,093	3,429	33·98	6,264	62·06	400	3·96
Total in a job	123,196	59,755	48·50	60,274	48·93	3,167	2·57
FEMALES							
A. Administrative and clerical occupations	51,786	26,029	50·26	25,102	48·47	655	1·26
B. Creative, educational and recreational service occupations	2,208	1,058	47·92	988	44·75	162	7·34
C. Health, community and personal services occupations	10,198	3,588	35·18	4,817	47·23	1,793	17·58
C40. Hairdressing occupations	10,176	7,008	68·87	2,912	28·62	256	2·52
D. Selling and storage occupations	16,964	6,340	37·37	7,054	41·58	3,570	21·04
E. Scientific occupations	686	308	44·90	364	53·06	14	2·04
F. Catering, food preparation and processing occupations	9,355	2,171	23·21	5,081	54·31	2,103	22·48
G. Agriculture and related occupations	1,585	694	43·79	767	48·39	124	7·82
J. Transport operating occupations	518	200	38·61	248	47·88	70	13·51
K. Construction and civil engineering occupations	361	136	37·67	214	59·28	11	3·05
M/N. Engineering occupations	1,494	340	22·76	1,134	75·90	20	1·34
P. Motor vehicle repair and maintenance occupations	147	72	48·98	69	46·94	6	4·08
Q. Non-metal processing occupations	1,006	163	16·20	800	79·52	43	4·27
R. Printing occupations	809	353	43·63	436	53·89	20	2·47

Occupational classification	Total	Full-time job with same employer		Full-time job with different employer		Part-time job	
		Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
S. Clothing and textiles manufacturing occupations	7,150	2,642	36·95	4,444	62·15	64	0·90
T. Security services occupations	426	42	9·86	377	88·50	7	1·64
Y. Other occupations	7,978	1,864	23·36	5,107	64·01	1,007	12·62
Total in a job	122,847	53,008	43·15	59,914	48·77	9,925	8·08

Labour Statistics

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the latest number of *(a)* referrals to job clubs, *(b)* the number of starts with job clubs, *(c)* the number of job club leavers and *(d)* the number of job club leavers getting jobs or becoming unemployed for Great Britain and each Training Agency region for each month since May 1989.

Mr. Eggar: From May 1989 to November 1989, 81,725 people started with a job club. During the same period, there were 79,239 leavers, of whom 42,729 left to start work, a further 11,954 going on to some other positive outcome such as training, education or self-employment. Regional and monthly breakdowns are given in the table.

Because of the very large number of potential referrals points, the employment service does not keep statistics of referrals.

All job club members are unemployed and separate records are not kept of the number remaining out of work on ceasing to attend.

	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	Total
Scotland								
Starts	1,452	1,841	1,202	1,586	2,017	1,898	1,909	11,905
Total leavers	1,810	1,942	1,460	1,661	1,968	1,744	1,708	12,293
Job entries	1,043	1,116	777	923	1,161	1,005	981	7,006
Other positive outcomes	225	254	188	275	316	228	268	1,754
Northern								
Starts	743	860	714	689	1,075	1,082	982	6,145
Total leavers	876	995	723	691	988	842	878	5,993
Job entries	460	496	367	355	485	434	414	3,011
Other positive outcomes	116	140	116	83	131	110	127	823
Yorkshire and Humberside								
Starts	919	1,033	991	926	1,339	1,317	1,305	7,830
Total leavers	1,006	1,240	877	915	1,268	1,133	1,081	7,520
Job entries	621	712	500	537	723	692	661	4,446
Other positive outcomes	128	188	113	124	231	157	150	1,091
North West								
Starts	1,731	2,050	1,588	1,689	2,210	2,185	2,400	13,853
Total leavers	1,968	2,096	1,722	1,705	2,121	1,910	1,930	13,452
Job entries	1,080	1,185	971	920	1,189	1,049	1,063	7,457
Other positive outcomes	250	263	234	247	337	265	268	1,864
East Midlands and Eastern								
Starts	798	1,093	833	856	1,110	1,064	1,204	6,958
Total leavers	919	978	923	816	1,079	959	908	6,582
Job entries	568	610	537	476	679	590	545	4,005
Other positive outcomes	108	160	150	161	194	161	156	1,090
West Midlands								
Starts	811	1,028	899	971	1,234	1,317	1,303	7,563
Total leavers	961	1,037	862	912	1,239	1,173	1,171	7,355
Job entries	495	562	451	503	627	647	624	3,909
Other positive outcomes	164	180	163	148	217	206	173	1,251
Wales								
Starts	510	684	599	637	758	813	781	4,782
Total leavers	597	780	598	563	757	661	673	4,629
Job entries	381	397	355	326	448	394	408	2,709
Other positive outcomes	97	86	94	98	125	82	84	666
South West								
Starts	527	547	451	518	605	608	727	3,983
Total leavers	580	608	471	460	563	557	555	3,794
Job entries	323	354	254	266	326	345	298	2,166
Other positive outcomes	66	95	78	70	100	84	79	572
London and South East								
Starts	2,075	2,544	2,394	2,436	3,062	3,093	3,102	18,706
Total leavers	2,276	2,617	2,389	2,277	2,777	2,615	2,670	17,621
Job entries	1,119	1,133	926	1,008	1,303	1,277	1,254	8,020

	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	Total
Other positive outcomes	333	442	396	374	502	360	436	2,843
National								
Starts	9,566	11,680	9,671	10,308	13,410	13,377	13,713	81,725
Total leavers	10,993	12,293	10,025	10,000	12,760	11,594	11,574	79,239
Job entries	6,090	6,565	5,138	5,314	6,941	6,433	6,248	42,729
Other positive outcomes	1,487	1,808	1,532	1,580	2,153	1,653	1,741	11,954

Unofficial Strikes

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many unofficial strikes took place in the coal industry in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(2) how many unofficial strikes took place in the construction industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(3) how many unofficial strikes took place in the docks industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(4) how many unofficial strikes took place in the motor manufacturing industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(5) how many unofficial strikes took place in the Post Office in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(6) how many unofficial strikes took place in the shipbuilding industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(7) how many unofficial strikes took place on the railways in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(8) what was the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes in the construction industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(9) what was the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes in the Post Office in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(10) what was the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes in the coal industry in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(11) what was the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes on the railways in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(12) what was the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes in the motor manufacturing industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(13) what was the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes in the docks industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(14) what was the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes in the shipbuilding industry in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: Data on stoppages of work and working days lost in unofficial disputes, where it is possible to make this distinction, are given in table 1. The statistics requested for years prior to 1987 are not available. Statistics for the docks and shipbuilding industries are not available except at disproportionate cost. Statistics on disputes solely in the Post Office are confidential. Where data are not available for a specific industry, the statistics for the broad industry classification into which they fall are given.

Stoppages of work and working days lost in unofficial industrial disputes where a categorisation is possible

Industry SIC 1980 (Class)	*1987*		*1988*		*1989*[1]	
	Stoppages in progress	*Working days lost*	*Stoppages in progress*	*Working days lost*	*Stoppages in progress*	*Working days lost*
Coal (11)	291	198,000	141	81,000	138	49,000
Construction (50)	8	11,000	6	3,000	17	61,000
Motor vehicles (35)	80	65,000	39	30,000	42	86,000
Railways (71)	7	1,000	2	less than 500	—	—
Supporting and miscellaneous transport services[2] (76, 77)	5	5,000	7	8,000	6	6,000
Other transport equipment[3] (36)	9	20,000	17	29,000	8	17,000
Other transport and communication[4] (75, 79)	91	55,000	61	1,100,000	23	10,000

[1] Data are for the period January to November 1989 and are provisional.
[2] Data for the docks industry are included with the Supporting and miscellaneous transport services.
[3] Data for the shipbuilding industry are included with the Other transport equipment sector.
[4] Data for the Post Office are included with the Other transport and communication sector.

Restart

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many and what percentage of unemployed claimants called for Restart interviews have *(a)* stopped claiming benefit and *(b)* obtained regular full-time work, for the most recent convenient period.

Mr. Eggar: The aim of the Restart programme is to make contact with longer-term unemployed people and provide information and advice about opportunities to help them back to work. We do not collect information on how many people stop claiming benefit or obtain regular full-time employment as a result of being called for a Restart interview.

Burns Day

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to make Burns day a United Kingdom public holiday annually on 25 January.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans to do so.

Local Offices

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will establish an integrated jobcentre and unemployment benefit office in Thornaby, Cleveland.

Mr. Eggar: The employment service is working progressively to bring jobcentres and benefit offices together under one roof. This will provide a new and improved one-stop service.

I will ensure that the hon. Member is informed as soon as a decision about the future of the office at Thornaby has been taken.

Private Mines

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in how many private mines registers are kept of the names and numbers of employees working underground; and if there have been *(a)* any warnings issued by Her Majesty's inspectors and *(b)* any prosecutions initiated in respect of the requirement to keep such registers.

Mr. Nicholls: All coal mines are required to keep registers of the numbers of persons going below ground and these are inspected as a matter of routine by the Health and Safety Executive's mines inspectors.

There have been no warnings issued or prosecutions initiated in respect of failure to comply with this requirement in the past five years.

Vocational Training

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department will set up bursaries for young people aged between 16 and 19 years to pursue vocational training with companies located in western Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Opportunities for young people to spend part of their initial vocational training in other European countries already exists within YTS and European Community programmes for young people, including in particular the young workers exchange programme and Petra. I am keeping the need for further initiatives under review.

Mines Inspectorate

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what records are kept by the mines inspectorate.

Mr. Nicholls: The mines inspectorate keeps records under the following general subject headings:

Accidents
Whether fatal or major, date, time, description of injury and details of dangerous occurences.

Premise
Address, premise type, names of officials, reports of inspections at premises.

Registers
Complaints received, exemptions issued, equipment approvals issued.

Prosecutions
Date case heard, number of charges laid, result, fines imposed.

Notices
Number of Improvement and Prohibition notices issued and to whom.

Circulars
Internal instructions and information circulars issued; publications circulated.

Abandoned mine plans
Number of Ordnance survey sheets, relevant county, renovation status.

In addition, administrative records are kept as appropriate.

Action for Jobs

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the expenditure on Action For Jobs television advertising in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 was spent through the Central Office of Information.

Mr. Eggar: All the expenditure on Action for Jobs television advertising in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 was spent through the Central Office of Information.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Audiology

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the waiting list in audiology in Northern Ireland for *(a)* hearing tests and *(b)* fitting of hearing aids for the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: Figures for audiology are not identified separately in waiting list data. In most cases a patient can expect to be assessed and, where appropriate, fitted with a hearing aid within three months of the first contact with his GP.

Beef

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about the profitability of the beef industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Ulster Farmers Union has made representations to me about profit levels in the beef industry in Northern Ireland and I have had informative and useful discussions with UFU leaders on the matter.

Flooding

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on measures to reduce flooding.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of Agriculture (NI) is empowered by the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 to carry out drainage works on watercourses or works on sea defences where these have been designated by the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland and where, in the Department's opinion, works are expedient for the drainage of land. Decisions are informed by financial appraisal methods in use thoughout the United Kingdom.

The Department's powers under this order are permissive and are directed towards a better drainage of land. The order protects the Department inter alia from liability for any damage which may happen to other land or property through or by the accidental overflowing of a watercourse.

A high standard of flood protection is set in scheme proposals for urban areas, but the Department does not claim to prevent flooding in all circumstances.

Total annual expenditure on drainage works in each of the next three financial years is estimated at £19 million.

Bank Robbery, Athy

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, he will call on the Government of the Irish

Republic for an immediate report on the circumstances of the killing of a bank robber by armed police at Athy in the Irish Republic on Friday 12 January; if he will seek a judicial inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: This is not a matter which we consider appropriate to raise under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the following employers in Northern Ireland were requested, prior to the nominated date of 15 January, to register with the Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland in accordance with the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989: *(a)* Xtra-vision Ltd, *(b)* The Bank of Ireland, *(c)* Irish Lights, *(d)* The Irish League of Credit Unions, *(e)* Irish National Foresters, *(f)* The Irish National Teachers Organisation, *(g)* The Irish Tourist Board, *(h)* Irish Life Assurance Co. Ltd, *(i)* Irish Transport and General Workers Union, *(j)* Irish Bonding Co. Ltd, *(k)* Bass Ireland Ltd and *(l)* Aer Lingus.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Under the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 employers, with the exception of certain specified public sector employers, whose concerns satisfy the conditions for registration are obliged to apply for registration to the Fair Employment Commission within one month from 6 January 1990 or, if subsequently, from the time they first satisfy the condition for registration.

To assist registration the commission has issued application forms in advance to employers believed to have more than 25 employees, but it is under no obligation to do so and the duty to apply for registration rests firmly with employers.

The commission will not make public details of individual employers whom it has invited to register. Once initial registrations are made, however, the commission will keep a register, open to public inspection, of trades, businesses and other activities in which people are employed.

Protected Routes

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many protected routes are maintained by the Department of Environment roads service in each district council area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The Department of the Environment roads service maintains a total of 43 protected routes in Northern Ireland. It should be noted that some of these routes are common to more than one district council area.

	District council area	*Number of protected routes*[1]
1.	Antrim	6
2.	Ards	6
3.	Armagh	4
4.	Ballymena	4
5.	Ballymoney	3
6.	Banbridge	3
7.	Belfast	7
8.	Carrickfergus	2
9.	Castlereagh	5
10.	Coleraine	5
11.	Cookstown	3
12.	Craigavon	6
13.	Derry	4
14.	Down	5
15.	Dungannon	3
16.	Fermanagh	3
17.	Larne	4
18.	Limavady	4
19.	Lisburn	8
20.	Magherafelt	4
21.	Moyle	2
22.	Newry and Mourne	6
23.	Newtownabbey	5
24.	North Down	6
25.	Omagh	3
26.	Strabane	1

[1] A protected route is one on which the creation of new accesses and the intensification of use of existing accesses is curtailed as far as is practical in order to preserve a high level of service for the main road users and in the interests of road safety.

Cattle Diseases

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidences of *(a)* bovine tuberculosis and *(b)* brucellosis have been recorded in each year since 1980; how many herds were affected; and if he will give details for each Department of Agriculture sub-office.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* Cattle and herd breakdowns for each divisional veterinary office area in respect of tuberculosis and brucellosis from 1980 to 1989 are given in the following tables:

Brucellosis: reactor animals and herd breakdowns: 1980-89

Division	*1980*		*1981*		*1982*		*1983*		*1984*		*1985*		*1986*		*1987*		*1988*		*1989*	
	A	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*	*A*	*H*
Armagh	14	8	12	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	2
Dungannon	18	8	10	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enniskillen	65	21	57	13	4	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Newry	21	9	1	1	7	1	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newtownards	29	9	9	2	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Region	147	55	69	24	15	3	6	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	19	5
Ballymena	37	6	17	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	2
Coleraine	5	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	9	1
Larne	38	11	10	3	1	1	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Londonderry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Omagh	56	20	23	3	2	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1
North Region	136	39	53	12	3	3	3	3	1	1	3	1	0	0	1	1	4	3	16	5

Division	1980 A	1980 H	1981 A	1981 H	1982 A	1982 H	1983 A	1983 H	1984 A	1984 H	1985 A	1985 H	1986 A	1986 H	1987 A	1987 H	1988 A	1988 H	1989 A	1989 H
Total	283	94	122	36	18	6	9	6	3	3	5	3	1	1	1	1	4	3	35	18

Tuberculosis: reactor animals and herd breakdowns: 1980-89

Division	1980 A	1980 H	1981 A	1981 H	1982 A	1982 H	1983 A	1983 H	1984 A	1984 H	1985 A	1985 H	1986 A	1986 H	1987 A	1987 H	1988 A	1988 H	1989 A	1989 H
Armagh	166	70	130	42	140	58	96	49	148	55	176	58	114	43	52	33	118	57	317	100
Dungannon	168	43	209	60	106	39	106	57	165	82	178	63	75	49	69	47	83	57	103	67
Enniskillen	161	67	150	65	154	83	138	74	153	74	123	59	152	65	190	72	148	71	146	80
Newry	127	48	151	68	79	42	108	60	114	65	165	74	125	72	266	80	622	183	1,114	361
Newtownards	222	77	185	72	248	89	288	113	322	121	257	120	197	100	171	77	261	98	210	108
South Region	844	305	825	307	727	311	736	353	902	397	899	374	663	329	748	309	1,232	466	1,890	716
Ballymena	186	52	204	62	165	59	175	59	77	31	218	74	84	38	51	32	49	24	107	45
Coleraine	285	106	99	52	167	72	468	131	157	70	125	71	70	46	43	18	50	35	65	51
Larne	255	68	292	89	326	111	271	96	341	106	204	85	167	81	162	66	84	35	304	90
Londonderry	109	36	78	27	24	13	39	11	7	7	10	12	33	21	26	14	33	14	28	20
Omagh	102	36	144	43	90	38	113	60	21	19	51	31	23	16	13	14	22	19	107	38
North Region	937	298	817	273	772	299	1,066	357	603	233	608	273	377	202	295	144	238	127	611	244
Total	1,781	603	1,642	580	1,499	604	1,802	710	1,505	630	1,507	647	1,040	531	1,043	453	1,470	593	2,501	960

Source: Animal health veterinary statistics [Tables T3A and T5]
A = Animals
H = Herds

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount of compensation paid by the Department of Agriculture in respect of *(a)* bovine tuberculosis and *(b)* brucellosis in each year since 1980; and if he will give details for areas dealt with by each departmental sub-office.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The available information, giving total expenditure, is shown in the table. This information cannot be broken down by divisional veterinary office area. Net expenditure is given in brackets, that is, compensation paid less moneys released for carcases.

	Tuberculosis £		*Brucellosis* £	
1980-81	718,930	(389,073)	974,073	(491,441)
1981-82	614,265	(311,175)	498,631	(225,885)
1982-83	750,006	(382,910)	10,559	(8,558)
1983-84	766,585	(398,514)	8,590	(8,182)
1984-85	784,758	(465,382)	6,781	(6,781)
1985-86	740,547	(455,853)	8,015	(7,573)
1986-87	522,211	(319,791)	7,240	(7,240)
1987-88	717,363	(447,376)	8,071	(7,903)
1988-89	1,076,662	(646,931)	7,377	(6,612)

Parliamentary Boundary Commission

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the qualifications of the two members of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland whom he has appointed; and what criteria he applied for these appointments.

Mr. Cope: Both members appointed to the Parliamentary Boundary Commission meet the criteria that they should have relevant intellectual qualities, appropriate experience and/or professional qualifications, a commitment to public service and the ability to make independent and non-partisan judgments. Following normal practice, the views of the main political parties in Northern Ireland were sought before the appointments were made.

ENERGY

Energy and Environment Research Unit

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he or any of his Ministers have any present plans to meet the director and staff of the energy and environment research unit at the Open university.

Mr. Wakeham: No.

Sizewell B

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many representations he has received calling for the Sizewell B project to be halted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government attach the highest importance to the completion of Sizewell B by Nuclear Electric. The station will maintain the PWR technology as an option for the future.

Colliery Sites (Environmental and Safety Work)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much money has been spent by British Coal in each of the last five years on environmental and safety work at former colliery sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for British Coal.

Greenhouse Effect (Report)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to obtain the report by Dr. Michael Grubb, published by the Royal Institute for International Affairs on 4 December, entitled "The Greenhouse Effect: Negotiating Targets."

Mr. Peter Morrison: A copy of this report is already held in the Department of Energy library.

Private Mines

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the number of private mines which had *(a)* up to nine, *(b)* 10 to 15, *(c)* 16 to 20, *(d)* 21 to 25, *(e)* 26 to 30 and *(f)* over 30 persons working underground in 1989.

Mr. Baldry: My Department does not have this information. The British Coal corporation is the licensing authority and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

CEGB Statistical Yearbook

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish in the *Official Report* 1988-89 equivalents to tables 12, 13, 14 and 16 of the Central Electricity Generating Board statistical yearbook for 1987-88.

Mr. Wakeham: No. This is a matter for the Central Electricity Generating Board.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department was consulted about the omission from the 1988-89 Central Electricity Generating Board statistical yearbook, annexed to its annual report, of up-to-date information replacing that given in tables 12, 13, 14 and 16 of the 1987-88 yearbook.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department was not asked for its views on the omission.

Electricity Meters

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy who will pay for the examining and testing of electricity meters under schedule 7 to the Electricity Act 1989.

Mr. Wakeham: It is intended that the costs of examining, testing and certifying meters under schedule 7, paragraph 5(4)(b) to the Electricity Act 1989 will be paid by the person submitting the meters.

It is intended that the costs of examining and testing meters under schedule 7, paragraph 7(3) to the Electricity Act 1989, will normally be paid by the electricity supplier concerned. Where persons other than an electricity supplier have required a meter examiner to carry out the duties given under schedule 7, paragraph 7, they may be asked to make a contribution towards these fees.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the basis of his Department's calculations that the cost of energy produced by nuclear power exceeds the cost of that generated by fossil fuels.

Mr. Baldry: The Department's assessments of likely nuclear and fossil-generating costs are based on information supplied by the CEGB.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Oilseed and Cereal Substitutes

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to resist EEC proposals to levy new taxes on oilseed imports and imports of cereal substitutes.

Mr. Curry: The Government continue to press the case against unilateral increased import protection for oilseeds and cereal substitutes.

Scrapie

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what information he has concerning the geographical distribution of scrapie in sheep;

(2) what information he has concerning the susceptibility of different breeds of sheep to scrapie;

(3) whether he has any evidence to demonstrate any recent increase or decrease in the incidence of scrapie.

Mr. Maclean: Scrapie is not a notifiable disease and I therefore have no reliable information about its incidence, distribution or breed susceptibility.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning the vertical transmissibility of scrapie in sheep.

Mr. Maclean: Detection of the scrapie agent in placenta and epidemiological studies of the natural disease in sheep have demonstrated that scrapie is transmissible from dam to offspring via the placenta.

Coastal Land Erosion

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many local authorities in England have applied for central Government financial assistance to alleviate the threat of coastal land erosion between 1979 and 1989; and how much money has been granted per annum to such schemes.

Mr. Maclean: Since my Department became responsible for the administration of grant under the Coast Protection Act 1949 in 1985, a total of 55 local authorities have submitted proposals for approval and grant aid for schemes to protect against coastal erosion. We have no similar information for earlier years. Grant payments over the period from 1979 to 1989 have been as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	5·7
1980-81	7·1
1981-82	8·3
1982-83	11·5
1983-84	11·5
1984-85	9·1
1985-86	7·8
1986-87	14·0
1987-88	9·8
1988-89	12·8

Cattle (Import Restrictions)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those countries currently imposing import restrictions on live cattle or

cattle products originating from the United Kingdom, indicating in respect of each country the nature of the restrictions.

Mr. Maclean: It would be impracticable to publish in the *Official Report* the large number of health conditions imposed by importing countries on live cattle or cattle products originating from the United Kingdom. Import conditions reflect the requirements of Community rules, where they exist and, in other cases, the rules of the countries of destination.

For live cattle these may include confirmation, as appropriate, of country/area/holding/animal freedom from specific diseases and possibly pre-export isolation and/or testing. In the case of cattle products, import rules may require that the products in question originate from healthy animals and have been produced or processed in a way that safeguards public and/or animal health. Importing countries generally require that live cattle or cattle products be accompanied by an export health certificate signed by an official veterinarian to confirm that the necessary conditions have been met.

Rabies

Sir David Price: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the threat of rabies reaching the United Kingdom through infected bats; and what measures can be taken to prevent it.

Mr. Maclean: There is no evidence of natural transmission to terrestrial mammals of the rabies-related virus found in some species of insectivorous bat on the continent. Therefore, while it is possible that an infected bat could be blown across the Channel on strong winds, the threat is extremely small. Some 600 bat carcases, submitted by bat groups and other organisations since 1987, have been examined with negative results. Imported bats are subject to six months quarantine or, in the case of vampire bats, life. If necessary powers would be taken to deal with any bat colony which might prove infected.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the future level of hill livestock compensatory allowance;

(2) if it is his intention to offset the shortfall in the FEOGA contribution towards the hill livestock compensatory allowance in 1991; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations he has received on the future levels of hill livestock compensatory allowances; and if he will make a statement;

(4) when he expects to make an announcement on the hill livestock compensatory allowances;

(5) when his Department last reviewed the level of hill livestock compensatory allowance.

Mr. Curry: A statement on the outcome of the annual review of the economic conditions in the United Kingdom's hill and upland areas, including details of the arrangements for hill livestock compensatory allowances, will be made as soon as possible.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total expenditure in each year since 1986 on hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Mr. Curry: The total payments in the United Kingdom on hill livestock compensatory allowances in each year since 1986 were as follows:

	£ million
1986	111
1987	113
1988	117
1989	[1]118

[1] Provisional.

Slaughterhouse Regulations

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions initiated by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* local authorities resulted in convictions for breaches of the slaughterhouse regulations in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: Enforcement of slaughterhouse hygiene legislation is the responsibility of local authorities (district councils). No records of enforcement actions are collected centrally.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce an immediate scheme of slaughterhouse inspections by the state veterinary service without prior notification to the abattoir proprietors.

Mr. Maclean: No. Local authorities (district councils) are responsible for the enforcement of hygiene and welfare standards in slaughterhouses. Officers of the state veterinary service make periodic visits to all plants to give advice. It is usual, and more effective, for arrangements for these visits to be made with the local authority and the management of the plant concerned. Exceptionally, unannounced visits are made in response to reports of problems at a plant.

Birds (Importation)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he is making in the quarantine regulations and practice in relation to the importation of rain-forest birds and parrots.

Mr. Maclean: The examination by my officials of quarantine conditions for captive birds imported into this country, referred to in the reply given to the hon. Member for Linlithgow on 20 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *350*, continues and I am therefore not yet able to say what changes may be made.

Farmers (Borrowing)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the total amount borrowed by farmers in the United Kingdom in each year since 1983.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the total amount borrowed by farmers in the United Kingdom is not available. However, figures for the total liabilities of United Kingdom agriculture which include borrowings by agricultural landlords as well as by farmers but exclude borrowing for private purposes are as follows:

	[1]£ million
1983	7,300
1984	7,650
1985	8,250
1986	8,350
1987	8,550
1988	9,250

[1] At 31 December.

Interest Rates

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to alleviate the effects of high interest rates on small and medium-sized farms.

Mr. Maclean: Policy on interest rates is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He has made plain the Government's belief that even those small businesses that are dependent on bank borrowing and are adversely affected in the short term by higher interest rates would be damaged far more by the resurgence of inflation that would otherwise occur.

Green Pound

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current level of green pound exchange rates; and what action he intends to take to obtain a devaluation of the green pound.

Mr. Curry: The current level of our real monetary gaps, which represent the difference between green and market exchange rates, range from −9·567 per cent. for pigs to −17·990 per cent. for sheep. The Commission has proposed green pound devaluations as part of the 1990 price review, and these are currently under discussion in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to devalue the green pound.

Mr. Curry: The Commission has made proposals for green pound devaluations as part of the 1990 price proposals and these are currently under discussion in the Council of Ministers.

Less-favoured Areas

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce the results of appeals submitted to the European Commission for the designation of less-favoured area status for land in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: As soon as we have a decision from the European Commission.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will detail the total assistance given to the United Kingdom fishing industry in each year since 1974.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 19 January]:* The information requested is contained in the relevant chapter of the Government's expenditure plans for the years in question. Copies are available in the Library of the House. The plans show the direct expenditure on grant aid for the construction and modernisation of fishing vessels, harbour grants, decommissioning of fishing vessels, EC grant aid and expenditure on market support. There has also been substantial expenditure on research and other scientific work and on fishery protection. In 1989-90 the United Kingdom fisheries departments expect to spend £15·1 million on sea fisheries research and scientific investigation and £18·7 million on fisheries protection, including aerial surveillance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the number of prosecutions in each European Community country in the latest year for which figures are available for *(a)* fishing with incorrectly sized nets and *(b)* overfishing.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 19 January]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, the following tables show infringements of EC fisheries legislation which member states have reported to the Commission under regulation 3561/85 as having been brought before the relevant national courts:

Fishing with illegal gear

	1988
Belgium	6
Denmark	11
West Germany	4
France	174
Ireland	4
Netherlands	25
Portugal	3
United Kingdom	38
Spain	—

Illegal catch (resulting from direct fishery or by catch)

	1988
Belgium	—
Denmark	77
West Germany	—
France	12
Ireland	10
Netherlands	121
Portugal	—
United Kingdom	13
Spain	—

It is not possible to draw conclusions from these figures which relate to information reported to the Commission rather than any comparable basis of actual infringement.

Fish Stocks

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the national fixed percentage share of fish stocks for each European Community country in *(a)* 1983, *(b)* 1986, *(c)* 1989 and *(d)* 1990.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 19 January]:* Member states' fixed percentage shares of relevant total allowable catches were agreed as part of the common fisheries policy settlement in 1983. These fixed percentages have not changed since then, apart from minor adjustments to accommodate the accession of Spain and Portugal and the

recognition of Hague preference in 1989 and 1990. The percentage shares are reflected in the quotas allocated to each member state under each of the 102 TACS which the Community sets each year. The quota figures for 1988, Council regulation 3977/87 (*Official Journal* 31.12.57 No. L 375), reflect the percentage allocations without any adjustment for Hague preference.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in the light of the Tyrell committee's report, he will now introduce random testing for bovine spongiform encephalopathy in all cattle slaughtered for human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: No. The Tyrell committee considered such testing to be of low priority.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any evidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy being caused other than by ingestion of scrapie-infected foodstuff.

Mr. Maclean: There is no evidence to suggest that BSE infection under field conditions has been caused by any means other than by the ingestion of feedstuffs containing a scrapie-like agent. However, research is in hand on the experimental transmission of BSE by inoculation and orally and to determine whether maternal transmission occurs.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has asked the Tyrell committee to continue its role of review and co-ordination of work into bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement on the future of the committee.

Mr. Maclean: The establishment of a small group to provide advice on BSE and the other transmissible spongiform encephalopathies is currently being considered. We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has reviewed the regulations governing and procedures involved in the rendering of animal waste since the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and whether he proposes to modify either.

Mr. Maclean: Feeding ruminant-derived protein to ruminant animals has been prohibited since 18 July 1988. The time and temperature combinations necessary to inactivate the BSE agent with certainty have not yet been identified. It would therefore be inappropriate at this stage to consider modifying the existing regulations controlling rendering practices.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on 29 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *307*, if he will give the number of cases of cows having been certified as contracting bovine spongiform encephalopathy in 1989 up to the end of December.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* In 1989, 6,853 cases of BSE were confirmed in Great Britain.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who receives compensation if a bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected animal is found in *(a)* a livestock market or *(b)* a slaughterhouse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 18 January *Official Report*, column *409*.

ENVIRONMENT

Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the Government Departments and agencies occupying accommodation at the Brooklands avenue site in Cambridge with effect from 1 January, indicating the number of civil servants engaged in each, the area of space occupied by each such Department or agency, the approximate cost per square foot of this accommodation, broken down by Department or agency, and the overheads attributable to each.

Mr. Chope: Following is the information requested.

Departments and agencies occupying accommodation at Brooklands avenue, Cambridge

Department/Agency	*Staff in post at 1 January 1990*	*Space (square feet)*	*Accommodation charge*[2] £
Property Services Agency[1]	365	80,517	657,018
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	302	91,643	747,803
Her Majesty's Inland Revenue	244	43,397	354,121
Ministry of Defence Land Agents	36	6,709	54,747
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	32	6,735	54,958
The Crown Suppliers	15	3,139	25,612
English Heritage	13	1,871	15,266
Department of Transport	4	922	7,527
Department of Employment	4	2,489	20,307
Department of Energy	3	687	5,604
Ordnance Survey	3	1,061	8,660
Soil Science Survey	3	790	6,447
Department of Health	2	1,338	10,918
Rural Development Commission	2	1,883	15,362
Department of Social Security	1	3,611	29,468
Lord Chancellor's Department (storage only)	—	1,076	8,783
TOTAL	1,029	247,868	2,022,601

[1] Includes 2,705 square feet vacant accommodation charged to PSA.
[2] Comprises notional rent at £5·46 per square foot, maintenance at £1·60 per square foot and rates (contribution in lieu) at £1·10 per square foot. The annual cost of fuel and utilities for all Departments and Agencies is estimated at £150,000.

Revaluation

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the total post-revaluation rateable values by standard region and by class of property.

Mr. Chope: The total non-domestic rateable values shown on the lists deposited with local authorities on 20 December by region and broad property type are shown in the table:

1990 rateable values by broad property type

(£ million)

	Factories	*Offices*	*Warehouses*	*Shops*	*Other properties*
Northern	220·9	69·5	59·4	268·2	493·8
North West	503·6	259·0	233·7	629·2	839·1
Yorkshire and Humberside	412·3	158·3	178·4	484·0	714·7
East Midlands	390·4	103·9	177·2	377·4	555·8
West Midlands	475·3	183·6	223·0	499·3	662·7
East Anglia	208·8	108·5	115·3	249·4	296·3
South West	355·4	250·0	209·1	612·6	637·3
Greater London	671·8	4,496·6	625·3	2,160·9	1,986·5
Rest of South East	1,090·0	1,154·2	758·1	1,516·7	1,825·2

Rates

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) by what percentage the rate imposed by Bassetlaw district council increased in each year from 1980 to date;

(2) by what percentage the rate imposed by Newark and Sherwood district council increased in each year from 1980 to date;

(3) by what percentage the rate imposed by Nottinghamshire county council increased in each year from 1980 to date.

Mr. Chope: The percentage changes over the previous years are as follows:

	Bassetlaw DC Local Rate	*Newark and Sherwood DC Local Rate*	*Nottingham-shire CC Precept*
	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.
1980-81	+88·5	+46·3	+12·7
1981-82	+176·8	+67·7	+29·0
1982-83	−25·5	+16·9	+27·5
1983-84	−0·2	+0·7	+9·7
1984-85	−0·1	+25·1	+12·5
1985-86	+23·0	+17·2	+8·5
1986-87	+12·3	+6·0	+17·7
1987-88	+9·8	+0·9	+7·8
1988-89	+9·0	+22·5	+7·2
1989-90	+7·4	+7·9	+3·6

Local rate is the rate charged by the district council including the average parish rate; precept is the rate levied by the county council.

Land and Sea Environment

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the reports on land and sea environment commissioned by his Department over the past five years; and whether they were published.

Mr. Trippier: My Department includes a list of DOE-published pollution papers and reports in the digests of environmental protection and water statistics. This list is complemented by the list of published research reports given in the DOE biennal R and D reports. Both publications include reports on land and marine pollution and copies of both are held in the Library of the House.

"Sustaining our Common Future"

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of the document "Sustaining our Common Future", produced by his Department have been printed; and what attempts have been made to give the report a wide circulation.

Mr. Trippier: A total of 10,000 copies have been printed of "Sustaining our Common Future", my Department's report on the substantial progress made by the United Kingdom in following up the recommendations of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. The report has been very well received and copies have been sent to, among others, hon. Members, other Government Departments, non-governmental organisations, local authorities and business organisations, as well as overseas Governments and participants in a number of international conferences.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the rate support grant as a percentage of local authority expenditure in *(a)* 1979-80 and *(b)* 1988-89.

Mr. Chope: Rate support grant as a percentage of local authority relevant expenditure in England was 49·3 per cent. in 1979-80 and 31·2 per cent. in 1988-89.

Thames Path

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in the establishment of a Thames path; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment approved proposals for the establishment of a Thames path on 29 September 1989 and responsibility for its implementation now rests with the Countryside Commission and the relevant local authorities.

Carbon Dioxide

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much carbon dioxide is in the atmosphere now; at what rate carbon dioxide becomes absorbed by plants and plankton; at what rate carbon dioxide is being discharged into the atmosphere; what is his estimate of the amount of carbon dioxide permitted in the atmosphere before an increase in global temperature occurs; when the atmosphere will be saturated by carbon dioxide; and what will be the overall effect.

Mr. Trippier: The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is currently about 350 parts per million by volume. Land and ocean-based plants are estimated to absorb some 800,000 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, which is approximately balanced by the natural annual discharges. Man-made emissions to atmosphere are estimated to be between 18,000 and 25,000 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. Any increase in atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide would be expected to lead to some global warming. The scale of the effect is currently under review by the UNEP/WMO intergovernmental panel on climate change. The measured rise of about 0·5 deg. C in average global temperature in the past 130 years is consistent with model predictions of the increase to be expected as concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have risen from pre-industrial values. No projections of future man-made emissions lead to saturation of the atmosphere by carbon dioxide.

Green Telephone Line

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to establish a green telephone line in Britain.

Mr. Trippier: No.

Greenhouse Effect

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what gases, other than carbon dioxide, are thought to contribute to the greenhouse effect; what is their percentage currently in the atmosphere; and which sources, man-made and natural, are the main causes for emissions of these gases.

Mr. Trippier: Greenhouse gases, excluding carbon dioxide, their current (1988) average atmospheric concentration and the main sources believed to be responsible for their emissions are set out in the booklet "Global Climate Change"; copies of which may be found in the House Library.

Outdoor Leisure Maps

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Ordnance Survey to publish a revised outdoor leisure map of the Conwy valley based on the second series maps; whether the map will be printed back to back with the Snowdon sheet; and what plans there are for new outdoor leisure maps.

Mr. Trippier: Ordnance Survey plans to publish a new edition of the outdoor leisure map of Conwy valley to second series specification during 1992. The map will be printed back to back with the Snowdon outdoor leisure sheet.

Ordnance Survey is continually reviewing its range of maps and services to ensure that the needs of the market are met within the resources available and that the required return on investment is achieved. The outdoor leisure map series is no exception to this and any change in outdoor leisure map coverage will be dictated by these marketing principles.

Climate Change

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the membership of the inter-governmental panel on climate change.

Mr. Trippier: The IPCC has no formal membership. Its meetings are open to member states of the United Nations, and are also attended by representatives of non-governmental, national and international environmental and energy organisations.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to increase the sums available for the countryside premium on set-aside land, in terms of *(a)* the amount available for the scheme as a whole and *(b)* the premium payable per hectare.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been delighted by the response to the countryside premium in its first year; the Countryside Commission has drawn up agreements with farmers covering over 3,500 hectares of set-aside land, which will be managed to provide benefits for both landscape and wildlife and new areas of countryside for the public to enjoy. We need, however, to gain more experience of the operation of the scheme before taking decisions on any major changes to it.

Greenhouse Effect (Conference)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what papers were presented by his Department to the Royal National Institute for International Affairs conference on the greenhouse effect at Chatham house on 4 and 5 December.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend gave a paper to the Chatham house conference on 5 December on the subject of energy and the environment.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in tabular form the number of sites of special scientific interest which have been *(a)* irreversibly damaged and *(b)* damaged but reversible by (i) agriculture and forestry, (ii) activities for which planning consent was obtained and (iii) other courses, together with their proportion of total designated sites for each year since 1981.

Mr. Trippier: Full information on the numbers of SSSIs damaged since 1 April 1984, and the numbers of SSSIs (re-)notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, is set out in the NCC's annual reports, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers the Nature Conservancy

Council has to negotiate financial management agreements with owners and occupiers of sites of special scientific interest for the carrying out of operations or activities for the purposes of maintaining, enhancing or restoring the nature conservation interest of such sites; and how many such agreements were made in each of the last five years.

Mr. Trippier: Full information on the number of management agreements reached by the NCC under section 15 of the Countryside Act 1968 is set out in the NCC's annual reports, copies of which are in the Library.

Toxic Chemicals

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will institute an immediate inquiry into how three vanloads of toxic chemicals, including cyanide compounds and phosphoric acid, came to be dumped in the Bowesfield lane area of Stockton-on-Tees on 18 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: An inquiry is not required. This is a matter for Cleveland county council as the waste disposal authority for the area. I understand that it has taken prompt and appropriate action to take control of all the material involved and will be considering the need for further action under its powers in the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Ethanol

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for the most recent year for which figures are available the volume of natural gas used in the production of ethanol.

Mr. Trippier: The information requested is not centrally collected.

Transferable Discount Schemes

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local housing authorities which are operating approved transferable discount schemes under section 129 of the Housing Act 1988.

Mr. Chope: The following 43 local authorities are currently operating approved cash incentive schemes:

London Borough Councils

Brent
Bromley
Croydon
Ealing
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Harrow
Havering
Wandsworth
Westminster

District Councils

Adur
Arun
Aylesbury Vale
Carrick
Colchester
Gillingham
Gravesham
Harlow
Hart
Kennet
Luton
Mendip
New Forest
North Cornwall
Poole
Rochester
Rochford
Rushmoor
Shepway
Slough
South Bucks
South Kesteven
Spelthorne
St. Albans
Swale
Tandridge
Taunton Deane
Teignbridge
Test Valley
Tunbridge Wells
Watford
Wealden
Wrekin

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to require all local housing authorities to operate approved schemes under section 129 of the Housing Act 1988.

Mr. Chope: None. Cash incentive schemes, under which existing local authority tenants are assisted to move into homes of their own and so release vacancies for reletting, can make a valuable contribution to housing the homeless, but it is for each authority to consider whether to seek approval for a scheme for its area.

Refuse Tips

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has commissioned and proposes to commission on the best practice for management and after-use of large controlled household refuse tips.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* Research into landfill practices was initiated in the early 1970s. The first major publication of results of the work was the so-called "Brown Book", the co-operative programme of research into the behaviour of wastes in landfill sites, published in 1978.

Many of the results of the research are embodied in recent waste management papers, specifically No. 26 on "Landfilling Wastes" (1986), No. 4 on "Licensing of Waste Facilities" (1988) and No. 27 on "The Control of Landfill Gas" (1989). These papers provide technical guidance to the waste management industry.

Currently my Department is funding a programme of research, costing over £1 million annually, into landfill practices. Topics covered include microbiology of landfill gas and leachate generation; mechanisms of gas and leachate migration and attenuation; leachate management; modelling, risk assessment and landfill monitoring and landfill reinstatement.

My Department has arranged a conference on 1 March to present recent research results.

Lancashire County Council

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the total revenue expenditure for Lancashire county council in 1989-90; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his Department's estimated population for Lancashire and the amount spent by Lancashire county council per head of population, in 1989-90; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is the total rate support grant paid or to be paid, plus any other individual grants, to Lancashire county council in 1989-90.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The information is as follows:

	1989-90 £ million
Rate Support Grant	321·0
Specific and Supplementary Grants	79·3
Net Revenue Expenditure[1]	783·3
Total population (June 1988)[2]	1·382
Net Revenue Expenditure per head	567·0

[1] Rate Fund Revenue Account net current spending on services, plus net loan charges, contributions to/from other funds and accounts and

net non relevant expenditure (such as net spending on Housing Benefits).

[2] Office of Population Censuses and Surveys latest estimate of total population. The aggregate of the estimated relevant populations for the districts of Lancashire used in the exemplifications placed in the Library of the House on 11 January 1990 is 1·048 million.

Rent Rises (South Hams)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the basis of his Department's calculation that rent rises in council house property would be 95p per week as far as the housing stock in the South Hams is concerned.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* We have, for guideline purposes, assumed an increase in national rent income of 10 per cent. (£444 million). We intend to attribute this increase to councils in proportion to the value of their housing stocks, subject to adjustments to reflect existing rents and to keep guideline increases within a range from 95p to £4·50 a week. On the basis of past sales, we estimate that the value of South Hams' housing stock accounts for 0·088 per cent. of the total value of the national council housing stock. A guideline rent, calculated as a proportion of the national total without further adjustments, would be £21·37. As this is less than South Hams' current average rent of £25·75, we have assumed a guideline increase of 95p, the national minimum, which is less than would be required to keep pace with inflation. Subsidy will be paid to the authority on the assumption that its actual rent increase follows the guideline, but the council is free to determine its own rents.

Rate Support Grant (Sunderland)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give, at 1979 prices, the amount of rate support grant given to Sunderland for each year since 1979 inclusive.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Rate Support Grant—Sunderland

	Cash £ million	*Real (1979-80 prices)* £ million
1979-80[1]	65·6	65·6
1980-81	77·1	65·2
1981-82[2]	63·8	49·1
1982-83	64·7	46·5
1983-84	65·3	44·8
1984-85	65·6	42·9
1985-86	67·1	41·6
1986-87[3]	71·4	42·8
1987-88	78·1	44·5
1988-89	87·4	46·4
1989-90	86·7	43·0

Note:

The information given is not available on a comparable basis for all years ie.

[1] In 1979-80 and 1980-81 no RSG payments were made to Metropolitan County Councils and Sunderland's RSG was correspondingly higher in those years.

[2] In 1981-82—1985-86 inclusive RSG payments were made to Metropolitan Counties (and other upper tier authorities) and Sunderland's RSG was correspondingly lower.

[3] In April 1986 the Metropolitan County Councils (and the GLC) were abolished and arrangements for paying grant changed accordingly.

PSA

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many staff of the Property Services Agency are currently working in Hastings; and how many Property Services Agency staff it is anticipated will work in Hastings in each of the next three years;

(2) what efforts he has made to find alternative Government work for those Property Services Agency staff at Hastings whom the Property Services Agency will no longer require; and what the results of those efforts have been so far;

(3) whether he will make it his policy that sufficient Government work will be transferred to Hastings for Property Services Agency staff made surplus by the current reorganisation and preparation for privatisation.

Mr. Christopher Chope *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* At 1 January 1990 PSA services employed 1,265 non-industrial staff at Hastings. It is not possible to forecast future staff numbers since these will depend partly on how much work the agency is able to win in competition after it is untied on 1 April 1990 and partly on decisions about where some of the agency's activities will be located.

Other Government Departments have been asked whether they have work which could be transferred to Hastings, to provide employment for the staff PSA will be releasing there. One Department has already expressed interest and we are hoping for more.

Pollution (Irish Sea)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the quantities and types of waste dumped into the Irish sea from sources in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Licensing the disposal of waste at sea is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland. No licences have been granted for the disposal of liquid and solid industrial waste in the Irish sea and information on the disposal of sewage sludge and dredged spoil is given in the Ministry's, "Report on the disposal of waste at sea—1986 and 1987", a copy of which is in the Library (a similar report giving figures for 1988 is expected to be published shortly). Information on waste inputs generally in the Irish sea is given in the status report prepared by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

HEALTH

Eyesight Checks

11. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has yet received the results of his monitoring of the effects of charging for eyesight checks.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has yet received the results of his monitoring of the effects of charging for eyesight checks.

65. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has yet received the results of his monitoring of the effects of charging for eyesight checks.

103. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has yet received the results of his monitoring of the effects of charging for eyesight checks.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The results of a survey of the number of sight tests in the first quarter of 1990 compared with earlier periods should be available by the early summer. A summary will be placed in the Library.

Cold-Related Deaths

12. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about cold-related deaths.

48. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about cold-related deaths.

68. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about cold-related deaths.

96. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about cold-related deaths.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The five-year trends from 1955 to 1985 have seen the excess winter mortality—that is, the number of deaths that occur in the winter quarter in excess of the numbers that occur in the summer—decrease, from about 47 per cent. from 1951 to 1955, to 26 per cent. between 1981 and 1985 in Scotland, and from 68·2 to 29·3 per cent. in England and Wales.

Ambulance Dispute

13. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent meetings he has had with the chief executive of the National Health Service to discuss the ambulance dispute.

4. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the ambulance workers' dispute.

46. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the National Union of Public Employees' dispute in the ambulance service.

71. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now meet representatives of ambulance staffs.

88. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received about the ambulance men's dispute.

97. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has met representatives of ambulance workers since their current dispute commenced.

115. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the current policy in the ambulance service dispute; and what action he now proposes taking.

116. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now meet representatives of ambulance staff.

121. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the National Health Service chief executive to discuss the ambulance service dispute.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I meet the chief executive of the National Health Service regularly to discuss the ambulance dispute. I have no intention of meeting representatives of ambulance staffs myself.

National Health Service Trusts

16. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest figure for the number of hospitals, health districts and specialist units which have expressed an interest in becoming a self-governing National Health Service trust.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A total of 190 units have expressed interest in National Health Service trust status, including a number with more than one hospital. Twelve expressions of interest cover all the facilities within the relevant districts, and 19 are single specialty units. Eighty of these units are considering the preparation of applications for the first wave, which we would expect to be established in April 1991. However, applications will not be invited until Parliament has approved the necessary legislation.

38. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision his Department has made for ambulance services within district health authorities to become self-governing trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government regard all hospitals and a number of other services, including ambulance services, as potentially eligible to apply for National Health Service trust status when Parliament has approved the necessary legislation. A number of ambulance services currently provided by health authorities have already expressed an interest in becoming National Health Service trusts.

21. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the core services which self-governing hospitals must provide.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Core or "designated services" are simply those which can be provided only in a particular locality by a particular hospital which has become an NHS trust and to which district health authorities and GPs have no reasonable accessible alternative. This will vary in the light of local circumstances and the services available in each district. There is no basis upon which a national list could be compiled at this stage of all those local situations which will give rise to some services in some places being described as "designated services" when the first NHS trusts are established.

Health Authorities (Maintenance)

17. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total figure for the estimated maintenance backlog for health authorities.

19. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total figure for the estimated maintenance backlog for health authorities.

Mr. Freeman: The first returns of information about the stock of National Health Service property, under the Korner requirements, are now being collected, but complete information will not be available until the figures for 1989-90 are received. Estimates have been received from 133 health authorities in respect of the year 1988-89. This indicates that in those authorities the total cost of bringing the estate to an overall condition which exhibits only minor deterioration amounts to about £1·2 billion.

Helicopter Ambulance Service

18. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health regions have now established an emergency helicopter ambulance service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally, but I am aware that dedicated helicopter ambulances are now operating in the London area out to the M25 and also South East Thames and South Western (Cornwall) RHAs. In addition, there are joint police/ambulance service helicopter projects in operation in Sussex, Wiltshire and the Thames valley.

Acute Services (Bromley)

22. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the proposal of Bromley health authority to centralise all the acute services of the district in one purpose-built hospital.

Mr. Freeman: Following the offer by the London borough of Bromley of a greenfield site in the geographical centre of the district, Bromley health authority is developing plans to centralise most of its acute inpatient services. The authority believes that in this way the best service will be offered to local people and the best use made of staff resources. Because of their scale, these proposals will need to be submitted to the RHA and, in due course, to Ministers for a final decision.

National Health Service and Community Care Bill

23. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department, health authorities and family practitioner committees to prepare for the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

35. **Mr. Leadbitter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department, health authorities and family practitioner committees to prepare for the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

74. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department, health authorities and family practitioner committees to prepare for the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

106. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department, health authorities and family practitioner committees to prepare for the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In this financial year we expect to spend a total of £85 million on preparation for implementation of the Government's proposals to improve the National Health Service. This sum includes expenditure on such items as the creation of new consultant posts in expensive specialties and on staff training in better financial management.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of the black and Asian community to discuss the National Health Service and Community Care Bill; and which groups he met.

Mr. Freeman: I met representatives of the Overseas Doctors Association on 11 July 1989, when we discussed a variety of subjects related to the black and Asian community, including the Government's proposals to improve the Health Service.

On 31 January I shall be meeting representatives from the King's Fund for Health Services Development to discuss their work with ethnic minority groups. I shall also be visiting the National Community Health Resource on 7 February, again to discuss its activities in this field. I expect that during these meetings our proposals for the NHS and community care will be considered.

There are also discussions taking place at the moment about the possibility of a conference with the Overseas Doctors Association specifically to consider the effects of the White Paper proposals for ethnic minority groups.

69. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority places will be removed from health authorities in each district in Greater London, after the enactment of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill in its present form.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is as follows:

District Health Authority	*Local authority members*
Barnet	4
Ealing	4
Harrow	4
Hillingdon	4
Hounslow and Spelthorne	5
Parkside	5
Riverside	5
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	5
Bloomsbury	5
City and Hackney	5
Enfield	4
Hampstead	4
Haringey	4
Islington	4
Newham	4
Redbridge	4
Tower Hamlets	4
Waltham Forest	4
Croydon	4
Kingston and Esher	4
Merton and Sutton	4
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	4
Wandsworth	4
Bexley	4
Bromley	4
Camberwell	5
Greenwich	4
Lewisham and North Southwark	5
West Lambeth	4

49. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from professional bodies and trades unions concerning the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have had a large number of representations from a wide variety of sources.

36. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his intention that health circular 89(5) on the discharge of patients from hospitals will apply when in-patient services are contracted under the provisions of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. It is intended that this circular will continue to be implemented by district health authorities and by NHS trusts. In securing good quality services for their residents when placing contracts, district health authorities will need to consider monitoring the performance of those providing the service.

Infertility Treatments

24. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve the range and availability of infertility treatments.

34. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve the range and availability of infertility treatments.

79. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve the range and availability of infertility treatment.

87. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve the range and availability of infertility treatment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: These matters are for individual health authorities to determine in the light of

local needs and priorities. I understand that the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has just put proposals for funding a medical audit unit to the Department and that this will include a programme of work aimed at auditing the delivery of infertility services with a view to encouraging improvements.

Ambulance Service

25. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to privatise the ambulance service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans to privatise this service.

General Practitioners, Kent

26. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of support staff employed by general practitioners in Kent at present; and what the number was in 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The total number of staff qualifying for direct reimbursement under the ancillary staff scheme in Kent increased by 78 per cent. from 1,109 (660 whole-time equivalents) in 1979 to 1,975 (1,116 whole-time equivalents) in 1988. A few general practitioners employ support staff outside the scope of the present scheme; information about these staff is not collected centrally.

Hospital Catering

27. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance and resources he gives to health authorities for the maintenance of cooking and beverage preparing areas in hospitals.

Mr. Freeman: It is for health authorities to devote appropriate resources to the maintenance of cooking and beverage preparation areas in hospitals from the funds allocated to them. Health authorities have a duty to comply with the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and it is Government policy that they should comply with all other relevant statutes and regulations. The Department issues building guidance on the standards that it expects in new and upgraded food preparation areas.

AIDS

28. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total level of Government spending on caring for AIDS patients in the years 1988-89 and 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Spending on care for AIDS patients is not separately identified. The specific provisions made available to health authorities in England as a contribution towards the costs of work to prevent the spread of HIV infection and the provision of diagnostic, treatment care and support services for people infected with the virus, including those with AIDS, were £58·74 million in 1988-89 and £121·90 million in 1989-90. In addition, an AIDS support grant allocation to local authorities of £7 million was introduced in 1989-90.

Dental Checks

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the effects of charging for dental checks on dental attendances.

29. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the effects of charging for dental checks on dental attendances.

Mr. Freeman: The annual data on dental examinations in England and Wales from 1984-85 to 1988-89 show a gently rising trend and we expect this to continue. As might be expected, however, attendances increased in the months prior to the introduction of the examination charge in January 1989 and fell immediately afterwards. It is too early to form a definitive view about any longer-term effects.

NHS (Consumer Involvement)

30. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve consumer involvement in the running of the National Health Service.

40. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve consumer involvement in the running of the National Health Service.

92. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve consumer involvement in the running of the National Health Service.

93. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to improve consumer involvement in the running of the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's proposals to improve the Health Service are based on a full recognition of the importance of the consumer of health care—the patient. Our proposals put patients first and give hospitals and their staff incentives to take account of the individual patient's needs. District health authorities will work closely with local interest groups and consider the views of users of services. Complaint procedures will be made easier. The interests of the local community will continue to be represented by community health councils, which will act as a channel for consumer views to health authorities and the family service authorities. The delegation of decision-making powers to hospital and GP level will ensure that local staff will have responsibility for responding to local needs. At least two non-executive members of each NHS hospital trust will be drawn from the local community. This all adds up to a package of measures designed to ensure that NHS consumers benefit from improved, better directed, more patient-responsive services.

Social Work Training

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of social work training.

31. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of social work training.

95. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of social work training.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) on 16 January at column *195*.

Community Care

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the role of voluntary organisations in providing care in the community; and if he will make a statement.

32. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received regarding the Government's proposals on community care.

39. **Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations concerned with community care he has met since the publication of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

60. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from voluntary organisations on the community care proposals set out in the White Paper "Caring for People".

83. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received regarding the Government's proposals on community care.

89. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received regarding the Government's proposals on community care.

91. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received regarding the Government's proposals on community care.

104. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations concerned with community care he has met since the publication of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Members to my replies on 12 December 1989 at columns *845-47*. We have received further representations on the Government's proposals for community care. These representations have been from local authority associations, from individual directors of social services, from voluntary organisations, from carers' organisations and from independent providers of services. Most continue to express a general welcome for our proposals; detailed issues are being discussed with these and other organisations as part of our preparations for implementation of the main proposals in the White Paper, "Caring for People" in April 1991.

107. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure the involvement of qualified nurses in the move to care in the community for mental patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As our recent published White Paper on community care, "Caring for People", reaffirms, nurses represent an important skilled resource. It will be essential that health and social services authorities and voluntary bodies make best use of both their time and skills. We propose to build on nurses' existing contributions to the health and social care needs of mentally ill and handicapped patients discharged from hospital and living in the community.

62. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's policy on the role of the private residential nursing home in the field of community care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Our White Paper "Caring for People" makes it clear that we are firmly committed to a policy of community care which provides dignity and choice to frail and vulnerable people. While for most people this will be achieved by continuing to live in their own home, others would benefit from care in a more supportive environment. We believe that, along with other providers, independent sector nursing homes will continue to play an important part in meeting people's care needs.

Resource Management

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made on the implementation of resource management.

33. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further progress will be made with the resource management initiative in the coming financial year.

Mr. Freeman: The resource management initiative was launched in November 1986.

In March 1989 I announced the names of 50 hospitals starting resource management in 1989-90. I announced in December 1989 that 20 of those hospitals would invest in IT. The remaining 30 will invest substantially in IT in 1990-91. On 18 January I announced the names of 50 more hospitals which will implement the main resource management in 1990-91.

Computerised training packages on diagnostic related groups (DRGs) and DRG group software have been issued to all acute hospitals and a cost allocation model to the 50 acute hospitals which started resource management this year. This model will be issued to all acute hospitals shortly.

Breast Screening

37. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in implementing a national breast screening service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table lists those breast screening centres in England which had become operational by the end of 1989.

Under the programme, all women aged between 50 and 64 years will be invited to be screened by mammography every three years; older women will be screened on request. The purpose of screening is to detect changes in breast tissue which might be cancerous at an early stage when treatment can be simple and most likely to be effective.

Plans for extending the breast screening programme to cover all district health authorities in England are well advanced; a full nationwide service comprising about 80 centres (including mobile units) is expected to become operational during 1990.

The breast screening programmes in the other parts of the United Kingdom are the responsibilities of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Screening centres operational as at December 1989

Region	*Centres*
Northern	Gateshead
	Newcastle
Yorkshire	Huddersfield
	Hull
	York
Trent	Nottingham
	Leicester
	Lincoln
	South Yorkshire
East Anglian	King's Lynn
	Suffolk
	Peterborough
	Norwich
North West Thames	Barnet
	Charing Cross
North East Thames	Epping
	Bloomsbury
	East London
	Chelmsford and Colchester
	Whipps Cross
South East Thames	Camberwell
	Canterbury
	East Sussex
South West Thames	Guildford
	Worthing
Wessex	Southampton
	Isle of Wight
	Portsmouth
Oxford	Aylesbury
	Northampton
	Wycombe
	Milton Keynes
	Reading
South Western	Cornwall
	Avon
	West Devon
West Midlands	Stoke on Trent
	Coventry
	Dudley
	Walsall
	Birmingham
Mersey	Liverpool
North Western	Manchester
	Bolton
	Wigan

Family Planning

41. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the family planning service.

55. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the family planning services.

76. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the family planning services.

113. **Ms. Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the family planning services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government regard family planning as an important preventive service that contributes to maternal and child health and to the stability of family life. The emphasis of family planning services is on enabling people to plan and space their families as they would wish, with the consequent beneficial effects on health and the quality of life.

The day-to-day management of family planning services is a matter for individual health authorities since they can best judge local circumstances and priorities. Planning guidelines for 1989-91, issued in July 1988, asked authorities to ensure that full use is made of family planning services as a resource in combating AIDS and to strike a balance between services provided by specialist clinics and those provided by GPs.

Disabled Persons

42. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

57. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave the hon. Members for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) and for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) earlier today.

Medical Audit

43. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made on the proposals for medical audit.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Encouraging progress is being made. Officials are working with members of the medical profession to develop and implement systems of medical audit. Across the country the Department has contributed £926,000 in direct funding to 43 projects which began in 1989. Regions and districts have also been funding projects of their own. Considerable further expansion is expected soon both in the hospital and community health service and in general practice. To enable this, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced the provision of £31 million in 1990-91.

72. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement on the recently announced £31 million for medical audit.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A total of £24 million is being divided among the regional health authorities in their proportion to their consultant numbers, subject to their submitting satisfactory medical audit implementation plans to the NHS management executive. A total of £5 million will be used in general practice. The remaining £2 million will be retained centrally for training and for projects which have national application.

General Practice (Computers)

45. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners are likely to be affected by the recently announced scheme to provide reimbursement for computers in general practice.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Potentially all medical practitioners could benefit to some extent, depending upon the circumstances of their practices. Details will be published shortly in the statement of fees and allowances.

Drugs

47. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his proposals for the future supply of drugs to National Health Service patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The proposed introduction of indicative prescribing budgets will not affect the supply of necessary drugs to NHS patients. GPs will remain free to prescribe all medicines which are clinically necessary for their patients. Where there is a choice of equally effective drugs, GPs will be expected to take the relative costs into account. Indicative prescribing budgets will encourage more effective and economic prescribing and help to eliminate unnecessary expenditure in drugs, thus releasing money for other aspects of patient care in the NHS.

West Midlands RHA

50. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in the West Midlands regional health authority area in 1988; and what the comparable figure was in 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table.

Patients treated, NHS hospitals, West Midlands Regional Health Authority, 1979 and 1988-89

	1979	*1988-89*	*Percentage increase*
In-patient cases treated	547,773	689,457	25·9
Day cases	51,769	99,349	91·9
New out-patients	731,764	813,067	11·1
Total out-patient attendance	3,315,153	3,757,255	13·3

Source: Returns SH3 (1978 data), SH3a, KP70, KH09 and KH18 (1988-89 data).

114. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the allocation of funds to the West Midlands regional health authority for 1990-91.

Mr. Freeman: Regional health authorities' initial cash limits for 1990-91 will be announced shortly. But, as my hon. Friend may be aware, we have already announced that the West Midlands regional health authority will receive a cash increase of 6·76 per cent. on its general revenue allocation for next year.

NHS Indemnity Scheme

51. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the National Health Service indemnity scheme for doctors in National Health Service hospitals is now in place.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. With effect from 1 January 1990, health authorities are taking direct financial responsibility in claims of negligence against their medical staff. In December the Department of Health issued a circular to health authorities and a leaflet for all doctors and dentists in the hospital and community health services. A copy of the circular, HC(89)34, and of the leaflet, "Medical Negligence" are available in the Library.

Tuberculosis

52. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of tuberculosis were reported in the last year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures for the previous five and 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table:

Notifications of tuberculosis in England and Wales for the years 1988, 1983 and 1978

Year	*Notifications*
1988	5,164
1983	6,803
1978	9,688

NHS Reforms

53. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there are any experiments being undertaken to assess how the proposed National Health Service reforms would work.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Health Service is undertaking a wide range of projects designed to inform the implementation of the Government's proposals to improve services.

111. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made on plans for the implementation of the proposed reforms of the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are making good progress in putting into action the changes outlined in the White Paper "Working for Patients". We are confident that the NHS will be ready to implement the basic elements of the new and better systems of matching growth and resources with expansion of patient services by April 1991, once Parliament approves the necessary legislation. By 1990-91 the total expenditure on the implementation of the Government's proposals to improve the Health Service will exceed £300 million.

We have issued detailed guidance on many subjects, including the education and training of non-medical staff. Guidance on the principles of the new contracting system was issued in September, and further guidance on additional aspects of the contracting system will be issued shortly.

We have recently published a GP fundholder programme, which gives more details about the operation of a GP practice fund.

A new working paper, the 11th in the series, has been published, called, "Framework for Information Systems: Overview". This working paper covers two documents issued for consultation, looking at the way ahead for information and information technology and concentrating on action in preparation for April 1991.

We have launched a project to support district health authorities in detailed work in developing the key role

which DHAs will have under the new system of identifying and obtaining the best pattern of services which will most effectively meet all the health needs of the population they serve.

We have received over 180 expressions of interest from potential NHS hospital trusts. Seventy-nine of them are proceeding towards being the first wave of applicants for trust status within the NHS in April 1991. Subject to progress in Parliament, we expect many more to be ready for later waves of applicants in future years.

We have made £2 million available for implementation of medical audit this financial year, and a further £26 million has been allocated to hospital and community health services for the development of medical audit in 1990-91. A £4·5 million scheme has been launched to develop information technology skills. Demonstration projects, aimed at improving the quality of care and services to patients, have been announced for five outpatient departments. The principles of general management are being introduced into the family practitioner committee system.

Good progress is also being made in relation to medical education and research. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State explained in a speech on 10 July 1989, since sent to all hospital doctors, we intend to take powers to ensure, for instance, the continuation of high standards of undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education and research in all NHS hospitals.

We will also ensure that postgraduate training posts are provided in NHS hospital trusts in accordance with the national objectives set out in "Achieving a Balance". Medical education and research will be further enhanced by the proposed increase in the service increment for training (SIFT) to meet 100 per cent. of the median excess costs of teaching hospitals. This will be distributed by regions in consultation with universities.

The National Health Service and Community Care Bill is now before the House.

Health Authorities (Maintenance Backlog)

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total figure for the estimated maintenance backlog for health authorities.

54. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total figure for the estimated maintenance backlog for health authorities.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 10 January at columns *666-69*.

Patient Services

56. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the use of contracts for patient services within the National Health Service.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 12 December 1989 at columns 843-44.

Health Promotion

58. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent initiatives have been taken by his Department to assist with health promotion and disease prevention.

Mr. Freeman: We recognise the essential role of health promotion and disease prevention in sustaining and improving people's health. Recent major initiatives include:

(a) changes to the system of paying family doctors, which will be introduced from 1 April to encourage them to provide a wide range of health promotion and preventive activities. Examples include incentive payments for achieving specified levels of vaccination and immunisation and screening for cancer of the cervix; new payments for approved health promotion clinics; and a requirement on general practitioners to give advice on matters such as diet, exercise, alcohol, smoking and drugs;

(b) the holding of an expert symposium, jointly organised with the Health Education Authority (HEA), to assess the current and future spread of HIV and AIDS in the United Kingdom and to inform future development of the AIDS public education campaign. The proceedings of this symposium will be published shortly;

(c) the launch in December of the teenage smoking campaign, costing £2 million a year over the next five years and intended to dissuade young people from starting to smoke. National advertising is currently aimed at 11-15-year-olds;

(d) also in December, the making of a regulation under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 banning the manufacture and supply of oral snuff. The ban takes effect from 13 March 1990;

(e) further "Look After Your Heart" campaign national television and press advertising as part of LAYH's endeavours to encourage the adoption of healthier lifestyles;

(f) the preparation, with the HEA, of a further phase of a major information and education campaign on vaccination and immunisation for later this year.

112. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will increase the level of investment in health promotion and health education programmes.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) on 12 December at column *600*.

Expenditure

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities project a deficit for the end of the current financial year.

59. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities project a deficit for the end of the current financial year.

61. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities project a deficit for the end of the current financial year.

90. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities project a deficit for the end of the current financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Health authority cash limit spending is monitored by my Department on a regional basis and we do not expect any region to exceed its cash limit for the year. Information about the financial position

of district health authorities is not collected centrally. The NHS is spending more money this year than last in real terms and is treating more patients.

Junior Hospital Doctors

63. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the number of hours worked by junior hospital doctors.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall be meeting the profession for talks shortly to discuss what further action might now be appropriate to reduce the number of junior doctors on onerous rota commitments and how best to take this issue forward. Reports have now been received from all regional health authorities on the results of our June 1988 initiative. They show encouraging progress, but more needs to be done to achieve further reductions.

National Health Service Funding

64. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on funding for the National Health Service for 1990-91.

Mr. Freeman: In 1990-91 gross expenditure on the National Health Service in England is planned to increase to over £23·3 billion. In addition, if health authorities do no more than they have achieved in recent years, they will have a further £150 million from their cost improvement programmes. Taken together, this means that the resources available to the NHS next year will increase by the equivalent of nearly 11 per cent. in cash or about 5·5 per cent. in real terms.

British Medical Association

66. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of the British Medical Association; and what matters were discussed.

80. **Mr. Lambie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the British Medical Association and what subjects were discussed.

100. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the British Medical Association; and what subjects were discussed.

119. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the British Medical Association; and what subjects were discussed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) earlier today.

Eye Hospital (Hampshire)

67. **Sir David Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will give his approval for a new eye hospital for the Southampton and South West Hampshire health district, the details of which have been submitted to his Department.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is responsible for giving approval in principle, within delegated limits, to any scheme which starts a cycle of project development with a total works cost of over £10 million. The total cost of the proposed relocation plan for the Southampton eye hospital is, I understand, around £4 million and therefore not subject to departmental approval.

Wandsworth Health Authority

70. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the overspending by the Wandsworth health authority in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Wandsworth district health authority reports an overspend at the end of November of £2·197 million. This is projected to rise by the end of the financial year to a figure between £2·5 and £3·1 million. South West Thames region has been discussing with the district a package of economy measures to reduce the overspend in 1989-90 and to produce a balanced budget for 1990-91. The district is still considering what action to take.

Inpatients

73. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figure he has for the average number of inpatients treated each week by the National Health Service: and what was the figure in 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table:

Patients treated, per week, NHS hospitals, England, 1979 and 1988-89

	1979	*1988-89*
Inpatient cases treated	103,848	126,654

Source: Returns SH3 (1978 data), SH3a (1988-89 data).

Mental Health

75. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the capital fund for mental health projects.

117. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give further details of the capital loan fund for mental health projects.

Mr. Freeman: The intention is that the capital loans fund will operate from 1 April 1990. The total sum committed over the three years from that date will be £50 million. An executive letter is being issued to health authorities, which provides details of the new arrangements and asks for bids by the end of March for the year 1990-91.

General Practitioners (Earnings)

77. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the average earnings of a general practitioner in the current year and the year 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The intended average gross income for general medical practitioners was £17,327 in 1979-80 and £45,761 in 1989-90, an increase of 31 per cent. in real terms. The average GP also received an income of £5,955 in 1979-80 in direct reimbursement of certain expenses: the 1989-90 figure is estimated to be £21,475, an increase of 79 per cent. in real terms.

Homeless People

78. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision he has made for the health care needs of homeless people in 1990-91 and the subsequent year.

Mr. Freeman: It will be for individual health authorities and family practitioner committees to assess and meet the health care needs of all those, including any homeless, within their areas of responsibility. The Department, however, is funding several voluntary organisations helping the homeless and has funded two projects in London designed to promote new models of primary care. Following an encouraging evaluation, it is hoped that similar schemes will be developed elsewhere, In addition, the Department is examining what further measures could be taken to help those homeless who are mentally ill.

North West RHA

81. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated by the North West regional health authority in 1978-79 and 1988-89 as inpatients, outpatients and day patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

	1979	*1989*	*Per cent.*
In-patient cases (including day cases)	563,787	809,868	+43
Day cases	70,608	136,020	+93
Out patients (new cases)	699,717	779,084	+11

Park Hospital, Liverpool

82. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will intervene with Liverpool regional health authority to prevent the closure or rundown of Park hospital in the Broadgreen constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) earlier today.

Regional Health Authorities (Resources)

84. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give further details of the new system of distributing resources to regional health authorities.

Mr. Freeman: The new system was set out in paragraphs 4.8 to 4.10 of "Working for Patients" and in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.6 of Working Paper 2: "Funding and Contracts for Hospital Services", copies of which are available in the Library. For further details, I refer my hon. Friend to the replies that I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 10 January at column *663* and today.

Social Workers

85. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received any recent representations from the Association of County Councils about a shortage of qualified social workers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no record of recent representations from the Association of County Councils on this issue. We are aware of the problems faced by some local authorities in attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff and of the steps that they, as employers, are taking to improve the position. The response by local authorities to the Department of Health's two training support programmes targeted at staff working with elderly people and those working in the field of child care, indicates that many social services departments will be enabled to increase significantly the number of their staff seconded to social work qualifying courses. The Department will keep under review possible measures to increase intakes to qualifying courses in social work.

Children Act

86. **Mr. Cabom:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress being made with the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

108. **Mr. Rees:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress being made with the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) earlier today.

Regional Allocations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *663*, he will publish a table showing in the case of each National Health Service region in 1990-91 *(a)* the basic allocation for population, *(b)* the effect of adjusting for morbidity, *(c)* the effect of adjustments for the relative costs of services to seven age bandings and *(d)* the damping effect of phasing in the new allocation system over three years.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The information requested is given as follows in the form of allocation shares of the resources available nationally. Table 1 shows how these shares are changed as the various weighting factors within the new allocation formula are applied and table 2 the effect on 1990-91 of phasing the new formula over three years:

Table 1

Region	*1990-91 shares*			
	Crude population	*Weighted[1] for age structure*	*Weighted for SMRs*	*Weighted for costs of providing services*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
Northern	6·40	6·32	6·85	6·63
Yorkshire	7·56	7·54	7·84	7·59
Trent	9·80	9·65	9·82	9·51

Region	1990-91 shares			
	Crude population	Weighted[1] for age structure	Weighted for SMRs	Weighted for costs of providing services
	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.
East Anglian	4·30	4·43	4·15	4·02
North West Thames	7·39	7·08	6·78	7·41
North East Thames	7·93	7·86	7·77	8·61
South East Thames	7·69	8·14	7·96	8·36
South West Thames	6·28	6·57	6·15	6·49
Wessex	6·21	6·50	6·10	5·91
Oxford	5·37	4·92	4·62	4·48
South Western	6·78	7·33	6·98	6·76
West Midlands	10·92	10·49	10·80	10·47
Mersey	5·02	4·92	5·25	5·08
North Western	8·33	8·26	8·93	8·66
Total	100·00	100·00	100·00	100·00

[1] Relative cost of services for different ages

Table 2

Region	Effect on shares of moving direct to new formula in 1990-91	Effect on[1] shares of phasing in new formula	Difference
	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
Northern	6·63	6·63	0·00
Yorkshire	7·59	7·53	−0·06
Trent	9·51	9·45	−0·06
East Anglian	4·02	3·96	−0·06
North West Thames	7·41	7·45	0·03
North East Thames	8·61	8·72	0·09
South East Thames	8·36	8·23	−0·13
South West Thames	6·49	6·49	0·00
Wessex	5·91	5·77	−0·13
Oxford	4·48	4·56	0·08
South Western	6·76	6·65	−0·11
West Midlands	10·47	10·59	0·11
Mersey	5·08	5·26	0·16
North Western	8·66	8·72	0·06
Total	100·00	100·00	0·00

[1] Over three years.

Tranx Advice Centre

94. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has had any further discussions about the means of avoiding the closure of the Tranx tranquilliser advice centre.

Mr. Roger Freeman: No. Officials wrote to Tranx (UK) Ltd in December explaining that, because the statutory authorities are not prepared to fund local elements of the service that Tranx (UK) Ltd provides and given the constraints on central funds, the Department is unable to offer the organisation any further grant aid.

Doctors' Pay

98. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to be in a position to publish his reaction to the pay review body's recommendation on doctors' pay.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The doctors' and dentists' review body reports directly to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who will announce the Government's decision in due course.

Hospital Building

99. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans for improving value for money in the hospital building programme.

Mr. Freeman: A number of initiatives aimed at improving the value for money of the hospital building programme are already in hand. These include a review of the procedures leading up to the approval of new building schemes, a review of the Department's procedural framework for processing building schemes in the NHS, and a review of project management. Each of these reviews will be reporting this year. The Department will continue to develop its building guidance, which has led to significant improvement in the value for money of new hospital building schemes.

The NHS reforms are expected to provide further incentives to improve the performance of the programme, and the future involvement of the Audit Commission in the NHS will bring the management of the estate, including the building programme, into sharper focus.

Sarum 89 Group

101. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will consider further representations from the "Sarum 89" group of doctors in Salisbury, following study of their alternative White Paper on National Health Service reform.

Mr. Freeman: I have now held several useful meetings with the Sarum 89 group and I am grateful for their time and energy. We are always willing to consider fresh representations from this group on the detailed implementation of the Government's proposals to improve the Health Service.

Cervical Cancer

102. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Northern regional health authority with regard to the incidence of cervical cancer; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The incidence of and mortality from cervical cancer varies considerably geographically and within various groups within the population. The main strategy for dealing with the disease is through a programme of early detection based on population screening programmes. I understand from the Northern regional health authority that it is well within target in covering its population through a comprehensive screening programme.

109. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the number of deaths from cervical cancer between 1978 and 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table:

Deaths from cancer of the cervix in England and Wales for the years 1978 to 1988

Year	*Deaths*
1978	2,153
1979	2,087
1980	2,068
1981	2,017
1982	1,932
1983	1,959
1984	1,899
1985	1,957
1986	2,004
1987	1,903
1988	1,942

North East Thames RHA

105. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of the hospital capital programme in the North East Thames region for 1990-91.

Mr. Freeman: The capital programme for North East Thames regional health authority for 1990-91 includes the following major schemes:

Schemes for which there is a Contractual Commitment
Whittington—Phase 1
Mile End—Geriatric Unit
Chase Farm Enabling Works
Whipps Cross Development
St. Bartholomews—New Theatres

Schemes not yet with a Contractual Commitment
Princess Alexandra Development
Chase Farm Main Development
Goodmayes DGH
Broomfield—Phase VII
Colchester—Phase IV
Bloomsbury—Hospital Development

Broomfield, Colchester and Bloomsbury are subject to the approval of Ministers. Further details of the capital programme can be obtained from North East Thames regional health authority.

Infant Deaths

110. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for the years 1979 and 1988 the rate of infant deaths within the first week of birth and the number of stillbirths.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table:

Early neonatal mortality rate and the number of stillbirths in England and Wales for the years 1979 and 1988

	1979	*1988*
Early neonatal mortality rate per 1000 livebirths	6·75	3·89
Stillbirths	5,125	3,382

Cornwall First Air Ambulance

118. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a contribution to the cost of the Cornwall First Air Ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: It is for local health authorities to determine the level of and extent of services that they provide, taking into account the available resources and the competing demands upon them. However, the Department is funding an evaluation of this local initiative.

General Practitioners

120. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there are in the National Health Service now; and how many there were in 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 1 October 1988 (the latest year for which figures are available) there were 25,322 unrestricted general medical practitioners in England compared with 21,357 at 1 October 1979—an increase of 18·6 per cent.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for how many days general practitioners on duty over a weekend will be expected to work continuously under the new contract for general practitioners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no specific requirements in the GPs' new contract for weekend duties or for working continuously. The responsibility placed upon GPs by regulations to provide all necessary and appropriate personal medical services for their patients on a 24 hours a day basis remains unchanged. Existing arrangements for delegating this responsibility also remain unchanged. The new requirement introduced by the National Health Service (General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1989 is that GPs who are full time will be required to be available for surgery consultation and home visits for a minimum of 26 hours a week over five days at times convenient to their patients.

Hospital Services (Rural Areas)

122. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the provision of hospital services in rural areas.

Mr. Freeman: Small hospitals can play a valuable role in providing a range of services if that is what is needed locally. Under the proposals of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, district health authorities will have responsibility for ensuring provision of a comprehensive range of services for their resident population. They will be able to take full account of the services offered by small hospitals in deciding where to place contracts.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus

123. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest evidence as to the efficiency of the heterosexual transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to my earlier reply to him on 11 December 1990 at column *502*. A number of scientific journals have contained articles on this topic; these include the *British Medical Journal* (18 February 1989, pp 401-2, 411-15) and "AIDS 1988 2" (supplement 1) pp S49-56, copies of which are available in the Library.

Generic Medicines

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received any recent representations on the quality control of foreign generic medications, including those from European Community countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received no representations to date.

National Health Service Trust, Barnsley

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has received any representations regarding the setting up of a National Health Service trust in Barnsley.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Donor Cards

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were estimated to carry *(a)* kidney donor cards and *(b)* other organ donor cards, in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not available in the form requested.

We now issue a single multi-organ donor card, which makes provision for the donation of individually specified, or all, organs.

Different sample surveys produce varying estimates of donor card ownership, but it appears likely that between 20 and 30 per cent. of the general public now possess a donor card. Possession of donor cards has risen substantially over the past decade. A survey carried out in November 1978 found that only 10 per cent. of those questioned possessed a signed card.

Soviet Union

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what communications he has received from his counterpart in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I was delighted to meet and host a dinner for Academician Chazov, the Minister for Health of the USSR, during his visit to the United Kingdom as a guest of Her Majesty's Government at the end of October last year, and for Mr. Gromyko, Deputy Minister of Health in the USSR, when he was here last week to discuss health trade matters. I have also received correspondence from Academician Chazov.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many black and Asian people are currently serving on regional health authorities; and if he will name them.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information that the hon. Member requests is not available centrally. We do not monitor the ethnic composition of regional health authorities.

NHS Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many posts in the National Health Service are either nominated by him or need his consultation before they are filled.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State does not nominate, nor is he consulted upon, the appointment of staff to posts in the National Health Service. Employment matters are entirely the responsibility of individual health authorities. So far as the appointment of chairmen and members of health authorities are concerned, details of those for which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is responsible were given in my reply to the hon. Member for Leicester, East on 12 December 1989 at columns *623-24*.

Sterilisation Treatment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list by district health authority in the Trent regional health authority the waiting times for women patients requesting National Health Service sterilisation treatment;

(2) if he will list by regional health authority the waiting times from women patients requesting National Health Service sterilisation treatment;

(3) if he will list by regional health authority, and by district health authority, the waiting times for colposcopy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on waiting time for individual procedures is not collected centrally.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffering from schizophrenia have been released from mental institutions *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in the North West region, during each of the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: The number of discharges of patients treated for a main diagnosis of schizophrenia from

National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units for the last five available years, 1982-86, for England and the North Western regional health authority are shown in the table. The figures relate to discharges and cannot be related to individual patients; a patient may be admitted more than once in a year.

	England	*North Western RHA*
1982	24,594	2,348
1983	25,336	2,331
1984	25,934	2,683
1985	26,225	2,875
1986	26,077	2,621

The figures for Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland respectively. The figures for Scotland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Community Pharmacy Contractors

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why it was decided to retain a cost plus system of remuneration and year-end review for medical practitioners and to terminate arrangements for community pharmacy contractors in England and Wales.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The arrangements for determining the remuneration of the professions providing family practitioner services are designed to reflect the different circumstances of each profession. The "cost plus" system of determining pharmacists' remuneration was brought to an end last year because it provided insufficient incentives to efficiency in the dispensing of medicines. We expect the measures contained in the White Papers "Promoting Better Health" and "Working for Patients" to improve value for money and raise standards of care in general practice.

Under-fives Provision

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional moneys he has allocated to voluntary organisations for the small grants scheme for under-fives in this financial year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am pleased to announce that the Department has just increased the amount allocated to voluntary organisations for the small grants scheme for under-fives and their families by £101,000. The additional allocations are as shown in the table:

Organisation	*Additional allocation* £
Pre-School Play Groups Association	50,000
National Council for Voluntary Child Care Organisation (Child Care)	10,000
National Childminding Association	10,000
National Toy Libraries Association (Play Matters)	11,000
National Playbus Association	10,000
Home Start Consultancy	10,000

This brings the total allocation to £425,000 in 1989-90.

Welfare Milk Scheme

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received about the effects of changes to the welfare milk scheme; how many people in Bradford are now receiving weekly milk tokens; what groups of people are entitled to milk tokens; what estimates he has made of the number of people in Bradford who will no longer receive doorstep delivery of welfare milk; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received about the impact upon those engaged in milk distribution from the discounting of welfare milk tokens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: A period of eight months' consultation and discussion with interested parties preceded the announcement of the price to be paid by the Government for liquid welfare milk. There are no changes in the welfare milk scheme as far as recipients are concerned. Since the announcement my noble Friend Baroness Hooper met representatives of the dairy trade on 10 January to discuss implementation. Specific points about the revised pricing structure were further discussed between officials and the trade on 16 January. Early-day motions have been tabled, seeking reconsideration of our decision, and the regulation bringing the change into effect has been prayed against. In addition, a number of hon. Members have written expressing the concerns of their constituents.

Information about the number of welfare milk beneficiaries by area is not available, but we do not anticipate any changes since the scheme itself remains unchanged. Milk tokens will continue to be issued in respect of pregnant women and children under five in families receiving income support and to handicapped children aged five to 16 who, because of their handicap, are registered at a school. The revised pricing structure does not affect beneficiaries entitlement to welfare milk nor the way in which they choose to obtain it.

Emergency Services

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many departmental employees who are classified as emergency services receive shift allowances and incremental payments.

Mr. Freeman: None, in the Department of Health.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 January 1990

DEFENCE

Z-Berths

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any further reserve Z-berths have been introduced to date, since his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley of 5 May 1989, *Official Report*, column *276*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) on 5 May 1989 at column *276*. Swansea and Tilbury are still under discussion with local authorities as possible venues for visits by nuclear-powered submarines.

Northern Ireland

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will consider paying financial compensation to civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence working in Northern Ireland on the grounds of the special hazards and difficulties of their employment in the Province.

Mr. Neubert: A general principle of Civil Service pay is that compensation is not paid because of exposure to risk. The general conditions of service for staff serving in Northern Ireland are, however, kept under review.

Philippines (Personnel Carriers)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Simba armoured personnel carriers have been supplied to the Philippines by GKN; what assurances have been received as to their proposed use; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement summarising the main features of the deal involving the sale of armoured personnel carriers to the Philippines, including details of offsetting arrangements.

Mr. Neubert: It has been the consistent policy of successive Administrations not to provide details of defence exports to specific countries.

Namibia

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the British military contingent of the United Nations transition assistance group (UNTAG) in Namibia will return to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The majority of the British military contingent will be returning from Namibia towards the end of January. It is planned that the remainder will return by early April in accordance with UNTAG's overall withdrawal plan. The contributions of the British armed forces and the civilian election advisers have been widely recognised as key elements in the successful involvement of the United Nations in helping Namibia achieve independence, and the House will wish to pay tribute to those concerned for their dedication and professionalism.

THE ARTS

Copyright Act 1911

Mr. Waller: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has any plans to seek to extend the provisions of the Copyright Act 1911 to cover material published in the form of electronic or audio-visual media.

Mr. Luce: I have no plans to amend the Copyright Act 1911.

Royal Ballet

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he has received any request from the Royal Ballet for funds to assist it to tour the United States this summer.

Mr. Luce: I have received no such request. Overseas touring is the province of the British Council, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Arts Council and Crafts Council

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Minister for the Arts (1) if he will explain the corporate roles of the Arts Council and the Crafts Council and list the similarities and differences between those roles; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the various craftspeople, educationists, retailers, guilds and societies active in the craft business which were consulted by the author of the Wilding report during the preparation of that report;

(3) if he will make a statement on the comparative performance, in the fields of business and fund-raising, of the Arts Council and of the Crafts Council;

(4) if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals for merging the Crafts Council with the Design Council.

Mr. Luce: In reaching a decision on the future of the Crafts Council, I am considering carefully the many representations I have received on this subject. I shall announce my conclusions as soon as possible, and I shall write to the hon. Member in more detail when I have done so. Before deciding whether to accept Mr. Wilding's recommendation to merge the Crafts Council with the Arts Council, I shall want to be sure that any new structure of support enables the crafts to continue to flourish. This Government are concerned to see the continued expansion of the crafts in this country.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list on a year-by-year basis the number of craftspersons grant-aided by the Crafts Advisory Committee and its successor, the Crafts Council, to help set up new businesses between 1971 and 1989, inclusive.

Mr. Luce: The information is as follows:

Number of individual craftsmen and women assisted

Year	Number
1971-72	7
1972-73	14
1973-74	40
1974-75	66
1975-76	68
1976-77	71
1977-78	67
1978-79	33
1979-80	48
1980-81	42
1981-82	47
1982-83	35
1983-84	41
1984-85	39
1985-86	40
1986-87	35
1987-88	39
1988-89	30
Total	762

CIVIL SERVICE

Statutory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many organisations and bodies have been established and taken on staff and premises since 1979 before they were put on a statutory basis by the passage of the authorising legislation through Parliament; and how much has been spent on this basis.

Mr. Luce: This information is not held centrally.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"The Blooding"

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what reports the Director of Public Prosecutions received concerning the book, "The Blooding"; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has received two reports from the police relating to matters connected with the publication of the book "The Blooding".

Sunday Trading

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received from the chairman of the Keep Sunday Special Campaign on the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950, in the light of the European Court of Justice's decision on 23 November 1989; if he will publish his response; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) on 17 January 1990 at column *260*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the Government have laid down to retrain and re-employ ivory carvers in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The Hong Kong Government are currently holding discussions with representatives of the ivory carvers with a view to placing them on suitable retraining courses run by the Vocational Training Council or helping them to find alternative employment. The Hong Kong labour department has opened a special register to help ivory workers seeking new jobs and a number of them have already been placed.

Tibet

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Chinese Government to end martial law in Tibet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: We have frequently made clear to the Chinese our concern about human rights in Tibet. We hope that the Chinese Government will follow up the lifting of martial law in Peking by taking further steps to strengthen the protection of human rights throughout China, including the lifting of martial law in Lhasa.

Mr. Andrew Balfour

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Mr. Andrew Balfour to resume his official duties, and in what capacity.

Mr. Sainsbury: Mr. Balfour has been informed that his future is under consideration.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Corporation Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the amount of corporation tax paid by manufacturing industry in each financial year since 1978-79 and the proportion of the total corporation tax precept comprised by manufacturing in each of those years.

Mr. Lilley: Information on a comparable basis is available only from 1986-87 and is as follows:

Year	*Net receipts of corporation tax[1] from manufacturing industries*	
	Amount £ billion	*As proportion of total onshore CT receipts (net)[2] Per cent.*
1986-87	3·6	29·7
1987-88	4·5	29·7
1988-89	5·9	32·9

[1] Including advance corporation tax and net of repayments.
[2] Excludes north sea MCT receipts.

National Savings

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by month for the last 12 months, the amount of *(a)* investments and *(b)* withdrawals made in National Savings.

Mr. Ryder: Figures for National Savings receipts and repayments (including accrued interest) for each of the 12 months of 1989 are as follows:

	Receipts £ million	*Repayments £ million*
January	534·7	637·1
February	531·0	745·3
March	494·8	744·0
April	482·2	742·3
May	459·1	674·2
June	420·4	652·2
July	399·4	605·6
August	526·8	1,084·2
September	476·4	1,009·7
October	460·3	776·6
November	414·9	854·7
December[1]	289·2	637·0

[1] Provisional.

Taking into account gross accrued interest of £2·2 billion, the Department for National Savings' contribution to the public sector debt repayment in 1989 was £1·5 billion.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Eastern Europe

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that United Kingdom aid for eastern European countries is invested in activities which are environmentally beneficial or neutral.

Mrs. Chalker: Bilateral British aid is so far confined to Poland. Projects supported there to date comprise mainly training, technical co-operation and consultancy studies which are environmentally neutral. However, the procedures which we use to assess proposals for funding include an explicit consideration of the effects on the environment. We are also discussing with the Polish authorities a programme of assistance in the energy sector, which will look at environmental concerns.

Know-How Funds

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of projects approved to date under the know-how funds for Poland and Hungary, giving details of the type of project, the funding in cash and kind and the name of the United Kingdom organising body.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 18 December. Most activities are being undertaken by firms or institutions engaged directly by the joint FCO/ODA Unit, or by the British Council on the unit's behalf. Additions to the list are given in the table:

Title:	Coal industry training
Description:	Training in colliery management techniques
Status:	Under way
Cost:	£38,000
Title:	Cracow tourism study
Description:	Recommendation of immediate measures to help Cracow cope with the coming tourist season, and development of longer-term proposals
Status:	Under way
Cost:	£37,000
Title:	Agros dried vegetables
Description:	Recommendations for productivity improvements in this enterprise
Status:	Under way
Cost:	£55,000
Title:	Company doctor training
Description:	Training Polish consultants in techniques of company analysis
Status:	To be implemented
Cost:	£11,000
Title:	Conference on demonopolisation
Description:	Discussion of methods and experiences of demonopolisation in relation to the process of economic and political decision taking
Status:	To be implemented
Cost:	£11,000
Title:	Book industry training
Description:	Pilot project to assess the training needs of the Polish book industry
Status:	To be implemented
Cost:	£17,200

Poland

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide details of expenditure approved to date from the £15 million agriculture project fund for Poland.

Mrs. Chalker: No expenditure has yet been approved. We are still at the stage of working out the details of the project.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Engineering Courses

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what surveys have been carried out or commissioned by his Department since 1987 to find out why fewer sixth formers were applying for engineering courses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Department and the engineering industry commissioned a survey in 1989 into the factors which influence young people in deciding whether or not to study engineering. It covers both students at school or in further education on A-level mathematics and physics courses, and new entrants to degree courses other than engineering. I expect the results of this survey, which is being carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research, to be available in March-April this year.

Research Councils

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what resources he expects to make available to the five research councils to enable the re-equipment of laboratories and the replacement of aging apparatus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: On 15 November at columns *272-76*, my right hon. Friend announced that an additional £61 million would be made available for the science budget in 1990-91, together with planning additions for the next two years of £58 million and £59 million. He announced the allocations to the five research councils on 10 January at columns *623-24*. It is for the research councils to determine how to spend the additional funds made available to them.

However, in its advice to the Secretary of State on the allocations, the Advisory Board for the Research Councils advised that a high proportion of these funds should be directed to preserving the quality of United Kingdom science. The ABRC also suggested that the research councils should deploy some of these additional funds to increase equipment provision through research grants, and that funding of new research programmes and inter-disciplinary research centres would also include some provision for equipment.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what are his long-term plans with respect to the formation of a national research council; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what are his plans for reform of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what are his proposals for establishing a working group to examine the scope for merging the AFRC and the NERC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The proposal for a single national research council was made in the report of a review group established by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils to look at the organisation of council responsibilities for biological sciences. The culmination of this process was the advice offered by the chairman of the board in his letter of 15 November to my right hon. Friend which recommended that the ABRC should be reconstituted as a smaller body specifically charged with promoting greater harmonisation of research council activities. The board also offered advice about improving co-ordination between the AFRC and NERC research programmes, particularly in terrestrial life sciences.

My right hon. Friend wrote to the chairman of the ABRC on 19 January announcing the Government's decision to reconstitute the ABRC from 1 April as recommended by the board; and noting that he and his colleagues were considering the board's subsequent advice concerning the AFRC and NERC. For the full text of the letter I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on 19 January.

Irradiated Rodent Carcases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the practice of disposal of irradiated rodent carcases used in research inside human cadavers was stopped by the Medical Research Council; and where these cadavers were buried.

Mr. Jackson: The Medical Research Council is not aware of the practice of the disposal of irradiated rodent carcases used in research inside human cadavers.

Director of Education, Wandsworth

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the director of education of the London borough of Wandsworth; and what subjects were discussed.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend and I met Mr. Naismith and other interested parties on 9 January to discuss plans for city technology colleges in Wandsworth. I met Mr. Naismith and Councillor Edward Lister on 11 January to discuss a number of ILEA-owned sites in Wandsworth which will be subject to the property transfer orders being made by my right hon. Friend under section 168 of the Education Reform Act.

Higher Education (Students)

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to increase the number of students in higher education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Actively fostered by the Government's education policies and consistent with the general aim of securing further substantial increases in participation above present record levels, we expect to see significant growth in student numbers over the 1990s. Our latest projection indicates full-time equivalent student numbers rising from about 760,000 in 1988 to about 890,000 by the turn of the century.

Interim Advisory Committee

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the interim advisory committee.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend asked the interim advisory committee to submit its report by the end of January. He will be arranging for its early publication once he has received it.

Teachers

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to recognise teachers of excellence by means of higher salaries.

Mrs. Rumbold: Local education authorities can award incentive allowances to teachers demonstrating outstanding ability in the classroom. The Government hope that they will make full use of this discretion.

Student Loans

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about his proposals for a student loan scheme.

Mr. Jackson: Since the publication of the White Paper on top-up loans for students we have received about 5,050 letters, including 64 petitions. Of those, about 700 have been received since publication of the Education (Student Loans) Bill.

Disabled Students' Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list any additional information his Department plans to take into account when calculating the maximum level of the disabled students' allowance;

(2) if he will list the information his Department took into account when calculating the maximum level of the disabled students' allowance.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend continues to take into account all the relevant information available to him, when determining within available resources the rate and conditions of the disabled students' allowance. This year,

in addition to information about cost increases generally, he has received representations from interested parties and detailed evidence from disablement organisations about students' circumstances and needs, which he is considering carefully.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy that the upper limit of the disabled students' allowance will not be frozen in the event of the introduction of his proposals for student loans.

Mr. Jackson: The way in which the disabled students' and other supplementary allowances will be handled in the years after 1990-91 when the main mandatory grant rates are to be frozen will be considered in the light of all the circumstances, including the availability of resources, prevailing at the time.

Special Educational Needs

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the most recent figure for the number of pupils and students with statements of special educational needs in England.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The provisional total number of pupils with statements of special educational needs in England was 138,173 on 21 January 1989, with one authority's return outstanding.

ENERGY

Nuclear Safeguards

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what proportion of the costs allocated under *(a)* in annex B of his Department's memorandum to the Energy Committee on fast reactors published in HC 613, page 6, to reprocessing operations, fissure materials, and technical support for the Dounreay plants, in 1989-90, was spent on nuclear safeguards activities;

(2) what proportion of the costs allocated under *(b)* in annex B of his Department's memorandum to the Energy Committee on fast reactors, published in HC 613, page 6, to reprocessing services in support of European collaboration, materials, design and component proving and for engineering in the research and development programme in 1989-90 was spent on nuclear safeguards activities.

Mr. Baldry: The AEA recovers the cost of its nuclear safeguards work as an overhead from its various nuclear activities. In 1989-90, this cost represents some 0·2 per cent. of costs allocated under item *(a)* Dounreay plants, and some 0·1 per cent. of expenditure allocated under item *(b)* research and development in annex B of the Department's memorandum to the Energy Committee on fast reactors.

Plutonium

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), 8 January, *Official Report*, column *474*, when the discussions to which he makes reference began; how many meetings have been held to date, and where; which states have participated; and when he expects an agreement on safeguarding wastes containing civil material will be concluded.

Mr. Baldry: Discussions with the IAEA on the safeguards to be applied to waste containing civil nuclear material began in 1988. Three consultants' meetings have been held in Vienna. These were held on 12 to 16 September 1988, 12 to 16 June 1989 and 9 to 13 October 1989. Representatives from the United Kingdom, United States of America, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, Sweden, Canada, and Euratom attended the meetings. The IAEA is currently considering the consultants' recommendations.

WALES

Landslips

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, between 1979 and 1989, how many local authorities in south and west Wales have applied for Welsh Office financial assistance for villages threatened by landslides and landslips which have not been directly caused by mining; how much money has been granted per annum by his office on such schemes, and if he will list them.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Department has no powers to give financial assistance for villages threatened by landslides and landslips, but it can advise local authorities on financing necessary works.

Coastal Erosion

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authorities in Wales have applied for central Government assistance since 1979 to tackle coastal land erosion problems; how much money per annum has been allocated by central Government in this period; and which schemes have been supported.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Fourteen maritime district councils in Wales have applied since 1979 for central Government assistance for schemes, approved by the Department under section 5 of the Coast Protection Act 1949, to tackle coastal erosion problems.

The schemes supported under the Act and the actual amount of grant paid during each financial year are listed in the tables:

Financial Year	*Grant Paid*
1979-80	984,331
1980-81	980,659
1981-82	1,553,313
1982-83	2,048,111
1983-84	749,718
1984-85	1,080,983
1985-86	431,933
1986-87	1,106,116
1987-88	1,436,051
1988-89	727,376
Total	11,117,890

The provision for the financial year 1989-90 is £2·9 million.

Note: Some of the grant paid in earlier years will relate to schemes approved before 1979 and not included in the list of schemes in the table.

Grant aided schemes from 1 January 1979 to 31 March 1989

Authority	*Scheme*
Aberconwy Borough Council	Aberconwy Stage 1
Aberconwy Borough Council	Aberconwy Stage 2, 3, 4
Aberconwy Borough Council	Happy Valley, Llandudno
Aberconwy Borough Council	Penrhyn Bay Breakwaters
Aberconwy Borough Council	Penmaenmawr Emergency Works
Carmarthen District Council	Pendine Sea Wall
Carmarthen District Council	Ferryside Phase I, II and III
Ceredigion District Council	Pen-yr-Eryyd Peninsula
Ceredigion District Council	Cae Bach
Ceredigion District Council	Victoria Terrace, Aberystwyth Beach Nourisement
Ceredigion District Council	Abearaeron Harbour South Pier
Ceredigion District Council	Victoria Terrace Stage I
Ceredigion District Council	Victoria Terrace Stage II
Ceredigion District Council	Traeth-y-Duffryn Beach, Aberporth
Ceredigion District Council	Village Frontage, Borth
Ceredigion District Council	Llanina Point, Newquay
Colwyn Borough Council	Storm Damage Phase 4
Colwyn Borough Council	Rhos-on-Sea
Colwyn Borough Council	Rhos-on-Sea Phase 3
Colwyn Borough Council	Sea Wall Rhos-on-Sea
Colwyn Borough Council	Llandulas Beach, Armourflex
Colwyn Borough Council	Emergency Works Sea Wall 1987
Colwyn Borough Council	Llandulas Tip
Colwyn Borough Council	Llandulas Beach
Colwyn Borough Council	West Promenade Wall and Groynes
Dwyfor Borough Council	Abersoch
Dwyfor Borough Council	Carreg Samson
Dwyfor Borough Council	Nefyn Beach
Dwyfor Borough Council	Pwllheli Golf Links
Dwyfor Borough Council	East Cliff, Aberdaron
Dwyfor Borough Council	Pwllheli Harbour Walls
Dwyfor Borough Council	Abersoch Port Fawr
Dwyfor Borough Council	Cliff Opposite Castle Street, Criccieth
Llanelli Borough Council	Llanelli Beach
Llanelli Borough Council	Salters Reclamation PI and PII and PIII
Llanelli Borough Council	Reinstatement of CP works at Llanelli Beach
Meirionnydd District Council	Ynysbrawd Phase 2
Meirionnydd District Council	Aberamffra
Meirionnydd District Council	Barmouth Drifting Sands
Meirionnydd District Council	Grouting Harbour Wall
Meirionnydd District Council	Abrasion of Stepped Apron
Meirionnydd District Council	Tywyn Road to Bryn-y-Mor
Ogwr Borough Council	Porthcawl Breakwater
Ogwr Borough Council	Porthcawl Seawall and Promenade
Port Talbot Borough Council	Aberavon Sea Wall
Preseli District Council	Cwm-yr-Egllys
Preseli District Council	Newport Sands
Preseli District Council	Whitesands
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Rhyl and Prestatyn Storm Damage November 1977
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Barkby Beach Phase 4
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Ffrith Beach Phase 1
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Lengthening Groynes Prestatyn
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Sand Dunes, Ffrith Beach
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Prestatyn Beach Nourisement
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Barkby Beach—Splash Point Phase 3
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Barkby Beach—Emergency Works
Rhuddlan Borough Council	Ffrith Beach Phase 2
South Pembrokeshire District Council	Front Street, Pembroke Dock
South Pembrokeshire District Council	North Cliff, Tenby Stage II
South Pembrokeshire District Council	Wisemans Bridge Phase I
South Pembrokeshire District Council	Laston House, Tenby
South Pembrokeshire District Council	Saundersfoot Harbour South Wall
South Pembrokeshire District Council	Iron Bar Sands, Tenby
South Pembrokeshire District Council	Paragon and Sluice Tenby

Authority	Scheme
South Pembrokeshire District Council	Castle Beach Slipway, Tenby
Vale of Glamorgan District Council	Cliff Walk, Penarth, Phase I
Vale of Glamorgan District Council	Cliff Walk, Penarth, Phase II
Vale of Glamorgan District Council	Groynes at Penarth Head
Vale of Glamorgan District Council	Penarth Promenade
Ynys Môn-Isle of Anglesey District Council	Sea Wall Holy Island
Ynys Môn-Isle of Anglesey District Council	Trearddior Bay Sea Wall
Ynys Môn-Isle of Anglesey District Council	Beaumaris Sea Wall
Ynys Môn-Isle of Anglesey District Council	Gallowspoint Beaumaris
Ynys Môn-Isle of Anglesey District Council	Lleiniog, Penmaen

The Arts

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which matters of art in Wales fall under his responsibilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Primary responsibility for arts matters in Wales rests with the Welsh Arts Council. However my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has responsibility for aspects of the visual arts and general museums matters, together with sponsorship responsibility for the National Museum of Wales.

Japanese Investment

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what efforts are being made to strengthen Wales's chances of obtaining Japanese investment.

Mr. Peter Walker: Wales continues to be extremely successful in obtaining inward investment from Japan and has secured 19 projects promising over 2,000 jobs in the last two years. A number of measures have been introduced to further improve this excellent performance, including the setting up of a board of experienced business people to advise Welsh Development International; provision of additional staff for Welsh Development International, including two new deputy directors; and strengthening of their Tokyo office. I have myself undertaken two inward investment missions to Japan, the last in September 1989, and I regularly meet executives from Japanese companies. I was also pleased to officially open the new Centre for Japanese Studies, in Cardiff, in November 1989. There are good prospects for further investment from Japan.

Gross National Product

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will take steps to maintain gross national product figures for Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: GDP for Wales and other areas of the United Kingdom is estimated annually. To calculate GNP would necessitate the estimation of net property income from outside Wales which would involve income from external (to Wales) investment and income generated in Wales by non-residents. Little information is available on these elements.

Hill Livestock Allowances

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total value to farmers within less-favoured areas in Wales of the hill livestock compensatory allowance.

Mr. Peter Walker: Farmers in the less-favoured areas in Wales received £30·9 million in hill livestock compensatory allowances in 1988-89.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the future levels of hill livestock compensatory allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received representations about HLCA rates from both the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales. This matter has also been raised with me by several hon. Members in correspondence and questions in the House.

General Practitioners

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of general practitioner practices in Wales; and what proportion of those practices have a computer.

Mr. Grist: The total number of general practitioner practices in Wales is 548; approximately 25 per cent. of those practices have a computer system.

Milk

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether any liquid milk is being imported into Wales from Ireland for either liquid consumption or manufacturing purposes.

Mr. Peter Walker: No liquid milk is currently being imported into Wales from Ireland.

Doctors and Pharmacists

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the steps by which consideration is given to an application to dispense by *(a)* doctors or *(b)* pharmacists in respect of rural areas in Wales, including all the available appeal stages; what changes he plans to make to that procedure for the future; and who will be responsible for each stage in the new procedure.

Mr. Grist: The controls on dispensing in rural areas are governed by the National Health Service (General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1974 (as amended). There are two sets of controls under these regulations for doctors and pharmacists. They are as follows:

Doctors—A doctor may make application to the responsible family practitioner committee (FPC). The FPC refers the matter to the rural dispensing committee (RDC) for determination. The regulations provide for an appeal to the Secretary of State against the decision of the RDC.

Pharmacists—Pharmacists may make an application to the responsible FPC. The FPC refers the matter to the RDC for determination. There is provision for appeal to the Secretary of State. Additionally, following a successful outcome the pharmacist would have to secure admission to the FPC's pharmaceutical list, decisions on which are taken by the pharmacy practices sub-committee (PPSC) of the FPC. Appeals against decisions of a PPSC are considered by an appeal panel appointed by the FPC from a list of people drawn up by the Secretary of State.

So far as arrangements for the future are concerned I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him on 23 January 1990.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy with regard to the creation of a consolidated body to deal with appeals on professional matters in respect of doctors and pharmacists; and whether it is his intention for Welsh appeals to be dealt with through such an England and Wales body.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him on 23 January 1990.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many community health councils in Wales are *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against his proposed restructuring of community health councils in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The consultation period on the proposals for restructuring community health councils in Wales runs until the end of February 1990. Virtually all the councils are yet to respond.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish the responses of each community health council in Wales to his proposals for changing the number and structure of community health councils in Wales.

Mr. Grist: Any council is free to publish its response.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which community health councils in Wales have indicated *(a)* approval and *(b)* disapproval for the National Health Service and Community Care Bill's provisions and the way they will affect Wales.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on Friday 8 December.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to upgrade any trunk roads in Wales during the next five years to dual carriageway standard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Our plans for upgrading trunk roads in Wales to dual carriageway standard in the period to March 1994 are set out in "Roads in Wales—Progress and Plans for the 1990s".

Central European Time

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's policy towards the imposition of central European time in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: A Government Green Paper that considered the options open to the United Kingdom with regard to summer time arrangements, including harmonisation with central European time, was published in June 1989. I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department will be announcing the results in the near future.

Road, Rail and Air Links

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to improve Wales's road, rail and air links with Europe prior to 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Improvements to the road network, including east-west links to Europe, are set out in "Roads in Wales—Progress and Plans for the 1990s". Improvements to rail and air links are commercial matters for the operators concerned.

Community Charge

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales further to his statement of 18 December 1989, if he will now provide further information on the operation of his scheme for community charge transitional relief in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: I am today placing in the Library revised calculations showing the effects of the scheme in Wales in 1990-91. Further calculations will be required for future years.

The calculations show that personal chargepayers in 320 Welsh communities will receive relief in 1990-91. I expect 750,000 chargepayers, more than one in three of all personal chargepayers, to benefit from the scheme. Chargepayers in most valleys communities, and in many rural communities, can expect to see reductions in their charges.

I will be laying regulations implementing the scheme shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Recycling

122. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he intends to take to encourage the use of products manufactured from recycled materials.

Mr. Forth: I have established, under the aegis of my Department's business and the environment unit, an advisory group of more than 40 recycling experts to provide recommendations to Government on how to improve the United Kingdom's recycling performance. Smaller working groups have recently been convened to examine specific materials, and the means of increasing demand for recycled products is one of the critical issues which each group is addressing.

EC Framework Programme

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the EEC framework research programme and Her Majesty's Government's participation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 1987-1991 EC framework programme for research and development has funding of 5·4 billion ecus (£3·6 billion). At the Research Council of Ministers on 15 December 1989 where I represented Her Majesty's Government the Council reached unanimous agreement on a new framework programme for 1990-1994 with funding of 5·7 billion ecus (£4·2 billion) (I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *318*.). There is, therefore, a two-year overlap between the two programmes. The United Kingdom currently contributes 19 per cent. to Community research and development expenditure.

United Kingdom scientists, research establishments, universities and companies participate in all the specific programmes under the framework programme. Individual projects require participation by organisations from more than one member state and the United Kingdom is typically involved in 50 to 80 per cent. of projects and receives 20 to 25 per cent. of the funding available.

Ferranti

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what study his Department has made of the Coopers and Lybrand report on the Ferranti fraud; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: As I said in reply to the hon.Member's questions about Ferranti in December 1989, the Serious Fraud Office is investigating allegations of fraud concerning the company. It is for the Serious Fraud Office to assess the relevance to its investigation of the Coopers and Lybrand report.

Steel Imports

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* the total tonnage of steel imported into the United Kingdom by British Steel plc during the last year, and any assessment made of the likely tonnage to be imported into the United Kingdom during the current year by British Steel plc.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not available.

Steel Demand (Ravenscraig)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of whether existing steel demand within a 250 mile radius of the Ravenscraig steelworks is sufficient fully to load the plant throughout the year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

Alcohol

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in light of the merger of Bass and Irish Distillers, what plans he has to ensure that the trade in alcoholic beverages does not become a monopoly and to provide safeguards for the interests of consumers.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* In the event of such a merger situation qualifying for investigation under the merger control provisions of the Fair Trading Act it would be examined in the normal way by the Director General of Fair Trading who would advise my right hon. Friend on the competition issues raised and on the question of reference to the MMC. Following the MMC report on the supply of beer, a number of steps have been taken to promote greater competition in the on-licensed trade throughout the United Kingdom. If the hon. Member has any particular concerns about competition in the market for alcoholic beverages he should bring them to the attention of the director general.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement about the extent of the efficiency scrutiny of the Civil Aviation Authority which he announced on 12 December.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The Monopolies and Mergers Commission has been asked to investigate the efficiency and costs of, and service provided by, the Civil Aviation Authority in supplying navigation and air traffic control services. The full extent of the investigation is contained in the reference made on 12 December 1989, a copy of which is in the Library.

1992 and Jobs

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the EEC Commission consulted Her Majesty's Government on its plans to consult political leaders from areas of the United Kingdom at a conference in Brussels on 25 January for the purpose of studying the implications of the report of 1992 and jobs in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Her Majesty's Government were not consulted by the Commission about the meeting on 25 January. We understand that this will not be a conference, but a meeting between Commissioner Millan and several representatives of RETI, an organisation representing traditional industrial areas within the Community. It is not yet known who the representatives will be, or from which member states. We understand that the meeting is at RETI's request, but that it is not specifically to discuss the Commission-Louvain university report. It is not customary for the Commission to consult member states about meetings of this kind.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EEC Commission decided to initiate an inquiry through the Catholic university of Louvain, Belgium, to study the impact of the 1992 measures on jobs in the United Kingdom and elsewhere; if Her Majesty's Government were consulted; and if he will take steps to inquire about the cost to the Commission of this exercise.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* We understand that the Commission decided to initiate this study, commissioned by it from the Catholic university of Louvain, towards the end of 1988. Her Majesty's Government were not consulted. The Commission may undertake its own studies of this kind without consulting member states, and does so regularly. However, proposals for legislative decisions flowing from such studies are of course a matter for member states in the Council of Ministers. No information is available on the cost of this exercise at present.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has been provided with a copy of the inquiry into 1992 and jobs by the EEC Commission; what were the conclusions of the report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The Commission has not formally made available copies of this report, which is not yet ready for publication. The report was obtained by the press without the Commission's consent. The report still has the status of a Commission internal document. The Commission has however made a full copy of the report available to Her Majesty's Government informally. The report is not specifically about the impact of the single market on jobs, but analyses a wide range of socio-economic issues related to the single market in six individual regions—Strathclyde, South Yorkshire, Pays Basque, Wallonia, Nord Pas de Calais and Nord Rhein Westphalen. Its conclusions are complex, and we are still studying them. We shall deposit a copy of the report in the Library of the House as soon as possible.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which areas of Europe were identified in the EEC report on 1992 and jobs as being likely to suffer most.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The full Commission-Louvain university report on the impact of the single market on certain regions was received in the Department only this week. We are still studying its conclusions.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the legislative and administrative changes, and proposals for change to the statutory sick pay scheme since its introduction.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The following legislative and administrative changes have been made to statutory sick pay (SSP) since it was introduced in April 1983:—

April 1984:
Uprating of SSP rates.

March 1985:
Restriction on which days can be treated as qualifying days for SSP.

April 1985:
Uprating of SSP rates;
Introduction of compensation for national insurance contributions employers pay on SSP.

April 1986:
Uprating of SSP rates;
Entitlement to SSP increased from 8 weeks in a tax year to 28 weeks in a period of incapacity for work;
The linking period between two periods of incapacity for work increased from 2 to 8 weeks;
Certain periods of entitlement to SSP with a previous employer to be taken into account by new employer when determining maximum SSP entitlement;
Introduction of Leaver's Statement;
Amendment of SSP Exclusion and Transfer Forms;
Days of entitlement to SSP deemed as days of entitlement to sickness benefit for invalidity benefit purposes;
SSP treated as earnings for Attachment of Earnings Act.

April 1987:
Uprating of SSP rates;
Abolition of middle rate of SSP;
Liability for payment of SSP transferred to Secretary of State where employer bankrupt or defaults;
Minor procedural changes to take account of introduction of Statutory Maternity Pay;

April 1988:
Uprating of SSP rates.

April 1989:
Uprating of SSP rates;
Simplification/Amalgamation of SSP Forms.

The following changes are proposed from April 1990:—

Uprating of SSP rates, including earnings band between rates:
Introduction of self-certificate form for optional use by employees and employers.

Pensioners

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the increase in real terms since 1979 in the income of pensioners who receive all their income from state benefits.

Mr. Scott: Between 1979 and 1986 the average total net income of pensioner tax units who obtained all their income from state benefits rose by 25 per cent. in real terms.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

Benefit Regulations

79. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will seek to repeal regulation 51 of the Housing Benefit (Community Charge Rebates) (Scotland) Regulations 1988 and regulation 52 of the Community Charge Benefits (General) Regulations 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 20 December 1989]:* A de minimis rule of this kind—50p a week for community charge benefit, as for the current system of rate rebates and other housing benefits—is a sensible feature of all the income-related benefit schemes, and we have no plans to repeal it.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Community Workshops

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about his policy for preventing young people from coming into contact with paramilitaries in Belfast whilst unemployed; if he has any plans to delay changes to the funding arrangements for community workshops; and what progress has been made by the Department of Economic Development in preparing for these changes.

Mr. Needham: The Government's social and economic policies are designed to address the problems of the unemployed and include specific education and training schemes, improved access to available employment through job clubs and job markets, the creation of employment through inward investment, setting up and expansion of small businesses, and schemes such as ACE, and encouragement to bona fide local community organisations to become directly involved in improving social and economic conditions in local areas.

The Belfast action teams, operating over a large area of the city, work in partnership with community groups. To encourage groups to make use of the services and facilities provided by the statutory bodies some pump-priming funding is available.

There are no plans to delay the implementation of the new funding arrangements. However, discussions have taken place and will continue with representatives of community workshops to consider whether modifications need to be made to the new funding arrangements to meet their concerns.

Flooding

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will take steps to encourage householders to insure house contents against flooding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is a matter for individual householders to determine in the knowledge that there is no general responsibility on Government to compensate for losses arising from bad weather.

The Housing Executive's policy with regard to household and contents insurance is to encourage its tenants to arrange adequate cover themselves and it emphasises its importance by means of enclosing leaflets with general correspondence.

Medical Research

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to strengthen existing links and priorities in medical research in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement about additional resources for the Province in this field.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The integration of the hospital, community health and primary care services, together with the personal services, in a unified management structure in Northern Ireland gives the Province a considerable advantage in identifying research opportunities in both the clinical and operation fields which reflect its particular needs.

The research programme of the DHSS in Northern Ireland is undertaken principally through three separate organisations whose activities are co-ordinated through common research priorities and an overlap in membership. Central direction and funding of clinical and operation research is secured primarily through the department research group (DRG). This considers research proposals in the context of the Department's priorities, which are selected having regard to national priorities. Secondly, the Department also provides direct funding for a core programme of research undertaken by the recently established health and health care research unit (HHCRU) located in the faculty of medicine of the Queen's university of Belfast. The membership of the unit's programme of work is drawn from the health and social service boards as well as the university medical faculty and the Department. The third element of the Department's research programme is the support of local research undertaken on its behalf by the clinical research awards advisory committee (CRAAC). This committee is made up of senior clinicians with research backgrounds together with departmental, university and board representatives. The committee considers applications for grants for research projects in the clinical field against priorities determined locally.

The Government intend to strengthen existing links with the services through regular discussions with boards on research priorities. These priorities will then provide the content for the commissioning of research by the DRG, HHCRU and CRAAC. This initiative will strengthen existing arrangements for the identification and funding of research projects in both the clinical and operational fields. Currently available resources are considered adequate for the Province in this field.

Cultural Traditions Programme

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funds he has made available under the cultural traditions programme to *(a)* the Ultach Trust and *(b)* the Ulster Society.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* A sum of £7,500 has been paid to the Ultach Trust to assist the trust in developing its future plans. The Ulster Society has been awarded £3,224 to support the publication of "The Ulster Covenant" by Gordon Lucy.

Students

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many students were enrolled at *(a)* St. Mary's teacher training college and *(b)* St. Joseph's teacher training college for the academic years 1987-88 and 1988-89, broken down as far as convenient into full-time, part-time and full-time equivalents;

(2) how many students were enrolled at Queen's university, Belfast, for the academic years 1987-88 and 1988-89, broken down as far as convenient into full-time, part-time and full-time equivalents;

(3) how many students were enrolled at Stranmillis college for the academic years 1987-88 and 1988-89, broken down as far as convenient into full-time, part-time and full-time equivalents;

(4) how many students were enrolled at the university of Ulster, Jordanstown, for the academic years 1987-88 and 1988-89, broken down as far as convenient into full-time, part-time and full-time equivalents;

(5) how many students were enrolled at the university of Ulster/Magee college for the academic years 1987-88 and 1988-89, broken down as far as convenient into full-time, part-time and full-time equivalents;

(6) how many students were enrolled in the university of Ulster, Coleraine, for the academic years 1987-88 and 1988-89 broken down as far as convenient into full-time, part-time and full-time equivalents.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The available information is as follows:

	1987-88			*1988-89*[1]		
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*FTE*[2]	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*FTE*[2]
St. Mary's College[3,4,5]	635	292	n.a.	692	450	n.a.
Stranmillis College[4,5]	636	153	n.a.	663	246	n.a.
The Queen's University of Belfast	7,537	1,696	7,908	7,680	1,690	8,086

	1987-88			1988-89[1]		
	Full-time	Part-time	FTE[2]	Full-time	Part-time	FTE[2]
University of Ulster[6]						
Belfast	560	112	n.a.	624	54	n.a.
Jordanstown	4,485	2,714	n.a.	4,609	2,882	n.a.
Coleraine	2,461	330	n.a.	2,380	331	n.a.
Magee	462	514	n.a.	683	570	n.a.
	7,968	3,670	9,956	8,296	3,837	10,410

[1] Figures for 1988-89 are provisional.
[2] FTE = Full-time equivalent student load. Separate figures cannot be computed for individual campuses on the same basis as the overall university FTE.
[3] St. Joseph's College was amalgamated with St. Mary's College in September 1985.
[4] "Full-time" figures show enrolments on initial teacher training courses, including Post Graduate Certificate of Education.
[5] "Part-time" figures include both award-bearing and non-award-bearing courses.
[6] Figures have been included for each of the four campuses of the University of Ulster.

Museums

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show what sums have been paid by the Government to each museum in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years for which figures are available; of these sums, in each case how much was used to encourage tourism; and what are the projections for the current and the next two financial years.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

	1986-87 £	1987-88 £	1988-89 £
Ulster Museum	2,523,000	2,802,000	2,865,000
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	1,878,500	1,914,000	2,086,000
Ulster American Folk Park	397,000	665,000	631,000

The estimated expenditure figures for the current year and the provisional planning figures for the next two financial years are:

	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £
Ulster Museum	3,338,000	3,394,000	3,633,000
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	2,138,000	2,187,000	2,239,000
Ulster American Folk Park	524,000	534,000	545,000

While the museums are among the attractions most popularly visited in Northern Ireland, resources are not allocated to encourage tourism as such.

Cattle Prices

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to what was the average gross margin for the year 1984 to 1989 in respect of *(a)* fat steers, *(b)* fat heifers and *(c)* beef bulls; and what is his estimate of the average net profit for each said animal in each year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The information requested is not available.

Suckling Calves

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the price of suckling calves in the principal markets for such cattle in Northern Ireland in the months of September, October and November in 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

Average prices (£/head) at auction

	September	October	November
1986	214	230	224
1987	268	302	294
1988	364	361	349
1989	318	337	319

Incentive Allowances

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teachers were employed in March 1988 in each education and library board area; how many teachers in each area were in receipt of an incentive allowance; what percentage this was of the total employed in each area; and how many teachers in receipt of an incentive allowance in each education and library board area held allowances that were *(a)* incentive A, *(b)* incentive B, *(c)* incentive C, *(d)* incentive D and *(e)* incentive E.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

1. Summary
(a) April 1988 (not available for March 1988)

Board area	Total number of full-time teachers in post	Total number of promotion allowances in payment	Percentage
Belfast	3,697	1,252	34
North-Eastern	4,113	1,252	31
Southern	3,832	977	26
South-Eastern	3,356	972	29
Western	3,418	945	28

Board area	Total number of full-time teachers in post	Total number of promotion allowances in payment	Percentage
Total	18,416	5,398	30
(b) March 1989			
Belfast	3,656	1,511	42
North-Eastern	4,122	1,522	37
Southern	3,842	1,353	36
South-Eastern	3,374	1,263	38
Western	3,444	1,222	36
Total	18,438	6,871	38

2. Analysis of Promotion Allowances per Board Area

Allowance type	Total number in payment April 1988	March 1989
a. Belfast		
A	119	349
B	761	755
C	12	63
D	264	238
E	96	106
Total	1,252	1,511
b. North-Eastern		
A	163	412
B	745	766
C	9	24
D	243	232
E	92	88
Total	1,252	1,522
c. Southern		
A	123	464
B	629	647
C	1	26
D	171	155
E	53	61
Total	977	1,353
d. South-Eastern		
A	102	370
B	623	623
C	10	48
D	167	156
E	70	66
Total	972	1,263
e. Western		
A	126	362
B	614	620
C	7	45
D	143	139
E	55	56
Total	945	1,222

Kells Police Station

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) whether the police inquiry team led by Deputy Chief Constable John Stevens has interviewed to date all police officers who served at Kells police station, Co. Antrim, during the period 31 October 1986 to 31 October 1988;

(2) whether the police inquiry team led by Deputy Chief Constable John Stevens has interviewed to date a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who previously served at Kells police station, Co. Antrim, and who was charged in October 1988 with the illegal possession of arms, ammunition, and detonators;

(3) whether the police inquiry team led by Deputy Chief Constable John Stevens has interviewed to date two police officers previously stationed at Kells police station, who resigned from the force between 1 January 1988 and 1 March 1989;

(4) whether the police inquiry team led by Deputy Chief Constable John Stevens has interviewed to date three police officers previously stationed at Kells police station, who were transferred to other duties during the period 1 June 1988 and 1 March 1989.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* These are matters for the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. As court proceedings involving these matters have not been concluded, it would not be appropriate to comment further.

HEALTH

Breast and Cervical Cancer

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the rates of cancer of the breast and cervix in the north-east of England for those aged *(a)* 20 to 25 years, *(b)* 25 to 30 years, *(c)* 30 to 35 years, *(d)* 35 to 40 years, *(e)* 40 to 45 years, *(f)* 45 to 50 years, and *(g)* 50 to 55 years; what were the average rates for the rest of the United Kingdom for the same age groups for each year from 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[pursuant to his reply, 13 December 1989, columns 677-79]:* I regret that incorrect figures were given in the table for the United Kingdom as a whole. An amended table is as follows. The exact information requested could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Newly diagnosed cases of cancer rates (per 100,000 population) for female breast[1] and the cervix uteri[2] by age group for Northern Regional Health Authority, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority, and United Kingdom, 1980-84

Year	Age-group	Northern Regional Health Authority	Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	United Kingdom
Malignant neoplasm of the female breast				
1980	20-24	0·86	1·53	1·12
	25-29	6·72	5·94	6·64
	30-34	27·78	26·78	20·46
	35-39	44·35	41·67	48·70
	40-44	98·10	97·83	96·42

Year	Age-group	Northern Regional Health Authority	Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	United Kingdom
	45-49	151·69	152·37	139·29
	50-54	146·47	123·42	140·28
1981	20-24	1·70	0·75	0·76
	25-29	7·66	9·39	6·69
	30-34	26·57	20·50	20·45
	35-39	64·94	61·36	47·43
	40-44	88·84	114·00	93·06
	45-49	128·00	134·28	133·45
	50-54	113·61	147·06	142·02
1982	20-24	—	0·73	0·51
	25-29	9·63	3·38	5·87
	30-34	24·34	14·47	20·29
	35-39	64·23	45·30	49·44
	40-44	109·20	94·38	95·14
	45-49	144·66	146·79	141·68
	50-54	123·51	140·59	146·58
1983	20-24	1·63	0·71	0·90
	25-29	3·83	6·71	6·17
	30-34	22·12	21·67	21·81
	35-39	38·61	47·35	48·22
	40-44	82·19	96·93	89·75
	45-49	147·64	138·24	130·31
	50-54	120·98	155·31	141·30
1984	20-24	1·60	2·07	1·36
	25-29	10·32	4·90	6·19
	30-34	28·38	27·90	20·47
	35-39	48·71	47·92	46·81
	40-44	71·83	103·68	86·33
	45-49	126·28	141·42	131·76
	50-54	144·47	138·07	141·73
Malignant Neoplasm of the Cervix Uteri				
1980	20-24	1·73	4·60	2·58
	25-29	9·61	7·63	10·65
	30-34	18·82	21·42	16·26
	35-39	26·61	28·41	21·64
	40-44	18·95	26·68	21·04
	45-49	15·73	14·13	19·63
	50-54	28·45	30·13	23·44
1981	20-24	1·70	2·24	2·46
	25-29	9·58	17·08	12·55
	30-34	15·06	23·54	19·40
	35-39	19·48	27·47	19·64
	40-44	20·50	27·00	23·31
	45-49	13·71	27·47	22·46
	50-54	30·01	25·49	22·83
1982	20-24	1·66	2·92	2·31
	25-29	12·52	17·77	10·11
	30-34	15·92	27·33	18·72
	35-39	17·79	28·52	19·94
	40-44	25·29	39·16	24·35
	45-49	20·67	18·35	20·79
	50-54	20·59	17·82	21·07
1983	20-24	0·82	5·66	1·94
	25-29	13·40	22·65	13·79
	30-34	21·15	35·00	20·87
	35-39	18·83	22·47	21·26
	40-44	27·40	27·70	22·93
	45-49	16·15	26·24	18·86
	50-54	23·31	22·04	21·15
1984	20-24	0·80	2·76	1·79
	25-29	10·32	13·88	12·24
	30-34	29·35	32·97	24·34
	35-39	19·30	36·92	25·00
	40-44	19·08	31·98	23·06
	45-49	20·48	31·09	22·64
	50-54	19·19	27·41	22·07

[1] Assigned to an International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 9th revision code 174.
[2] Assigned to the ICD code 180.

Environmental Health Officers

123. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations have taken place, and are taking place, on the status and qualifications of environmental health officers under European Economic Community directives for the inspection of food in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: The Government's policy continues to be one of ensuring as far as is possible and reasonable that EC food directives are negotiated and implemented by reference to the existing system of food inspection in the United Kingdom and the important role that the environmental health officers play in it.

Lead

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline current studies into the pervasiveness of lead in the environment and in diet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

My Department has recently published food surveillance report No. 27 "Lead in Food: Progress Report" which gives details of studies on lead in the diet and the measures taken to reduce exposure. This records the significant drop in lead intake from this source which has occurred over the last decade.

Numerous studies on lead levels in soil, dusts, stream sediments, air and water have also been carried out in recent times together with blood lead level monitoring in children and adults. These environmental programmes have been kept under review by the Department of the Environment steering group on environmental lead monitoring and used to influence and check on the effectiveness of action taken to reduce exposure.

Monitoring of lead in the diet, air and water is continuing and research is being carried out into the contribution made by lead in dust and soil to the total exposure of children to this metal.

Ambulance Service

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to ensure that the police and armed forces have made available to them for immediate use ambulances which are public property.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the event of the 999 service being disrupted within any particular ambulance authority, it is open to the chief constable and local managers jointly to consider the use of NHS ambulances by police crews if, in their view, that would strengthen the contingency arrangements locally and improve the service to the public. Where the armed forces are deployed to assist in the provision of an emergency service, they use their own vehicles, which are adequately equipped and with which they are familiar.

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that ambulances which are the property of local or other public authorities are not used in furtherance of the views of one party in the present dispute within the ambulance service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for local managers after considering all the circumstances to determine what action, if any, should be taken to prevent the use of NHS ambulances for unauthorised purposes.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the budget allocations for community health councils for the current year and on a constant value basis for 1984 and 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The expenses of community health councils are met by and are reported along with the total expenditure of the health authorities concerned. It is for health authorities to decide the level of funding they provide to community health councils and information on the allocations are not routinely collected centrally.

Following are expenditure figures for the years requested derived from the summarised accounts of health authorities in England:

Total expenditure on community health councils

	£000 (cash)	£000 (at 1988-89 prices)
1979-80	4,031	7,590
1984-85	6,341	7,800
1988-89	8,004	8,004

Notes:

1. The figures for 1979-80 and 1984-85 have been expressed at 1988-89 prices by the use of the gross domestic product deflator.
2. The figures for 1988-89 are provisional in that they are as yet subject to audit.

Aging

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many meetings have been held between Ministers and officials from different Government Departments to co-ordinate Government policy on aging and related issues in the last 12 months; and what were the topics discussed at each of these meetings.

Mr. Freeman: Frequent meetings are held between Ministers and officials in the relevant Departments to co-ordinate policies in this area.

Tiludronate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement concerning the use of the drug, Tiludronate as an alternative to hormone replacement therapy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The drug Tiludronate is not licensed in the United Kingdom.

Listeria

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is currently taking to ensure adequate inspection of dairy products for evidence of listeria.

Mr. Freeman: The public health laboratory service is preparing a report following a study of listeria in dairy products. Once this report is available, the Department will consider what, if any, additional measures are required to maintain an adequate inspection level of dairy products.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of *(a)* residential homes for the aged and *(b)* nursing homes which have been opened since the passage of the Registered Homes Act 1984, in the cities of Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Bristol, Newcastle upon Tyne and in the boroughs of Brighton, Eastbourne, Bournemouth, Torquay, Southport and Hastings.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. Residential care homes are registered with local social services authorities and nursing homes with district health authorities. The tables give details of the number of establishments catering for the elderly in the areas to which the hon. Member refers:

Information recorded on form KO36 about institutions[1] registered under section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984

District health authorities	As at 31 December 1985 number of institutions[1] with beds for the elderly[2]	As at 31 March 1988 number of institutions[1] with beds for the elderly[2]
Newcastle	0	1
Leeds Eastern, Leeds Western	9	33
Sheffield	6	14
Brighton	28	48
Eastbourne	37	38
Hastings	36	39
East Dorset	77	82
Bristol	32	50
Torbay	24	32
North, East, South, West and Central Birmingham	11	30
Liverpool	9	26
Southport	36	58
North, Central and South Manchester	5	13

[1] Institutions include private hospitals, nursing homes, mental nursing homes and clinics.

[2] Only including beds intended for those aged 65 years and over requiring long stay nursing care.

Number of registered[1] residential care homes for the elderly

Local Authority	At 31 March: 1985[2]	1988[3]
Liverpool	29	41
Leeds	42	61
Manchester	36	53
Sheffield	15	29
Birmingham	86	127
Avon	180	201
Newcastle	23	24
West Sussex	293	314
East Sussex	366	398
Hampshire	319	409
Devon	516	669
Sefton	99	131

[1] Includes homes exempt from registration under section 1(5)(j) of the Registered Homes Act 1984.

[2] Includes homes which are reported as catering for a mix of clients.

[3] Provisional.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments take place of aged persons before they are placed in either a nursing home or residential care; whether he expects to make changes to these procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The assessment of elderly people for whom residential care is arranged by local authorities is a matter for the authority concerned. At present no assessment is necessary before a person enters a residential or nursing home in the independent sectors, with or without help from income support.

Our White Paper, "Caring for People" proposes that from April 1991 local authority social services departments should carry out an appropriate assessment of individuals' needs for social care, including residential and nursing home care, in collaboration with medical, nursing and other caring agencies as necessary and having regard to the wishes of the individual and his carers, before deciding the appropriate type of care. The National Health Service and Community Care Bill at present before the House would lay a duty on local authorities to carry out such assessments. The preparation of guidance to local authorities on assessment and case management is also in hand.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has about the length of time taken for the registration of residential care homes *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the city of Liverpool, from the time an application is submitted under the Registered Homes Act 1984 until a certificate has been issued.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally.

Welfare Milk

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what savings from the reduction in the value of welfare milk tokens will accrue to his Department in the year 1990-91.

Mr. Freeman: It is estimated that the revised pricing structure for the supply of liquid welfare milk in England will save some £7·5 million in the financial year 1990-91. The entitlement of beneficiaries to welfare milk is not affected by this change.

Independent Inspection Units

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the consultation document on independent inspection units promised in the White Paper "Caring for People" will be published.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A consultation paper amplifying the proposal made in the White Paper that local authorities should set up independent inspection units has been sent to organisations representing local authority, independent sector and user interests today. Their comments have been invited. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Library.

Inspection units will form an integral part of the arrangements for securing and safeguarding the quality of community care services. They will have a special responsibility for supporting and monitoring those who provide residential care, both in local authority homes and in the independent sector. Their establishment will be entirely separate from the line management of local authority homes.

These proposals have already been welcomed. They will put providers of services in the public and independent sectors on the same footing and, through the setting up of local advisory committees, they will involve providers and users in running the system. This should not only foster good will, but increase the effectiveness of the quality control process and public confidence in it.

Cot Deaths

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide details of the incidence of child cot deaths from 1960 to date, indicating the difference between winter and summer months; what information he has on the possibility that cot deaths can be caused by poisonous gases resulting from the growth of fungi in soiled cot mattresses containing PVC; and if he will make a statement on the results of his Department's research into this subject.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 18 December 1989]:* Figures from 1971, the earliest date from which information is available, on numbers of mentions of sudden infant death syndrome on death certificates are provided in the table. Two qualifications need to be made in any assessment of an overall trend. First, the numbers of births in each year need to be taken into account. Secondly, over this period, respiratory disease has diminished as a reported cause of infant death and there has been a corresponding increase in the reporting of sudden infant death.

Details of a theory that gas emitted from the action of fungus on PVC mattresses may be a cause of sudden infant death have been submitted to the Department. A scientific assessment of the evidence is being undertaken by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist.

Number of mentions of sudden infant death syndrome[1] on death certificates for all ages, England and Wales, by year and month of registration, 1971-88

Comparable data for earlier years are not available

Year	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
1971	43	51	54	37	30	50	46	39	58	42	47	27	524
1972	77	78	74	64	73	53	47	47	50	82	73	80	798
1973	93	88	93	63	81	72	49	57	58	93	94	110	951
1974	130	87	101	76	71	54	65	48	46	86	95	106	965
1975	86	90	99	85	68	68	60	53	65	69	102	84	929
1976	104	100	72	83	70	55	42	37	56	88	83	117	907
1977	125	91	89	84	86	59	37	45	48	70	89	114	937
1978	109	106	103	73	82	56	65	50	56	87	86	122	995
1979	138	121	114	103	75	67	56	50	49	87	121	118	1,099
1980	158	127	113	119	91	55	77	65	74	106	120	155	1,260
1981	140	129	152	111	91	81	65	45	56	106	133	195	1,304
1982	194	145	153	100	83	72	75	39	75	109	134	196	1,375
1983	142	175	154	98	116	81	65	55	81	86	154	151	1,358
1984	174	171	172	122	67	86	52	46	68	122	101	104	1,285
1985	166	123	113	132	112	65	70	54	67	120	147	169	1,338

Year	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
1986	174	188	146	138	123	82	79	73	84	106	136	201	1,530
1987	173	169	172	127	89	123	80	68	81	131	149	212	1,574
1988	178	182	177	123	120	116	87	89	97	134	146	180	1,629

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, code 798.0.

Regional Allocations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library *(a)* a paper explaining the seven age band relative costs systems referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *663*, and *(b)* a paper showing why the particular method of adjusting regional allocations for mobility referred to in his reply was selected.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 17 January 1990]:* I have today placed a short note in the Library giving the information requested.

Medicines

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make an announcement about the proposed increase in fees relating to the Medicinal Products for Human Use Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 418); and if he will give the number of current applications waiting to be processed or being processed by the Medicines Control Agency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Comments received during the consultation exercise are being taken into account before the final version of the fees regulations is laid before Parliament. Subject to the usual statutory processes it is intended that these amending regulations will come into effect as soon as possible. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 20 December at columns *334-35*.

The number of applications for new licences awaiting a decision as at 31 December 1989 was:

	Number
Product licences	1,867
Product licences (parallel imports)	991
Manufacturers licences	20
Wholesale dealers licences	34
Non-orthodox practitioner licences	4

Cerebral Palsy

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of children born in England, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available, who have been diagnosed as having cerebral palsy.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Cerebral palsy is not necessarily diagnosed at birth, so information on the number of children born in England each year and diagnosed with this condition is not available centrally.

Expenditure

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for each year since 1974-75 current spending on the hospital and community health services for each National Health Service region and for the special health authorities (i) in cash terms, (ii) adjusted using the gross domestic product deflator, and (iii) adjusted using the National Health Service pay and prices index.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in a table, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The expenditure figures are based on those shown in the summarised accounts of regional and district health authorities and the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals (predecessor authorities for the years prior to 1982-83).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Shotguns

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to the number of complaints he has received during the last six months to the effect that shotguns were taken into the possession of the police without giving a receipt to the owner.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable that no such complaints have been received in Gwent police headquarters.

Begging

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were convicted of a begging or related offence in England and Wales during *(a)* 1987, *(b)* 1988 and *(c)* 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the table. Data for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Persons convicted of begging and sleeping out under the Vagrancy Act 1824 (as amended)
England and Wales

	1987	1988
Begging	440	512
Sleeping out	14	13

Racing

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a decision on whether to establish an inquiry into the financing of racing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are not as yet able to estimate when we shall have completed our consideration of this matter.

Random Breath Tests

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues on the criteria which should govern the instructions issued to police

officers in uniform who stop vehicles at random for the purpose of investigating whether the drivers of the vehicles concerned have alcohol in their bodies in excess of the prescribed limits, where such vehicles have not been involved in moving traffic offences or accidents which give legal grounds for such action.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is for individual chief officers of police to issue instructions to officers under their command. The Government encourage chief officers of police to use their powers to the full in the enforcement of the law relating to drinking and driving. Those powers were set out in the reply my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 5 December 1989 at column *131*.

Hillsborough Disaster

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received Lord Justice Taylor's final report into the Hillsborough disaster; and when he is proposing to publish it.

Mr. Waddington: I received Lord Justice Taylor's final report on 19 January. I hope to publish it on Monday 29 January.

Prisoners

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further developments there have been in his plans to help prisoners maintain contact with their families and friends.

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) announced a number of measures aimed at improving inmates' family ties on 17 March 1989 at column *363*. We are now establishing a pilot scheme to reduce routine censorship in local prisons, category B training prisons and remand centres to a 5 per cent. sample. The pilot scheme will run in Leeds, Maidstone, Norwich and Winchester prisons for three months from 1 February. The proposed reduction of routine censorship will remove the need for restrictions on the number of letters which inmates may send and receive and also enable staff to be redeployed to other duties.

We have also decided to establish a pilot scheme at Her Majesty's prison Manchester to enable remand inmates to use cardphones subject to certain safeguards. This follows the successful introduction of cardphones in open prisons and the present programme, which is well advanced, to instal them in all category C and equivalent establishments. The Manchester pilot scheme should begin in March and, if successful, will be extended to remand inmates held in other local prisons and remand centres. It has also been decided that expenditure on phonecards will no longer count against the limit on the amount of private cash which inmates may spend. I hope that the ability to telephone family and friends will be of particular help in reducing the anxiety and stress experienced by inmates on remand and reduce the incidence of self-harm.

Mr. Andrew Balfour

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the arrest of Mr. Andrew Balfour by special branch officers on 17 August 1989 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act; why he was held for two days at Paddington Green police station before being released on bail and told there is no case to answer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I understand from the Commissioner that Mr. Balfour was arrested under section 14 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 on 17 August 1989 and released the next day. A person arrested under this provision may be detained for up to 48 hours on the authority of the police if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that he is guilty of an offence under the Act, is a person who is or has been concerned with acts of Northern Ireland or international terrorism, or is subject to an exclusion order.

Remand

Sir Charles Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men and women were being held in custody on remand in the United Kingdom *(a)* from year end 1987 to year end 1988 and *(b)* from year end 1988 to year end 1989.

Mr. Mellor: Information for 1987 to 1988 was published in table 1.2 of "Prison Statistics England and Wales 1988" (Cm. 825), a copy of which is in the Library. The readily available figures for 1989 are given in the table:

Remand population in custody: by sex and type of custody, month end figures, 1989, England and Wales

Number of persons

Month end	*Males*				*Females*			
	All	*Untried*	*Convicted unsentenced*	*Police cells*[1]	*All*	*Untried*	*Convicted unsentenced*	*Police cells*[1]
1989								
January	10,512	8,594	1,681	237	494	380	88	26
February	10,357	8,436	1,726	195	476	364	105	7
March	10,294	8,545	1,678	71	476	394	82	—
April	10,151	8,407	1,689	55	469	375	94	—
May	9,926	8,120	1,675	131	476	374	102	—
June	10,014	7,943	1,845	226	480	378	98	4
July	10,036	8,102	1,870	64	476	377	99	—
August	10,242	8,389	1,833	20	474	395	79	—
September	10,098	8,287	1,781	30	468	366	102	—
October	9,989	8,190	1,784	15	482	382	100	—
November	9,520	7,840	1,676	4	444	350	94	—

[1] All were untried prisoners

Prison Service Headquarters

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which midlands city he is proposing to establish the new prison service headquarters which he has recently announced.

Mr. Mellor: Work has now begun to determine where in the midlands the new headquarters location should be. No decision has yet been taken.

Police Vehicles (Fatal Accidents)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1989, the number of persons who have died in accidents involving police vehicles.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Figures collected by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary (which do not include the Metropolitan police) indicate that in 1988 there were 14 civilian fatalities involving a police vehicle while engaged in a pursuit or responding to an emergency. Figures for 1989 are not yet available.

Metropolitan Police Overtime

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the hourly rates for overtime in the Metropolitan police force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The average overtime rates paid to officers, up to and including chief inspectors, in the Metropolitan police are:

	Chief Inspector £	*Inspector* £	*Police Sergeant* £	*Police Constable* £
Time and a third[1]	14·83	13·49	11·33	9·32
Time and a half[2]	16·68	15·18	12·75	10·49
Double time[3]	22·24	20·24	17·00	13·98

[1] This rate is paid to officers before or after completing a normal tour of duty.
[2] This rate is paid to officers who work on a rest day.
[3] This rate is paid to officers who work on a public holiday.

Squatting

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to amend the law on squatting to enable local authorities to take action in the absence of action by the owners of the properties concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Government have no plans to amend the law in this way. The police and local authorities have powers to deal with squatters who commit criminal offences; these may include criminal damage, theft, assault or using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, and powers under the Public Health Act 1936 and Control of Pollution Act 1974 to act against premises which are verminous or prejudicial to health, or give rise to a statutory nuisance or where the occupiers cause a noise nuisance. Additionally, the Criminal Law Act 1977 created certain offences aimed at squatters including failure to leave premises when required to do so by a displaced residential occupier. Otherwise, squatting is an act of trespass, which is a matter for the civil law, and it is for those whose interests are affected by the trespass to consider whether they wish to bring a civil action.

Mr. Malcolm Cairns

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the Director of Public Prosecutions' consideration of the report compiled by the deputy chief constable of Derbyshire in respect of Mr. Malcolm Cairns, the assistant chief constable of Leicestershire, and the author Joseph Wambaugh.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

The report is being considered carefully and as expeditiously as possible.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refreshment Facilities

Ms. Walley: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make available in the Library details of bookings and sponsoring hon. Members for dining rooms booked between 16 January and the summer recess.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is the practice not to divulge information on functions organised in accordance with the banqueting regulations. If the hon. Member has a specific issue in mind she is advised to raise it either with the General Manager of the Refreshment Department or with the Catering Sub-Committee, of which she is a member.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what measures his Department is taking to encourage and promote part-time working for those disabled people unable to work full time;

(2) whether his Department's internal review of employment assistance to disabled adults is examining the possibility of introducing a partial capacity benefit to facilitate part-time working by disabled people unable to work full time.

Mr. Eggar: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced on 10 January, the Government propose to introduce a disability employment credit to make it easier for people with disabilities to take up and remain in work. The new benefit, to be introduced in April 1992, will help people with disabilities whose earning capacity is low, including those who are only able to work part time.

Following publication of the report "Defusing the Demographic Timebomb" my Department is encouraging

employers through a range of media to make more use of flexible working patterns, including part-time working, to obtain suitable employees. The value of part-time working in drawing on the talents of people with disabilities is also stressed in our code of good practice on the employment of disabled people and by the Disablement Advisory Service.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department expects to publish its internal review of employment assistance to disabled adults, commissioned in March 1988.

Mr. Eggar: The review is at an advanced stage. The consultative document which will follow the review will be published as soon as possible.

Mines (Accidents)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many major injuries were suffered by men working underground in mines operated by British Coal in 1978-79 and each succeeding year;

(2) how many major injuries were suffered by men working underground in private licensed mines in 1978-79 and each succeeding year;

(3) how many men were killed in private licensed mines in 1978-79 and each succeeding year;

(4) how many men were killed underground in mines operated by British Coal in 1978-79 and each succeeding year.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The table lists underground fatal and major injuries at all coal mines for the period 1978 to 1987-88.

It is not possible before 1987-88 separately to identify those underground accidents at licensed mines without incurring disproportionate costs.

	Underground fatalities at all coal mines	*Underground major injuries at all coal mines*
1978	46	427
1979	41	375
1980	39	445
1981	26	[2]697
1982	30	770
1983	25	697
1984-85[1]	18	321
1985-86[4]	22	622
1986-87	16	[3]809
1987-88[5]	[7]4	[6]651
	[8]3	

[1] Covering the 15 month period January 1984-March 1985.

[2] The introduction of NADO Regulations 1980 on 1 January 1981 widened the coverage of the serious injury category.

[3] The introduction of RIDDOR Regulations 1985 on 1 April 1986 further widened the major injury categories. Major injury figures from 1981 and 1986-87 are therefore not directly comparable with earlier years.

[4] Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Mines have records of all fatal and major injury accidents for coal mines generally until 1984-85. From 1985-86 these records can be split to show accident figures at British Coal and licensed mines.

[5] Fatal and major accidents underground cannot be separated between British Coal and Licensed Mines before 1987-88.

[6] Cannot be separated between British Coal and Licensed Mines without incurring disproportionate costs.

[7] British Coal.

[8] Licensed mines.

Aids to Employment (Sheffield)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money has been spent within the city of Sheffield on the provision of equipment and resources to disabled people under the aids to employment budget; when the 1989-90 budget was exhausted; how many people have had applications for assistance refused in the past 12 months; and how many are currently awaiting provision of further resources.

Mr. Eggar: Figures are not available for the city of Sheffield alone. The amount spent under the special aids to employment scheme for the Sheffield area (which includes the city, and Rotherham) from 1 April 1989 to date is £46,082·22. The 1989-90 budget is not exhausted and so there are no cases awaiting the provision of further resources. Three people from the Sheffield area had applications under the scheme refused in the past 12 months. Two are ineligible for assistance; in the third case, a solution was not technically possible.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make additional resources available under the aids to employment scheme to facilitate the independence of Mr. John Gallagher of Sheffield.

Mr. Eggar: It is understood that Mr. Gallagher has applied to his local authority for assistance under the blind homeworkers scheme, under which the authority could contribute 25 per cent., and the employment service up to 75 per cent. of the assistance. No application has, however, yet been received by the employment service. If it is, consideration can be given to assisting Mr. Gallagher either under the provisions of the blind homeworkers scheme, or the special aids to employment scheme. Additional resources under the latter are not necessary, as the budget for the scheme is not exhausted.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Kingswood, *Official Report*, 12 January, column *783*, if he will provide similar information on the percentage fall in unemployment correct for the year to December 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The table shows the 20 parliamentary constituencies which have experienced the largest percentage falls in unemployment over the year to December 1989. The figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Percentage change in the number of unemployed over the year to December 1989

Constituency name	*Percentage*
Westmorland and Lonsdale	−42·7
Montgomery	−42·7
South Derbyshire	−38·8
Stoke-on-Trent North	−38·2
North Wiltshire	−38·1
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	−38·0
Harrow West	−37·6
Mid Staffordshire	−37·1
Kincardine and Deeside	−36·3
Old Bexley and Sidcup	−36·3
Clwyd South West	−35·9
Aberdeen South	−35·7
Harrow East	−35·7
Stratford-on-Avon	−35·3
Nuneaton	−35·2
Amber Valley	−34·8
North West Leicestershire	−34·4
North Shropshire	−34·3
South Worcestershire	−34·3
Sutton Coldfield	−34·1

Professional and Executive Recruitment

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, in the light of the privatisation of Professional and Executive Recruitment, if he will dispense with the requirement that before non-EEC candidates for highly specialised job vacancies can be retained, form OW5 has to be completed; and if he will make a statement as to his plans for creating a level playing field for professional and executive recruitment firms.

Mr. Eggar: Prospective employers of overseas nationals requiring work permits have not been required to notify the vacancy to Professional and Executive Recruitment since it was privatised. Employers applying for a work permit will continue to complete a form of application which, where appropriate, will require them to state what efforts have been made (including the use of agencies) to recruit resident labour.

Jobcentres

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he or his predecessor last visited a jobcentre or benefit office; and where that visit took place.

Mr. Howard: My predecessor, Sir Norman Fowler, visited Sutton Coldfield unemployment benefit office on 15 December 1989.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what criterion he will assess the success or failure of a TEC's annual plan.

Mr. Eggar: TECs will need to draw up their plan for the year ahead based on the needs of the community they will serve. They will need to set out and agree ambitious targets for key outputs such as qualifications and jobs gained by trainees. Progress towards these targets will be monitored on a regular basis.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of female part-time workers in Great Britain in April 1989, and in each standard economic region; and what was the proportion of those nationally and in each region whose earnings fell below *(a)* £4·15 per hour, *(b)* £4·30 per hour, *(c)* £3·10 per hour and *(d)* £2·80 per hour.

Mr. Nicholls: There were an estimated 4,301,000 part-time female employees in employment in March 1989. The estimated percentages of part-time adult female employees earning below specified amounts in the new earnings survey sample in April 1989 are given in table 175, part F of the new earnings survey 1989 report. Figures of the percentage earning below £3·10, £4·15 and £4·30 per hour are not available; the nearest available figures are given in table 175 except for the percentages earning below £3 which are provided in the following table:

Percentage of part-time females earning less than £3 per hour

	per cent.
Great Britain	47
South East	34
East Anglia	47
South West	52
West Midlands	53
East Midlands	52
Yorkshire and Humberside	54
North West	49
North	61
Wales	54
Scotland	50

Note: Adult rates of pay; pay not affected by absence.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of male part-time workers in Great Britain in April 1989; and what was the proportion of those workers whose earnings fell below *(a)* £4·15 per hour, *(b)* £4·30 per hour, *(c)* £3·10 per hour and *(d)* £2·80 per hour.

Mr. Nicholls: There were an estimated 901,000 part-time male employees in employment in March 1989. The estimated percentages of adult male part-time employees earning below specified amounts in the new earnings survey sample in April 1989 were:

Hourly earnings less than	*Percentage*
£2·80	38
£3·00	45
£3·20	53
£4·00	70
£4·50	75

Figures of the percentage earning below £3·10, £4·15 and £4·30 per hour are not available; the nearest available figures have been given.

Action Credit Pilot Scheme

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether it is his intention that individuals who participate in the action credit pilot scheme should have the equivalent employee status under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Participants in the action credit pilot scheme have the same rights under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 as other employees.

Linwood Car Plant

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will conduct a survey to ascertain how many men and women who worked for the former car plant in Linwood have contracted a form of asbestos disease; and if he will give the numbers.

Mr. Nicholls: No such survey is proposed as this would be unlikely to provide any useful information at this stage on exposure to asbestos at the Linwood plant.

SCOTLAND

Offences Against Children

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland have been prosecuted during the last five years for committing the offence of *(a)* rape and *(b)* sexual offences against children including incest, having already served a sentence of imprisonment for that offence; and what were the sentences administered.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not available in precisely the form requested. In the period 1984 to 1987, three men successfully prosecuted for rape were recorded as having previously served a prison sentence for this crime. The average custodial sentence for the earlier offence was just over four years and for the second just under nine years. Information which separately identifies sexual offences against children is not held centrally.

Sheriff Officers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of sheriff officers duly approved as of 1 January; and what was the figure on 1 January 1989 and 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of commissions issued by sheriffs principal authorising individuals to act as sheriff officers was 191 on 1 January 1990 and 186 on 1 January 1989. Figures are not available for 1988.

Hospital Readmissions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients in Scotland were, for each year since 1980, readmitted for hospital treatment and suffering from the same or related illness for which they had been previously discharged.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not held centrally.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients were admitted for hospital treatment in Scotland for more than *(a)* three days, *(b)* seven days *(c)* two weeks and *(d)* more than two weeks for each year since 1980.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Number of Inpatient Discharges from Acute General Specialties[1] in Scotland, by length of stay

	4-7 days	*8-14 days*	*More than two weeks*
1980	121,595	108,829	93,517
1981	128,052	112,798	96,088
1982	116,291	102,649	90,300
1983	132,552	112,187	91,519
1984	138,815	112,043	90,852
1985	142,179	111,566	90,500
1986	142,280	109,715	89,287
1987	145,899	108,640	88,423
1988	150,477	108,867	88,653

[1] The following specialties are excluded: Geriatric Long-stay, Young Chronic Sick, Psychiatric Specialties, and Obstetrics.

Water (Lead Levels)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that European requirements concerning lead levels in water are complied with.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish water authorities have already made substantial progress in reducing the levels of lead in their supplies.

The Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 1990, made on 23 January, impose standards relating to the quality of public and private water supplies for the purposes of drinking, washing or cooking. The standard on lead is tighter than that in EC Directive 80/778/EEC (the drinking water directive), and regulation 24 makes provision for securing the elimination, or reduction to a minimum, of the risk that water supplied by the authorities will be contaminated after supply by excessive concentrations of lead and certain other metals.

In addition, districts and islands councils have discretion to give housing repair grants for the replacement of lead plumbing. From 1982-88 inclusive, some 58,000 grants for work which included the replacement of lead plumbing had been made by these councils.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the dates and subjects of meetings of the Council of Ministers that he or members of his ministerial team intend to attend over the coming year; and if he will specify which Minister will attend.

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom delegations to meetings of the various European Councils of Ministers represent all the interests within the Government. Decisions on whether a Scottish Minister should be included in delegations are taken in the light of the business when it is known and of the other commitments of the Minister concerned.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the dates and subjects of meetings of the Council of Ministers that he or members of his ministerial team have attended in the past 10 years; and if he will specify which Minister attended in each case.

Mr. Rifkind: This information is provided in the table:

Date	*Council*	*Minister*
29 January 1980	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
16 June 1980	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
21 July 1980	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
29 September 1980	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
28 October 1980	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
17-18 November 1980	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
15-17 December 1980	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
27 January 1981	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
9-11 February 1981	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
10-11 March 1981	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
27 March 1981	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
29 September 1981	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
27 October 1981	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
15 June 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
28-29 June 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
20-21 July 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
4 October 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
25-26 October 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
8 November 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
29 November 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
21 December 1982	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
25 January 1983	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
20 June 1983	Fisheries Council	Right hon. George Younger, TD MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
30 June-1 July 1983	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
25-26 July 1983	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
3-4 October 1983	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
10-12 October 1983	Special Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
19 October 1983	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
14 December 1983	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
31 January 1984	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
24-25 May 1984	Fisheries Council	Mr. John Mackay MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
10 September 1984	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
4 December 1984	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
19 December 1984	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
6 May 1985	Informal Meeting of Education Ministers	Mr. Allan Stewart MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
27 September 1985	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
4 November 1985	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
16-17 December 1985	Fisheries Council	Lord Gray of Contin, Minister of State
22-23 September 1986	Fisheries Council	Mr. John Mackay MP
5 November 1986	Fisheries Council	Mr. John Mackay MP
3-4 December 1986	Fisheries Council	Mr. John Mackay MP
17-18 December 1986	Fisheries Council	Mr. John Mackay MP

Date	*Council*	*Minister*
5 May 1987	Fisheries Council	Mr. John Mackay MP
29 September 1987	Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
14-15 December 1987	Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
29 February 1988	Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
19-20 October 1988	Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
28 November 1988	Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
9-11 December 1988	Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
12 June 1989	Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
7 December 1989	Informal Fisheries Council	Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State
18-19 December 1989	Fisheries Council	Rt. hon. Malcolm Rifkind QC, MP, Secretary of State for Scotland and Lord Sanderson of Bowden, Minister of State

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the latest estimate of the cost to Scottish local authorities of collection of non-domestic rates in 1989-90 and the cost of the collection of non-domestic rates in 1988-89.

Mr. Rifkind: Local authorities have estimated the cost of collecting non-domestic rates in 1989-90 at £1·6 million. No corresponding figure is available for 1988-89 as returns from authorities for years prior to 1989-90 did not show separately the cost of collecting domestic and non-domestic rates.

Employment Training

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the drop-out rate for employment training in each of the Scottish regions and for Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Lang: In Scotland, at November 1989, 65·4 per cent. of those completing an action plan with a training agent were referred to a training manager. Of the group referred, 93·5 per cent. actually started in employment training. These percentages are not collected on a regional basis.

Takare Plc

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will announce the price to Takare plc of land in Rutherglen which Greater Glasgow health board plans to sell to that company;

(2) if he will publish the full details of the contract, when agreed, between Takare plc and Greater Glasgow health board for the provision of services to the elderly in Rutherglen;

(3) if his Department has approved the contract between Takare plc and Greater Glasgow health board for provision of services to the elderly;

(4) what are the reasons for the delay in making a decision about the contract between Greater Glasgow health board and Takare plc for the provision of services to the elderly in Rutherglen;

(5) when he expects to make a decision on whether to approve the contract between Greater Glasgow health board and Takare plc for the provision of services to the elderly in Rutherglen;

(6) who his Department consulted on the sale of land in Rutherglen by Greater Glasgow health board to Takare plc;

(7) what recommendations his Department has made on the sale of land by Greater Glasgow health board to Takare plc.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No final decision has been taken on the proposed contract between Greater Glasgow health board and Takare plc, which is still subject to negotiation.

Public Land Sales

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rules govern the number of potential buyers required to be involved by a public body selling land in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Land surplus to public sector needs will normally be offered for sale on the open market. Alternatively, if it is in the public interest to do so, the land may be sold off-market, in consultation with the district valuer as to value.

M80

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce the line of the proposed M80 motorway between Stepps and Haggs; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend announced in his statement of May 1989 that the central Scotland motorway schemes were to be a priority of the Scottish Office's roads programme. Construction work started on the M80 Stepps bypass, the adjacent scheme to M80 Stepps-Haggs, in November 1989. Aerial and ground surveys for the M80 Stepps-Haggs scheme have now been completed. Similarly, a key traffic survey has been completed. The final feasibility report can now be expected in spring of this year and it should be possible for a decision on a preferred route to be made shortly thereafter. The present expectation is that draft orders will be published later in the year with a public exhibition being held at that time to explain the proposals in detail.

Disabled Workers

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people on the disabled register for work in Scotland are *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed.

Mr. Lang: There is no such thing as a disabled register for work. Under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts 1944 and 1958, the Department of Employment maintains a disablement register on which disabled people may register. That register does not include a record of the

employment status of those who are on it. In April 1989, the date of the last count, there were 33,909 people on the disablement register in Scotland.

Both employed and unemployed people may register for employment at jobcentres. In doing so they may also choose to indicate that they are disabled. In October 1989, the latest date on which a count was made, 7,024 people with declared disabilities were registered for employment at jobcentres and local authority careers offices in Scotland.

Illegal Dumping

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland have been prosecuted for illegal dumping of rubbish on the roads and highways in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of persons prosecuted under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 for illegal dumping of rubbish is set out in the table. No information is collected on the location of the offence.

Year	*Persons proceeded against*
1984	78
1985	31
1986	29
1987	29
1988	47

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prosecutions have been made against companies that have illegally disposed of chemical or industrial wastes in Scotland in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information in the table relates to company prosecutions for offences included in the Scottish Home and Health Department's classification as offences relating to the control of pollution.

These offences include the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Acts, and the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968.

Year	*Companies proceeded against*
1984	8
1985	11
1986	8
1987	9
1988	20

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to do a survey to assess the extent of damage and costs that illegal dumping is causing to the environment in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have no plans to carry out a formal survey to establish the extent and costs of illegal dumping in Scotland. This is a matter that officials of the hazardous waste inspectorate discuss with local authorities in the course of their periodic visits.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to give extra powers to local authorities to fight illegal dumping of waste and rubbish; and if he will be allocating any new powers to the councils; (2) what plans he has to strengthen the laws against illegal dumping in Scotland's passing places, lay-bys and open spaces.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 contains powers to deter illegal waste dumping, which are to be enforced by district and islands councils. Part II of the Environmental Protection Bill also contains provisions to strengthen the relevant legislative controls.

Inverkip Power Station

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his plans for the Inverkip power station.

Mr. Lang: Inverkip power station is presently owned by the South of Scotland electricity board and ownership will pass to Scottish Power as part of the transfer scheme arrangements for the Scottish industry under the Electricity Act 1989. Decisions on the future use of the station will be for the industry to take in the light of its assessment of the contribution which Inverkip is likely to make to its ability to maintain an efficient, co-ordinated and economical system of electricity supply, taking into account a range of factors including operating costs and the relative prices of fuels.

River Clyde

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the state of the River Clyde regarding pollution; and what assessment he has made of whether *(a)* it is safe to eat fish and shellfish caught in the river at the lowest reaches, *(b)* it is safe to swim in the river at the lower reaches and *(c)* the new sewage outfall at Battery park in Greenock will cause any additional sewage problems in the Firth of Clyde.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The assessment and control of pollution are the responsibility of the river purification authority, the Clyde river purification board. For many years the board, in co-operation with local authorities and industrialists, has actively promoted the improvement of the quality of discharges to the River Clyde throughout its length. The Clyde, like almost every other river in Scotland, has markedly improved in quality in recent years.

The safety of fish and shellfish on sale for human consumption is a matter for the local environmental health authority. I am not aware of any evidence of any problem which has arisen from swimming in the Clyde. The board carries out relevant monitoring of these waters.

The new sewage outfall at Battery park will replace a number of unsatisfactory outfalls with one which meets modern requirements and its completion will greatly improve present conditions.

Waste Disposal Sites

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to allow other waste disposal sites in the Renfrew, West and Inverclyde constituency.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for the provision of waste disposal sites in Scotland rests initially with district and islands councils as waste disposal authorities. My right hon. and learned Friend would

normally become involved only if an application for planning permission, or an appeal against refusal of planning permission, came before him for determination.

Community Charge

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to reform procedure for appeals against entries in the community charge (poll tax) register; and what steps he will take to extend the role of the Scottish Committee of the Council on Tribunals to oversee the conduct of appeals to registration officers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to change the present appeal arrangements. However, discussions are being held with the Scottish Committee of the Council on Tribunals and with Scottish community charges registration officers to establish whether it would be practicable and helpful for the Scottish committee to have a watching brief on the conduct of appeals to registration officers.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to change the procedures for appeal against the decision of community charge registration officers in Scotland along the lines of that to be introduced in England and Wales.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

Sight Tests

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of recorded sight tests carried out in Scotland between *(a)* April 1988 to September 1988, inclusive, *(b)* October 1988 to March 1989, inclusive and *(c)* April 1989 to September 1989, inclusive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The information is set out in the table:

Period	*Number of NHS sight tests*
1 April to 30 September 1988	531,613
1 October 1988 to 31 March 1989	636,997
1 April to 30 September 1989	281,570

Free NHS sight tests were limited to prescribed groups with effect from 1 April 1989. The number of NHS tests carried out between 1 April and 30 September 1989 is not, therefore, directly comparable with NHS figures for earlier periods. The results of a survey on the total number of NHS and private sight tests carried out in Scotland in the first quarter of 1990 compared with earlier periods should be available after Easter.

TRANSPORT

Public Service Vehicles

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make available for public scrutiny data providing actual and comparative percentage figures for each spot check roadside, spot check maintenance facilities and MOT station examination carried out by the inspectors on every public service vehicle company operating in south Wales.

Mr. Atkins: Close monitoring of all PSV operators is maintained in the interests of road safety. Statistics showing the general level of enforcement activity are published in the annual reports of the south Wales traffic commissioner. Where the condition of a particular operator's vehicle gives cause for concern, the frequency of checks on that operator's premises and fleet may be increased. Details of individual checks are treated as a commercially confidential matter.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make available for public scrutiny the safety inspection records of all public service bus and coach operators in the south Wales area.

Mr. Atkins: The Department does not hold copies of records of PSV operators' own safety inspections.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has reached about the possibility of earmarking part of the expenditure accepted for transport supplementary grant for work that will help reduce the number of casualties on local authority roads.

Mr. Atkins: Following discussions with the local authority associations, I have decided that highway authorities in England should be invited to bid for transport supplementary grant for local safety schemes on all their roads—and not just those of more than local importance—from 1991-92 onwards. Authorities will be told what information they need to submit in support of their bids in the next transport policies and programme circular, which will be issued in a few months from now. The amount of each authority's accepted expenditure for local safety schemes will be separately identified at the time of each TSG settlement.

Lorry Trailer Maintenance

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the final report of the task force on lorry trailer maintenance is yet available.

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful to the trailer task force for its useful work on this and am arranging for copies of its final report to be placed in the Library. Well-designed and well-maintained trailer braking systems are important for road safety. Since the task force produced its interim report last July (*Official Report,* 6 July 1989, col. *259*) manufacturers have been adjusting and improving their service brake designs. Advice has been drawn up for operators preparing vehicles for test and discussions are in hand with the industry on a code of lorry maintenance generally.

Following the further work of the task force, we are considering making plating conformity a condition of acceptance of vehicles for test rather than part of the test itself, and also dropping the present secondary brake performance test. We shall be discussing further with the industry the clear identification of responsibilities for maintenance of rented trailers and ways of ensuring that the move to European Commission whole vehicle type approval for trailers contributes to the safety and cost-effectiveness of trailer construction and use.

Railway Investment

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are, in 1989 moneys, the comparable figures for the public investment on the railway systems of *(a)* France, *(b)* West Germany, *(c)* Holland, *(d)* Norway, *(e)* Sweden and *(f)* the United Kingdom for the years 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail's latest forecast for total investment expenditure in 1989-90 is £689 million and its latest plan forecasts investment of £1,052 million, £1,258 million and £1,421 million in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 respectively.

The only information that I have about the other countries is for France and West Germany for 1989. The figures are:

	£ million
France	1,062
West Germany	1,662

The networks in France and Germany are, of course, bigger than that in Britain.

Fishing Boats

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all incidents of collision between fishing boats or their gear and submarines in 1989 and 1988 in United Kingdom waters.

Mr. McLoughlin: The names of United Kingdom (and Isle of Man) fishing vessels reported to the Department as having been involved in incidents or suspected incidents with submarines in 1989 are listed in the table together with the date of the incident. There were no similar incidents reported to the Department in 1988.

Vessel	*Date of incident*
New Dawn	3 January 1989
Lau Ann	22 January 1989
Spes Bona (and Arturus and Strathayre)	27 February 1989
Seagull	31 March 1989
Northern Lights	31 March 1989
Laurel (Isle of Man)	17 April 1989
Huntress	28 June 1989
Scotia	13 November 1989
Sarah Marie	7 December 1989

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of United Kingdom fishing boats lost at sea in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: For 1988 the figure is 22. For 1989 the number is not yet available.

Western Ferries Limited

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of safety arrangements on board vessels operated by Western Ferries Limited; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Marine Accident Investigation Branch is conducting an investigation into this incident to establish the cause of the fire. The investigation is not yet completed.

Cyclists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received from hon. and right hon. Members and members of the public concerning British Rail's policy towards cyclists and rail services; how many of these were from regular cyclists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: In the past year I have received a total of 16 representations from members of the public, either directly or via right hon. or hon. Members, concerning British Rail's policy towards cyclists and rail services. I am unable to say how many were from regular cyclists. I understand that BR's policy is to welcome cyclists and to convey bicycles whenever possible, for an appropriate charge, provided that this will not unduly inconvenience other passengers, or displace other revenue-earning traffic, such as parcels.

Road Accidents

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional protection for car passengers he proposes to make over the next five years to abate accident injuries on British roads.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The Department reviews continually how improved construction standards might achieve casualty reductions, both among vehicle occupants and among those who are hit by vehicles. Any such standards require agreement in the EC. Safer steering wheels and protection against side impact are two areas with considerable potential where we have pressed for early action. More generally, we have sought to focus the attention of the Commission on priorities on vehicle safety through the note, "United Kingdom Priorities for Reducing Road Deaths and Serious Injuries from Improvements to Vehicle Construction Standards", copies of which I am placing in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

17. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to publicise the availability of community charge benefits.

116. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to encourage the maximum possible take-up of community charge benefits.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply given to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) earlier today.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the rate support grant allocations per head of population for each borough and district council in Kent for 1989-90 in descending order of magnitude.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The following is the information requested for the period from 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990:

1989-90	Rate support grant per head £
Gillingham	66·16
Thanet	56·76
Medway	43·45
Canterbury	42·19
Dover	40·50
Dartford	38·20
Gravesham	36·79
Shepway	35·57
Swale	34·83
Tunbridge Wells	34·29
Ashford	31·64
Maidstone	30·96
Sevenoaks	28·76
Tonbridge and Malling	21·66

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state his revised projected community charge per capita for *(a)* Thanet district council and *(b)* Canterbury city council based upon (i) 100 per cent. collection, (ii) 95 per cent. collection and (iii) 90 per cent. collection; and if he will state the rate of inflation and population figures upon which these calculations are based.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The community charge figures requested are as follows:

	Thanet district council	Canterbury district council
(i). Assumed community charge based on 100 per cent. collection	229	222
(ii). Assumed community charge based on 95 per cent. collection	241	234
(iii). Assumed community charge based on 90 per cent. collection	254	247

These figures assume spending figures for the district councils and for Kent county council based on their respective 1989-90 rate income and grant, adjusted for changes in function and uprated by 4·64 per cent. to be consistent with total standard spending for all authorities of £32·8 billion. They are shown after safety net adustments. The calculations are based on the following population figures: Thanet 96,367; Canterbury 95,811.

The published community charge exemplifications make no allowances for losses on collection; but, equally, they do not allow for certain additional offsetting sources of income (such as standard community charges or interest on cash flow, including the advance payment of revenue support grant that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment recently announced).

121. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has issued to responsible individuals who are in receipt of intrusive changes of circumstances forms issued by local community charge registration officers.

Mr. Chope: Every adult individual has a statutory duty to inform the community charges registration officer of any change of circumstances which affects his or her register entry. There is, however, no duty to volunteer such information about any other person. A responsible individual has a duty to provide information about people other than him or herself only in response to a specific request from the registration officer.

104. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of those liable to pay the community charge will be eligible to receive community charge benefits.

Mr. Chope: Nearly one quarter of all community charge payers will be helped by community charge benefit, which can reduce their liability by up to 80 per cent.

88. **Mr. Terry Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the new system of local authority capital controls.

Mr. Chope: The consultation paper "Capital Expenditure and Finance" published in July 1988 resulted in about 400 representations from the local authority associations, individual local authorities, other organisations, hon. Members, councillors, and other companies and individuals. Since then, my right hon. Friend has received further representations about various aspects of the new capital finance system provided for in part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

72. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to provide additional moneys to ease the introduction of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: We are already providing £23·1 billion of external finance for local authorities in England for 1990-91. In addition, there will be £2·2 billion of support for individuals through community charge benefit, income support, and the transitional relief scheme.

69. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the likely average percentage increase in community charge rates for 1991-92 over 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: I have made no such estimate.

60. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to finalise the details of the new system of local authority capital controls.

Mr. Chope: We expect to complete shortly the main regulations implementing the new system. The remaining items will follow within a few weeks.

56. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will produce revised estimates of the likely level of community charge in England and Wales.

110. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will produce a revised estimate of the likely level of community charge in Northumbria.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has made no estimates of the likely level of community charges. Figures placed in the Library on 11 January showed what the community charge could be in English districts if spending were in line with Government assumptions. My right hon. Friend has no plans to revise these figures.

43. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his officials last met the local authority associations to discuss the new system of local authority capital controls.

Mr. Chope: On 1 December 1989.

35. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the criteria to be used for poll tax capping.

Mr. Chope: It would not be right to speculate on any charge-capping scheme we might need to operate in future.

28. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what latest representations he has received over the workings of the poll tax.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend and I continue to receive representations about the administration of the community charge. The aspects most frequently raised recently have been the fairness of the new arrangements, questions about comunity charge benefit, and details of the standard charge.

20. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the cost of administration of the community charge; and what representations he has received on this subject from the Association of District Councils.

Mr. David Hunt: The cost of collecting the community charge, as indicated by an independent study, has been taken into account in the revenue support grant settlement. The Association of District Councils has made a number of representations on these costs.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state in relation to each district and borough council in Kent by what percentage its 1990-91 standard spending assessment represents an increase or decrease from the comparable adjusted figure for the 1989-90 grant-related expenditure assessment.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The figures requested are shown in the table:

1990-91 SSAs—cash changes from adjusted 1989-90 GREs

	1989-90 GRE £ million	*Adjusted 1989-90 GRE £ million*	*1990-91 SSA £ million*	*Cash change (Col 3-Col 2) £ million*	*Cash change (Col 3-Col 2) £/adult*	*Cash change (Col 3-Col 2) per cent.*
Kent						
Ashford	5·266	4·894	6·275	1·381	20	28·2
Canterbury	8·219	8·025	8·839	0·814	8	10·1
Dartford	4·935	4·802	5·321	0·519	8	10·8
Dover	6·387	6·205	7·420	1·216	16	19·6
Gillingham	6·311	6·169	6·954	0·785	11	12·7
Gravesham	5·701	5·523	6·418	0·896	13	16·2
Maidstone	7·382	7·193	9·059	1·867	18	25·9
Rochester upon Medway	10·021	9·532	11·719	2·187	20	22·9
Sevenoaks	5·400	5·144	5·964	0·819	10	15·9
Shepway	6·029	5·855	6·502	0·647	9	11·1
Swale	6·394	6·182	7·663	1·481	17	24·0
Thanet	9·862	9·620	10·242	0·622	6	6·5
Tonbridge and Malling	5·059	4·921	5·830	0·908	12	18·5
Tunbridge Wells	5·548	5·422	6·561	1·139	15	21·0

Development Projects

18. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he will take to expedite the consultative and legal processes necessary before the implementation of major development projects.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In July 1988 we introduced new rules of procedure to speed up planning inquiries into major projects. And we are considering responses to a consultation paper on improving the effectiveness of the planning system generally.

Defective Houses

19. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to offer assistance to those people who purchased houses which since purchase have proved defective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Eligible owners of designated defective properties are entitled to assistance from their local authority under the housing defects legislation.

92. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to provide additional resources for the repair and maintenance of defective houses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The housing investment programme (HIP) allocations for 1990-91, announced by my right hon. Friend on 21 December 1989, took account of the total needs of local authorities for housing expenditure, including the need for expenditure on housing defects. We do not propose to make any additional allocations.

Homelessness

21. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any further proposals to tackle homelessness.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme).

120. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to alleviate homelessness in London and the south-east.

Mr. Chope: Following publication of our review of the homelessness legislation we have made £250 million of extra resources available over the next two years for schemes to tackle homelessness in London and the south-east. My Department has written to all housing associations and local authorities in London and the south-east inviting them to submit schemes to use this money. We want in the first instance to reduce the number

of homeless families councils place in bed and breakfast accommodation. We have asked councils and associations to respond quickly.

113. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional resources he will provide to the Housing Corporation in 1991 to alleviate homelessness.

Mr. Chope: On 20 December my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) announced significant increases in the Housing Corporation's approved development programme. At £1,220·5 million, gross provision in 1990-91 will be nearly 50 per cent. higher than this year's allocation and will rise even further to £1,563 million in 1991-92. These additional resources will be allocated by the Housing Corporation to those areas and individuals in greatest housing need, including, of course, the statutorily homeless.

Included within these figures are allocations of £36 million in 1990-91 and £37 million in 1991-92 which form part of the Government's special homelessness programme announced in November last year. These resources will be used to finance projects in the pressure areas of London and the south-east aimed at making available, quickly, accommodation for the statutorily homeless.

100. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on his response to the Association of London Authorities' proposals for alleviating acute homelessness.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has written to the association, urging it to encourage member authorities to submit bids for a share of the additional £250 million we are making available specifically to reduce homelessness in London and the south-east.

Recycling

22. **Mr. Carttiss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage recycling of waste in Government Departments and in the House.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The recycling of waste is a matter for each Department to arrange in the light of local circumstances and other requirements such as security. We are, through the interdepartmental committee on business and the environment, stressing to colleagues the need to review carefully their waste disposal arrangements in order to maximise the opportunities for recycling.

111. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what levels of waste recycling are achieved by waste disposal authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There is at present no comprehensive record of the levels of waste recycling achieved by waste disposal authorities. However, my Department is about to launch a survey of local authorities which will investigate, among other things, the current extent of recycling activity by local authorities. In addition, under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Bill, which received its Second Reading on 15 January, waste collection authorities will be required to prepare recycling plans to enable their performance in recycling to be assessed and waste disposal authorities should have regard to the desirability of including in any contract for waste disposal terms or conditions designed to maximise the recycling of waste.

99. **Mr. Bright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to encourage local authorities to achieve targets of recycling 50 per cent. of household waste by the year 2000.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Local authorities will be encouraged through the provisions of the Environmental Protection Bill to improve their recycling performance. In particular, waste collection authorities will be given specific powers to facilitate recycling and will be required to prepare detailed recycling plans. Waste disposal authorities will be required to have regard to the desirability of including in any contract for the disposal of waste terms or conditions designed to maximise the recycling of waste, and waste regulation authorities will be required to give priority to recycling when considering disposal options. The provisions in the Bill will be followed up with detailed guidance to local authorities about means of encouraging recycling.

The Government are also supporting specific initiatives involving local authorities such as the recycling city project in Sheffield which is pioneering new methods of collecting and processing recyclables.

63. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the success to date of the recycling city project in Sheffield.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department, together with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment (INCPEN), is funding a three-year research contract to monitor and evaluate the UK2000 recycling city project in Sheffield. A report on the first six months of that research is expected in March. While it is still early to make any conclusive assessment of the success of the project, it is already apparent that important progress has been made by the various industries involved in the provision of facilities to enable the public to recycle their waste and that the response to those facilities has been enthusiastic, with up to three quarters of the people served by the kerbside collection scheme taking an active part.

Rent Arrears

23. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 local authorities in England with the highest rent arrears.

Mr. Chope: Local authority figures for 1988-89 are not yet available. The top 10 authorities with the highest arrears as a percentage of their rent roll in 1987-88 were as follows:

Rank Authority	*Amount*	
	£ million	*percentage*
1. Brent[1]	8·1	47
2. Lambeth	12·6	30
3. Southwark	19·0	29
4. Islington	9·8	27
5. Hackney	8·4	24
6. Haringey	4·1	19
7. Liverpool	11·2	18
8. Waltham Forest	3·1	16

Rank Authority	*Amount*	
	£ million	*percentage*
9. Greenwich	4·8	15
10. Camden	4·7	15

[1]The figure reported by Brent (£16·7 million) included rate arrears, and so on. The figure in the table is a DOE estimate on a pro rata basis (the basis apparently used by Brent in previous years).

Climate Change

24. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will report on the outcome of the Cairo world conference on preparing for climate change.

Mr. Trippier: I participated in the conference and found it stimulating, particularly for the attention it brought to the importance of climate change for developing countries.

Canals

25. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the chairman of the British Waterways Board to discuss future policy for canals.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have met the BWB chairman, Mr. David Ingman, twice since taking up my present office and I plan to visit the BWB later this year.

Business Rates

26. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the introduction of the national non-domestic rating system for businesses.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations from individual businesses and business organisations on aspects of the new uniform business rate in England.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the implications of the uniform business rate for small and large businesses in England and Wales.

Mr. Chope: I have nothing further to add to the answer given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) on 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *330-31*.

76. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, for the Bradford metropolitan district, he will state the average percentage change in rates payable in respect of industrial premises following revaluation and the introduction of the uniform business rate.

Mr. Chope: At the national non-domestic poundage of 34·8p and taking account of the non-domestic revaluation, average rate bills for factories in the metropolitan district of Bradford would fall by 27·3 per cent. compared with 1989-90. However, both reductions and increases in bills will be subject to transitional arrangements. The purpose of these is to give businesses facing higher bills time to adjust and to ensure that the overall yield from business rate remains broadly the same in real terms in 1990-91 as in 1989-90.

74. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received over the implementation of the new business rate.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 13 December, *Official Report*, column *710*.

64. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations were held with representatives of the business community and local authorities on the level of the uniform business rate prior to his recent announcement.

Mr. Chope: Wide consultations have been held with representatives of the business community and local authorities on all aspects of the new uniform business rate. The rate for 1990-91, which my right hon. Friend announced on 20 December, is pitched at the level necessary to meet the Government's commitment that businesses should pay broadly the same in real terms in the first year of the new system as in the last year of the old.

57. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the likely effects upon businesses of the introduction of the unified business rate.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud on 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *330-31*.

41. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the new business rating adjustment.

68. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the impact of the uniform business rate on small businesses in the midlands.

96. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has had from owners of small businesses in relation to his proposals for a national non-domestic rate.

114. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the introduction of the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Members and the hon. and learned Member to the reply given to the hon. Members for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) and for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) on 13 December, *Official Report*, column *710*.

Housing Corporation

27. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has received from the Housing Corporation for new projects since his announcement that the corporation's new-build programme is to be doubled.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In his statement of 20 December *Official Report*, column *327* announcing the doubling of the Housing Corporation's capital programme over the next three years my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) outlined the policy framework against which those funds were to be allocated in 1990-91. Within that framework it is for the Housing Corporation to decide which new projects are funded. I understand that the corporation hopes to have completed this process by the middle of March.

44. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any new proposals concerning the financing of the Housing Corporation.

118. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to increase the funding for the Housing Corporation.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) announced details of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1990-91 on 20 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *327*, and said that the corporation's capital programme was planned to double over the next three years, rising to £1,736 million in 1992-93. I have nothing to add to that statement. Decisions on the level of grant for the administrative costs of the corporation will be announced shortly.

Planning Applications

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account local planning committees and his departmental inspectors are required to pay to local objections to individual planning applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: All relevant views expressed by local objectors should be taken into account in determining planning applications, together with all material considerations.

Nature Conservancy Council

30. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further representations he has received regarding the Government's plans for the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 December 1989 to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), *Official Report*, column *706*. My Department continues to receive representations from interested parties covering a range of views.

Rural Development Commission

31. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Rural Development Commission; what was discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I met the chairman of the Rural Development Commission on 5 December 1989 to discuss the work of the commission.

33. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the numbers of job opportunities created by the assistance of the Rural Development Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The commission estimates that it assisted in the creation or retention of at least 5,000 job opportunities in the financial year 1988-89. Further benefits, as yet not quantifiable, will flow from the additional assistance to rural coalfield areas, including a substantial part of the hon. Member's constituency, announced on 9 January.

Tenants

32. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to issue any guidelines to councils about the availability of independent advice for tenants who may be transferred from the local authority to a new landlord.

117. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any new proposals for ensuring that a full and fair consultation is held with tenants in areas where the council is proposing transfer of housing to another landlord.

Mr. Chope: Local authorities have a statutory obligation, under schedule 3A to the Housing Act 1985, to consult tenants about a proposed disposal of their homes to a new landlord. It is for the local authority concerned to ensure that it provides tenants with sufficient and accurate details of its proposal to enable them to take an informed view about it.

Toxic Waste

34. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the current regulations concerning the importation and transit of toxic waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Department has received representations on a number of aspects of the current regulations on the transfrontier shipment of hazardous waste. The EC directives that are implemented through these regulations are being revised both in the light of operational experience by member states and also to give effect to the Basel convention adopted last year. The Government have made clear their views on the need for strengthening and extending the Community's rules on transfrontier shipment and we are seeking powers in the Environmental Protection Bill to restrict or prohibit the import of any wastes, where this is necessary to prevent risk of pollution or harm to human health.

75. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the amount in tonnes of toxic waste imported for incineration during 1988-89; and how much of this was of polychlorinated biphenyls or of materials contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution estimates that approximately 52,000 tonnes of hazardous waste was imported during 1988-89. It is not possible to identify separately the quantity destined for incineration. Figures for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are available only since the introduction of the transfrontier shipment of hazardous waste regulations in October 1988 and from then until 31 March 1989 some 5,800 tonnes of PCB-contaminated waste was imported for incineration.

55. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now expects the toxic waste held in Wath-upon-Dearne to be removed from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: I have asked officials to pursue the matter further with the United States authorities.

New Homes Environmental Group

36. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of the New Homes Environmental Group; and what was discussed.

Mr. Chope: I have not met representatives from the New Homes Environmental Group although my Department was an observer at their meetings.

Green Belt

37. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for development in London's green belt have been permitted in each year following the abolition of the Greater London council *(a)* by the London boroughs and *(b)* by the county districts; and if he will make a statement.

40. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for the total amount of London's green belt land lost to development in each year following the abolition of the Greater London council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I regret that this information is not available.

Water Privatisation

38. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people purchased shares in the privatised water companies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is not available in the form requested, but the number of original allocatees recorded on the interim register for each company was as follows:

	Numbers
Anglian	274,167
Northumbrian	255,476
North West	244,491
Severn Trent	317,673
Southern	261,704
South West	129,064
Thames	680,816
Welsh	143,099
Wessex	188,541
Yorkshire	210,091
Total	2,705,122

These registers include corporate holdings as well as individuals. The offer also allowed for holdings by individuals in any or all of the 10 companies and therefore holders may appear on more than one register.

77. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many worker shareholders there are in the nine privatised water authorities in England.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A total of 34,208 employees representing 85·55 per cent. of the eligible work force of the nine companies have successfully applied for shares in the companies under free and matching offers. In addition some of the small number of employees not eligible for the free and matching offers will have successfully applied for shares, but exact figures could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

49. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total value of the planned investment programmes of the privatised water and sewage businesses in England and Wales over the next 10 years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total estimated value of the planned investment programmes of the newly privatised water and sewage businesses in England and Wales is £24·6 billion at November 1989 prices.

Bedfordshire County Council (Spending)

39. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from Bedfordshire county council as to its proposed level of spending for the year 1990-91 following his announcement of the revenue support grant; what level of spending he estimates it should keep to; by how much this differs from the proposed level of spending and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has received no information from Bedfordshire county council on its proposed level of spending for 1990-91. Its standard spending assessment for 1990-91 is £277,308,000. This is an appropriate amount consistent with the provision of a standard level of service. However, Bedfordshire's budget for 1990-91 will depend on its own decisions for which it will be accountable to its chargepayers.

Rutland Water (Animal Deaths)

42. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now set up a special inquiry to investigate and report upon all aspects relating to the deaths of dogs and sheep around Rutland Water in September 1988.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not think that it is necessary to set up a special inquiry. The NRA will be compiling a report on its investigations into the causes of the toxic algal growth in 1989 at a number of sites in England, including Rutland Water. This report will address the circumstances surrounding the deaths of animals at Rutland Water.

Inner Cities

45. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures were taken by his Department to encourage the regeneration of inner-city areas in 1989.

Mr. Moynihan: During 1989 my Department continued to develop and implement a comprehensive range of programmes and initiatives directed at inner-city regeneration. Substantial progress was made during the year.

A new urban development corporation was established for Bristol to bring the number of third generation UDCs to four. Private investment committed across all UDC areas passed £7·3 billion.

City grant, introduced in the previous year, began to make a significant impact on the redevelopment of run-down urban areas. By the end of 1989, over 100 capital investment projects had received approval for a total of £85 million grant; these will lead to private investment of £360 million and the creation of 13,500 jobs.

The urban programme continued to support a wide range of projects to strengthen local economies, improve the environment and tackle social problems in deprived urban areas; it is estimated that about £260 million was spent on a total of more than 10,000 projects.

Under the enterprise zone initiative, Sunderland borough council and the Tyne and Wear development corporation were invited to prepare planning schemes for an enterprise zone in Sunderland.

To encourage further the disposal of unused or underused land, new registers of such land, including inner-city sites, were made publicly available by public sector owners on 31 October under codes of practice issued by the Department.

The annual report on the Department's inner-city programmes for 1988-89 will be published shortly.

Housing (Planning)

46. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which organisations have submitted comments on paragraph 3 of annex A of the draft planning policy guidance note on the planning aspects of housing developments issued in October 1989 by his Department.

Mr. Moynihan: We have so far received over 400 responses to the draft guidance note; a substantial number of them comment on the issue of low-cost housing for local needs. The consultation period ended on 5 January, and my officials are currently engaged on an analysis of the responses. When this is complete, I shall write to the hon. Member.

Sports Council

47. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Sports Council; and what topics he proposes to discuss with him.

103. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Sports Council; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Moynihan: I will next meet the chairman of the Sports Council at the Commonwealth games in Auckland. I expect that we will discuss informally a range of current issues relating to sport and recreation—including, I hope, British successes at the games.

Low-cost Housing

48. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to increase the rate of provision of low-cost housing both to buy and for rent in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Over the last two years the Government have announced a series of measures to promote provision of low-cost housing to rent and buy in rural areas. We have more than doubled public funding through the Housing Corporation for new investment by housing associations, so enabling the corporation to increase the targets for rented housing under its special rural programme to 1,500 a year by 1992-93 and identify a rural element within its low-cost home ownership programme. We have also made changes to the planning rules, to permit development of low-cost housing for local needs on sites not previously designated for housing, and introduced a repurchase scheme to ensure that shared ownership housing in rural areas remains available for local people. Taken together, and along with the steps we have taken to free the private rented market, these measures should make a major contribution to increasing the supply of low-cost housing to meet local needs in rural areas.

Clean Air

50. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives from the National Society for Clean Air.

Mr. Trippier: While my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not met representatives of the National Society for Clean Air, my hon. Friend the Minister for Health met representatives when she addressed the society's 90th anniversary celebrations on 15 May last year, when she was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment.

Environmental Protection

51. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what international commitments on environmental protection Her Majesty's Government have entered into since 1987.

Mr. Trippier: Since 1987 the United Kingdom and the other member states have adopted European Community measures on the following:

Directives:

Motorcycle noise
Construction plant noise
Testing new chemicals
Dangerous preparations
Vehicle emissions
Diesel emissions
Pesticide residues
Dangerous substances in water
Large combustion plants
New municipal waste incinerators
Existing municipal waste incinerators
Air Quality—smoke and SO_2
Titanium dioxide

Regulations:

Monitoring of forest damage
Forestry action programme
Trade in endangered species (enforcing CITES)
Ivory imports
Set-aside
CFCs, halons and ozone layer

The United Kingdom has also signed the Sofia protocol to the 1979 convention on long-range transboundary air pollution and the Basel convention on transfrontier movements of hazardous wastes.

52. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent per head of population in 1988-89 on the control of pollution and improvement of the environment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: Statistics are not available in a form that would allow an exact reply to this question. Broad estimates suggest that the UK spends for the purpose of pollution control and environmental improvement a proportion of its GDP comparable to that in other industrial countries.

59. **Mr. Maples:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals on environmental protection his Department is currently urging the European Community to adopt.

Mr. Trippier: The United Kingdom plays a leading and constructive role in shaping European Community policy

for protecting the environment. We are currently urging agreement on a wide range of proposals, including the following:

- A regulation establishing a European Environment Agency to underpin environmental policy with comparable and authoritative information on a Europe-wide basis;
- A directive to protect the habitats of wild fauna and flora which will enable all member states to implement the Berne Convention and which will have added value over and above what can be achieved nationally;
- A directive to consolidate existing directives on exhaust emissions from passenger cars and which will include evaporative emissions;
- A directive to tighten controls over emissions from large diesel vehicle engines, which are responsible for about half the emissions of NOx from road transport and which are the principal source of smoke in cities;
- A resolution that advanced industrialised countries should aim to become self-sufficient in disposing of their wastes so that we may put an end to virtually all transfrontier shipments of wastes;
- A proposal establishing a community-wide scheme of labelling to provide consumers with impartial advice on the environmental characteristics of products and to reinforce incentives for manufacturers to produce goods which are environmentally more benign;
- A directive designed to improve public access to environmental information which will be consistent with the register-based approach used successfully in this country for a number of years;
- The production of an agreed list of substances which are particularly dangerous for the aquatic environment and which require priority action to minimise imputs from all sources;
- A directive establishing a mechanism for up-dating certain existing directives on water quality in the light of technical progress and practical experience.

In addition, we have already persuaded the Community to adopt our ideas for reducing and eliminating chlorofluorocarbons as its position in the current revision of the Montreal protocol. These proposals are the most stringent of any put forward in the negotiations.

Council House Sales

53. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the numbers of council tenants who have exercised the right to buy since 1980.

Mr. Chope: From October 1980 to September 1989 about 900,000 tenants purchased their homes from local authorities and new towns in England under the right-to-buy legislation.

Task Forces

54. **Mr. Andrew Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to co-ordinate the activities of city action teams and inner-city task forces.

Mr. Moynihan: Effective co-ordination of Government action in the larger cities is delivered through the city action teams while the inner-city task forces operate at a more local level based in the heart of inner-city districts. The CATs and task forces work closely together to bring about regeneration in their areas.

On 6 December my hon. Friend the Minister of State announced the formation of a new ministerial team to spearhead and co-ordinate action in inner-cities. Each city action team and inner-city task force now has a Minister to advise and assist it in its vital regeneration work.

Derelict Land Clearance

58. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the provision of additional money for derelict land clearance in the city of Bradford.

Mr. Moynihan: We are currently considering local authority bids for derelict land grant resources and the regional distribution of grant for 1990-91 will be announced shortly.

Carbon Dioxide

61. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current estimate of Britain's carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2005.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy gave to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 13 December 1989 at columns *647-48*.

Drink Cans

62. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to reduce the propensity for discarding metallic beverage containers as litter.

Mr. Trippier: The Environmental Protection Bill contains various measures intended to discourage people from discarding litter in general, including powers for local authorities to impose fixed penalty tickets on litterers and the raising of the maximum fine for littering from £400 to £1,000. The Bill also promotes the recycling of waste by requiring local authorities to prepare recycling plans and to consider recycling as a vital part of their waste management strategy. The industry is also developing new products such as the non-detachable pull-ring which will contribute to reducing the problem of litter.

Affordable Housing

65. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give urgent consideration to extending to London and other cities, the principle of encouraging the provision of affordable housing which already applies to rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Government's policy is to encourage provision of affordable housing in both rural and urban areas. We have recently taken a series of measures to promote the provision of low-cost housing to rent and buy in rural areas; but special priority continues to be given to inner-city areas in distributing resources to both local authorities and housing associations.

86. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider initiating a study into the feasibility of using the planning system in high land value areas to reserve land for affordable housing as a specific land use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The general question of what role the planning system can and should play in helping to secure the provision of affordable housing has been raised in a number of the responses to the draft planning policy

guidance note on housing (PPG3) which we published for consultation last October. I will consider the hon. Member's suggestion in that context.

Houses (Demolition)

66. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new measures he is considering to curb the uncontrolled demolition of unlisted dwelling houses by developers creating sites for redevelopment, outside of conservation areas.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend is considering this and other planning aspects of housing development in the context of responses to the draft revised planning policy guidance note 3 (housing) which was issued for consultation on 4 October.

Sport and Recreation

67. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to implement the recommendations contained in his review group's report on the provision of sport and recreation in the inner cities.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government will be giving careful consideration to the recommendations contained in the report of the review of sport and active recreation provision in the inner cities and to appropriate follow-up action. I very much hope that the other organisations to which recommendations are addressed will take them forward positively.

Estate Action

70. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made under the Estate Action programme in selling run-down council properties to private developers.

Mr. Chope: Good progress. In the four years that the Estate Action programme has been operating 123 schemes have been approved which include planned disposals by councils of some 12,500 dwellings[1] to the private sector.

A research report[2] recently published by the Department of the Environment confirmed that selling run-down council properties to developers for improvement and sale to individual owners was welcomed by both the new occupants and former tenants.

The report endorses the Government's work under the Estate Action programme in promoting such schemes to help local authorities improve the quality of life on run-down estates.

Notes

[1] Excludes dwellings sold under the Right to Buy scheme

[2] 'The Sale of Local Authority Housing to the Private Sector' HMSO £12·50.

90. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to visit an Estate Action scheme.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has not yet done so, but hopes to do so in the future. For my part I visited three Estate Action schemes in Salford last month and look forward to further visits to other schemes.

Children's Play Facilities

71. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to increase the amount of money available for grants for the provision of children's play and recreation facilities in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Primary responsibility for play provision rests with individual local authorities which fund facilities according to their judgments about the need for and level of priority attached to particular projects. The Department allocates money specifically for children's play through the Sports Council which in turn funds the national children's play and recreation unit. The unit is currently supporting a number of demonstration projects which will examine good practice in play provision for children in rural areas. This Department also grant aids the Rural Development Commission, which funds a range of social and community projects, a number of them concerned with children's play and recreation. It is for both the commission and the play unit to decide within their overall budgets the priority given to children's play projects in rural areas.

British Scrap Federation

73. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the president of the British Scrap Federation; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside met the president of the British Scrap Federation on 16 November when he attended its half-yearly dinner. Various matters relating to recycling and the valuable reclamation work undertaken by members of the British Scrap Federation were discussed.

Enterprise Zones

78. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to end rates and uniform business rate holidays for retail properties in enterprise zones.

Mr. Moynihan: Under paragraph 27 of schedule 32 to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and paragraph 19 of schedule 5 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988 the rate exemption will end as each area concerned ceases to be an enterprise zone. My right hon. Friend has no plans to change the position.

Environmental Health Officers

79. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with local authority associations concerning environmental health officers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None, but the work of environmental health officers has been relevant to a number of matters, such as the revenue support grant, which my right hon. Friend, my colleagues and I have discussed with the local authority associations.

Local Authorities (Tendering)

80. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to introduce orders under the Local Government Act 1988 to extend those council activities required to be put out to public tender.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: An order extending the competition requirements of the Local Government Act 1988 to the management of sport and leisure facilities was made on 28 December 1989. There are at present no plans for extending those requirements to other services.

Local Government Finance (Barnsley)

81. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will arrange an early meeting with representatives of Barnsley metropolitan borough council to discuss its allocation of revenue support grant.

Mr. Chope: The then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) met a delegation from Barnsley metropolitan borough council to discuss revenue support grant (RSG) on 29 June 1989. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received no further request from Barnsley for a meeting on RSG, and the House approved the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1990-91 and other reports on the settlement on 18 January 1990. But we are, of course, prepared to meet authorities if they so wish.

Planning

82. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce more effective and progressive public involvement in planning processing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend is satisfied that the existing arrangements safeguard the public interest effectively.

Rented Houses

83. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what requests he has received from the Rural Development Commission to develop more housing for rent in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend's predecessor, and the then Minister for Housing, met Lord Vinson, chairman of the Rural Development Commission, in December 1988, and discussed the need for low-cost housing in rural areas; and the commission's officials have regular discussions with my Department and the Housing Corporation. The commission makes grants to the National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust for its work in helping to establish village-based housing associations. Public expenditure provision for subsidised rented housing in rural areas has increased substantially over the past two years, and the Housing Corporation has established a special rural programme for villages.

Drinking Water

84. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legal action is currently being pursued by the European Commission in respect of drinking water quality; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The European Commission and member states regard the detailed formal correspondence on infraction proceedings as confidential, hence detailed information on infraction proceedings is not freely available. However I understand that, with regard to the drinking water directive, the Commission is at various stages of legal action against virtually all member states, including the United Kingdom.

Environmental Research

85. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much his Department plans to increase expenditure on environmental research between the current year and 1992-93.

Mr. Trippier: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave on 13 December to my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) and for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) *Official Report* column *717*.

Director General of Water Services

87. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the powers available to the Director General of Water Services to protect consumers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Director General of Water Services' powers to protect consumers are set out in the Water Act 1989 supplemented by the water and sewerage undertakers' instruments of appointment. Under section 7 of the Act he must exercise his powers so as to secure that the functions of water and sewerage undertakers are properly carried out and that appointed companies are able to finance the proper carrying out of those functions. Subject to these general duties, he is subject to specific duties to protect consumers, to promote economy and efficiency and to facilitate competition.

Under section 6 of the Act the director general must establish up to 10 customer service committees and must allot each appointed company to one of those committees. It is the director general's intention to establish 10 customer service committees as soon as possible. The committees must keep under review all matters affecting customers' interests, consult and make representations to the companies, investigate those customer complaints within their remit and report to the director general on their activities in each financial year on any matter affecting the interests of customers or as required by the director general.

The director general has a duty to consider any complaint that the customer service committee is unable to resolve and any allegation that a committee is in breach of its duty, to consider any complaint asserting a contravention of any condition of an undertaker's appointment or any other requirement enforceable under section 20 of the Act, which he decides not to refer to the Secretary of State, and to take such steps as he considers appropriate.

The director general is also responsible for administering the regulatory system established under the Act and set out in the companies' instruments of appointment, which provides significant safeguards for consumers in relation to charges for water and sewerage services and to standards of service, and protects consumers from abuse of monopoly power.

The main provisions of the conditions of appointment are:

Limits on increases in charges. These may be adjusted by the director general in certain circumstances and reviewed periodically in the light of the principles set out in section 7 of the Act;

A prohibition on undue discrimination between classes of customers or potential customers so that, for example, domestic and industrial consumers both pay their fair share;

A requirement to submit audited accounts which, among other things, enable the director to protect the customer from cross subsidy between the appointed business and other businesses or companies in the group;

Requirements as to the procedures to be followed before a domestic customer may be disconnected for non-payment of charges and for dealing with leakage with respect to metered domestic customers, and requirements to prepare, submit to the director for approval, and publish code of practice for relations with customers and the customer service committees, for disconnection procedures and for liability for changes in the event of leakage;

A requirement to report performance against specified customer service indicators, to set targets for three key indicators of service—pressure of mains water, interruptions to water supplies and foul water flooding—and to make available to the public information on performance against these indicators. The director may vary the matters on which companies are required to report. Where performance is unsatisfactory he may ask the Secretary of State to make regulations under sections 38 of 68 to the Act to lay down standards of performance enforceable under the Act;

Procedures to ensure that the best value is obtained from the sale of any surplus land and that the customer benefits from the proceeds;

A requirement that the assets needed for the carrying out of the statutory water and sewerage functions remain available to the company, and a requirement to prepare, keep up to date and submit to the director an underground asset management plan to enable him to satisfy himself that the maintenance of long term assets is not being neglected.

The director has wide-ranging information powers under the Act and the instruments of appointment to monitor the performance of companies. Should a company be in breach of its appointment conditions the director general may take enforcement action under section 20 of the Act.

The director general is not responsible for regulating the quality of water supplied to customers or the quality of sewage discharges. Those are matters for other regulatory bodies but the director general has powers to ensure that the charges paid by consumers properly reflect the expenditure required to provide a satisfactory performance standard.

Itinerants

89. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding nuisance caused by itinerants.

Mr. Chope: I receive various letters, from hon. Members and the public, about problems caused by illegally camped itinerant gipsies.

Pharmaceutical Wastes

91. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the continued dumping of pharmaceutical wastes in the North sea.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In common with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is responsible for licensing of the disposal of waste at sea, I have had a number of letters and representations from members of the public about the disposal of liquid industrial wastes. None of the wastes concerned is toxic and nor do they contain more than trace elements of contaminants such as metals. Use of the sea disposal option for this type of waste has been reduced by 50 per cent. since 1980 and is expected to end within a very few years as practicable land-based alternatives become available.

Nuclear Accidents

93. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans there are for monitoring radioactivity after a nuclear accident.

Mr. Trippier: Arrangements for monitoring following an overseas nuclear accident, are set out in the booklet "The National Response Plan and Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET). Phase I". Copies of this booklet have been placed in the Library of the House. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Energy and for Wales, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland are responsible for making arrangements for dealing with accidents at civil nuclear sites in the United Kingdom.

Lead

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures Her Majesty's Government have taken since 1985 to lower the amount of lead in the atmosphere over Britain; and with what results.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The main thrust of the Government's policy has been, and is, to tackle lead in petrol which still accounts for the bulk of lead in air. We reduced the maximum permitted lead content of petrol from 0·40 to 0·15 per litre from 31 December 1985, and have taken a number of steps to encourage the widest possible supply and use of unleaded petrol. In particular the introduction of the differential between the rates of duty on leaded and unleaded petrol has meant that 95-octane unleaded can normally be found some 12p a gallon cheaper than leaded four star.

As a result, airborne lead concentrations have fallen by some 50 per cent. between 1985 and 1988, the latest year for which complete figures are available, and the use of unleaded petrol has risen from 2 per cent. to 28 per cent. of the market within the last year. Vehicle regulations will ensure that uptake continues to rise. Since October 1989 all new models of cars have had to be capable of running on 95-octane unleaded petrol. This requirement will apply to all new cars from October 1990, and from 31 December 1992 all new cars will be fitted with catalysts and will have to use unleaded petrol.

Water Standards

95. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his latest estimates of the capital investment required to meet European Community directives on water standards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh).

Environmental Improvements

97. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources Her Majesty's Government are making available to international organisations and to other countries to assist and encourage environmental improvements.

Mr. Trippier: In the current year the Government expect to give financial assistance to a range of international organisations as follows:

	£
The United Nations Environment Programme	3,000,000
The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change	750,000
The Convention and Protocol for the Protection of the Ozone Layer	83,000
The Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution	72,000
The OECD Chemicals Programme	52,000
The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance	14,000
The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals	41,000
CITES	[1]85,000
The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources	50,000
The European Environmental Bureau	5,000

[1] Approximately.

This is in addition to the general financial contributions by Government to the European Community, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations.

Government assistance to developing countries is provided through the aid programme which has as a central aim the promotion of sustainable development. Environmental issues are addressed in all projects and programmes under the aid programme, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development. On eastern Europe, we are working through the Group of 24 and the 300 million ecu aid fund established by the European Community.

115. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to improve the environment in the towns and villages of southern England.

Mr. Trippier: A sound and up-to-date planning framework is essential if we are to protect and improve the urban and rural environment. We have recently urged county planning authorities to revise and update their structure plans where necessary, and we are encouraging district planning authorities to extend the coverage of local plans. While plans must make adequate provision for necessary development, the decisions they embody about the distribution of new development can and should reflect communities' concerns for the protection of the local environment.

We also issued new draft planning advice last autumn which removes the previous strong presumption in favour of releasing land for housing development; stresses the importance of good design in new housing schemes; and encourages planning authorities to develop policies for the protection of existing residential areas, where their character is threatened by excessive infilling and redevelopment. Such policies should be embodied in local plans.

Acid Rain

98. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effects of acid deposition on trees within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I would refer the hon. and learned Member to the recently published terrestrial effects review group report which has chapters on the effects of air pollutants, including acid deposition, on trees. This report summarises current understanding and draws widely on research programmes funded by the DOE, NERC and Forestry Commission. Copies of the report can be found in the Library of the House.

Pollution Control

101. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the integrated pollution control provisions of the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mr. Trippier: A total of 91 responses were received to the initial consultation paper on integrated pollution control which was published in July 1988. Further documents setting out our proposals for cost recovery charging and public access to information under integrated pollution control drew 53 and 74 responses respectively. The proposals for integrated pollution control, which will place the United Kingdom at the forefront of pollution control within Europe, have been welcomed across a broad spectrum of opinion.

European Environment Agency

102. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to support the selection of a site in the United Kingdom to host the proposed European Environment Agency.

Mr. Trippier: The Secretary of State for the Environment publicly stated his support for the proposed European Environment Agency to be located in Cambridge, and wrote to the European Commission in confirmation on 8 December 1989. Documentation advocating the merits of Cambridge has since been compiled which will shortly be forwarded to the European Council and the Commission.

Tidy Britain Group

105. **Mr. Aspinwall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional resources are being provided by his Department to support the Tidy Britain Group during the current year.

Mr. Trippier: The Department is providing £3 million to support the work of the Tidy Britain Group in 1989-90. The grant was substantially increased over that provided in previous years specifically to finance the development of the group's pilot projects scheme and for preparations for 1990—Tidy Britain Year.

In view of the considerable amount of work generated by Tidy Britain Year and the success of the group's people

and places programme, the grant for 1990-91 has been set at £1·812 million. This is an increase of £1·2 million over the original PES planning figure of £612,000.

Greenhouse Effect

106. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further measures Her Majesty's Government are taking to promote international action to tackle the greenhouse effect.

Mr. Trippier: We actively support the work of the intergovernmental panel on climate change and our contribution to its scientific assessment will be enhanced by the establishment of the new climate change prediction centre. We are leading efforts to gain support for an international framework convention on climate change and hosting the second conference of the parties to the Montreal protocol at which we will press for the strengthening of the protocol to phase out the use and production of CFCs which are important greenhouse gases.

Waste Disposal

107. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made to him regarding provisions in the Environmental Protection Bill to separate local authority responsibilities for the management and regulation of the disposal of waste.

Mr. Trippier: I have received no representations regarding the provisions in the Environmental Protection Bill to separate local authority responsibilities for the management and regulation of the disposal of waste. But the responses to our consultative proposals to separate regulation from operation were generally favourable.

Planning Appeals

108. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of planning appeals in *(a)* Bracknell and *(b)* Windsor and Maidenhead, have been granted during the last 12 months for which figures are available, and the two previous 12-month periods.

Mr. Moynihan: The information requested is given in the table. In each case the figures are those for the 12-month period to 30 November.

Year	*Appeals/ decided*	*Appeals/ allowed*	*Per cent. Appeals/ allowed*
Bracknell			
1986-87	45	18	40·0
1987-88	56	18	31·1
1988-89	58	18	31·0
Windsor and Maidenhead			
1986-87	130	64	49·2
1987-88	131	68	51·9
1988-89	189	64	33·9

English Heritage

109. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much the grant in aid to English Heritage will have increased since 1984-85 by 1991-92.

Mr. Trippier: Grant in aid to English Heritage in 1984-85 was £49·9 million. The provisional allocation for 1991-92 is £79·816 million. In the intervening years English Heritage has taken on additional responsibilities—notably the Greater London Council's historic buildings division and historic house museums—which makes direct comparisons between 1984-85 and 1991-92 misleading. Nevertheless, the figures reflect steady increases in grant in aid and confirm the Government's strong commmitment to assist the preservation and protection of the nation's important heritage assets.

119. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals English Heritage has made to spend the additional resources being made available to it over the next two years.

Mr. Trippier: We have allocated an additional £3 million to English Heritage in 1990-91 and an extra £3·02 million in 1991-92 taking the total grant in aid in each of those two years to £77·977 million and £79·816 million (provisional) respectively.

These substantial increases signal the Government's recognition of the importance of our heritage to the quality of life and the contribution it makes to a healthy tourism industry. They mean that English Heritage will be able to build on its successful record in several different ways. It plans to invest more in the maintenance and presentation of its key historic sites, already a source of significant enjoyment and education for an increasing number of adults and youngsters.

We are particularly pleased that some of the increase is being earmarked for preparatory work on the proposed new visitor centre at Stonehenge. Recent agreement with the Ministry of Defence on an access route to the centre has ended a long period of uncertainty and concern. English Heritage will now be directing its energies wholeheartedly towards the preparation of detailed proposals for visitor facilities worthy of this outstandingly important monument.

Other areas of English Heritage's responsibilities which will benefit from the extra resources include archaeology and the review of lists of historic buildings produced in the early 1970s.

Water Leakages

112. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the leakage levels from the English water distribution system.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The latest information on water losses, which includes water lost by leakage, was published in the prospectus "The Water Share Offers", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Limestone Pavements

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken under the Wildlife and Countryside Act to protect limestone pavements; and what further steps he intends to take.

Mr. Trippier: Under the provisions of section 34 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, county planning authorities may make orders designating land containing limestone pavements and prohibiting the removal or

disturbance of limestone on or in it. To date, 12 orders have been made. The system is working satisfactorily and we have no plans for additional protective measures.

Dolphinaria

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has now received replies from all the dolphinaria operators in the United Kingdom regarding their plans to implement the new standards; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Trippier: One dolphinaria operator has supplied full details of its plans for the implementation of new standards. The Department is awaiting replies from the remainder. A reminder has been sent and we shall continue to press for full responses from all operators. The steering group report on dolphinaria, published in August 1988, and endorsed by Ministers, made it clear that failure to reach the required standards by August 1993 would constitute grounds for revoking an operator's display exemption.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's policy regarding dolphinaria exhibiting single specimens of cetacea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The standards recommended by the departmental steering group set up to review Dr. Klinowska's report on dolphinaria, and endorsed by Ministers in August 1988, state that no single specimen of any species of cetacea may be kept. We would therefore expect any dolphinarium which held a single specimen to take appropriate steps to remedy the situation as soon as practicable.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken to implement the recommendation of the dolphinaria steering group report regarding the provision of guidance on educational criteria for displaying cetacea in captivity.

Mr. Trippier: Several items recommended by the dolphinaria steering group, including the provision of guidance on educational criteria for displaying cetacea, raise scientific and technical questions on which we intend to seek appropriate specialist advice.

Water Act Consents

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many *(a)* consents and *(b)* authorisations have been made subject to any conditions in accordance with section 152(4) or (5) of the Water Act 1989;

(2) how many *(a)* consents and *(b)* authorisations he has made for the disposal of land, or rights or interests in or over any land, in accordance with section 152(3) of the Water Act 1989;

(3) how many requests he has received for his *(a)* consent or *(b)* general authorisation for the disposal of land, or of any interest or right in or over any land, in accordance with section 152(2) of the Water Act 1989;

(4) if he will list the location of all land, or the nature and location of any right or interest in or over any land, which has been subject to a request for consent for disposal in accordance with section 152(2) of the Water Act 1989, specifying which have received his consent or general authorisation under section 152(4), and what if any conditions were attached under section 152(4) and (5);

(5) on how many occasions he has had an opportunity to enter into covenant with a company holding an appointment under chapter I of part II of the Water Act 1989 for the purposes set out in section 152(7) of that Act; how many covenants have been entered into; on how many occasions he has declined to enter such covenants; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Trippier: The Secretary of State has received one application for specific consent to dispose of land, or rights or interests in or over any land, under section 152 of the Water Act 1989. Consent has been given. This permits the sale of two areas of land at Bamford in the Peak District national park by Severn Trent Water. The disposal is subject to condition K of Severn Trent's appointment. The Countryside Commission, after consultation with the Peak Park joint planning board, raised no objection to an unconditional sale. No covenant was therefore required.

The Secretary of State has not entered into any covenants under section 152(7) or declined any recommendation that he should do so.

The Secretary of State has issued two general authorisations under section 152 to each appointed water undertaker which allow disposal of land if certain conditions are satisfied. These concern application of the Crichel Down rules to compulsorily purchased land, and protection for land in national parks, the Broads, areas of outstanding natural beauty, and sites of special scientific interest. In all cases there is a requirement to satisfy condition K of their licences which relates to ring fencing, disposals of land, and changes of use of land. I am placing copies of the authorisations in the Library. No further general authorisations have been requested. Land disposals under the general authorisations do not require the Secretary of State's consent.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to prevent oil pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The primary responsibility for preventing oil pollution at sea lies with the owners and operators of ships, offshore installations, pipelines, refineries and other industries whose operation have the potential for a damaging impact. In the light of improving technology for reducing waste discharges, regulatory standards for these activities are continually under review and, on an international basis, in fora such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in the case of shipping and the Paris Commission for land-based discharges. In the case of preventing damage from oil pollution at sea, the United Kingdom has well tried and tested arrangements co-ordinated by the marine pollution control unit of the Department of Transport. The recent initiative within IMO to develop an oil spill convention will consider how such arrangements can be improved on a worldwide basis.

Public Land

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the rules for sale of public land to private companies.

Mr. Moynihan: Guidance on disposals by Government Departments of land which is surplus to their requirements is given in chapter 32 of "Government Accounting—A guide of Accounting and Financial Procedures for the Use of Government Departments", and in a Treasury letter to accounting officers (DAO 4/88).

Local authorities have a general power under section 123(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to dispose of land. However, subsection (2) of that section requires them to obtain consent from the Secretary of State for the Environment for any proposed disposal at less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable. My Department has from time to time issued advice by circular to local authorities about particular issues relating to land disposals.

EC Water Service Guidelines

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what are the water service guidelines for all member countries laid out by the EEC Commission on new connections for sewerage service;

(2) what EEC guidelines are laid out for member countries' water services in reference to service response time to sewerage problems;

(3) what EEC guidelines are laid out for member countries' water services in reference to sewage flooding;

(4) what guidelines are set out by the EEC Commission for its member nations' water services with reference to customer contact by telephone calls, correspondence and appointments.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am not aware of any such guidelines being issued by the Commission of the European Communities.

Water Services

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what codes of practice are required of member states by the EEC Commission in their treatment and disposal of sewage;

(2) what codes of practice are required of member states by the EEC Commission in their handling of complaints and commendations on their water services;

(3) what standards are required by the EEC Commission of its member nations in their sewage works' control of odours and effluent discharges;

(4) what standards, in terms of summary details and measurements used, are required of member states by the EEC Commission for the availability of raw water in the supply system;

(5) what standards, in terms of summary details and measurements used, are required of member states by the EEC Commission for the water pressure of their water supplies;

(6) what standards, in terms of summary details and measurements used, are required of member states by the EEC Commission for the restoration of clean water after the interruption of that service.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am not aware of any such requirement on member states from the Commission of the European Communities.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the process by which the standards and prices for water services are agreed in each member country of the EEC;

(2) which governmental bodies decide what the water standard will be for each member country of the EEC;

(3) which governmental body within each EEC member country determines water service prices; how these prices are constructed; and if he will give details of pricing policy and price construction on a member country basis.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: These are matters for individual EC member states.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of *(a)* properties and *(b)* population is connected to a clean water supply in each member state of the EEC.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The available information is to be found in table 13c of "Waterfacts '88" published by the Water Authorities Association, a copy of which is in the Library.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what, in terms of bandings and representative national averages, are the unit prices of *(a)* water, *(b)* sewerage and *(c)* trade effluence for all member states of the EEC.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We do not hold such information.

Common Land Forums

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to implement the recommendations of the Common Land Forum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 27 November 1989 to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) at column *89*.

Radon Gas

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he intends to take in response to findings of significant increases in the levels of emission of naturally occurring radon gas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: There have been no findings of significant increases in the levels of emission of naturally occurring radon gas. I announced on 19 January that the Government accept the National Radiological Protection Board's advice on the risks to health associated with exposure to radon, and endorse its recommendation that action should be taken in houses where the radon concentration exceeds 200 bq/cu m. I have arranged for a copy of the National Radiological Protection Board's advice to be placed in the Library.

Politically Restricted Posts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date the contracts of those local government officers regarded as politically restricted under section 2 of the Local Government and Housing Act will incorporate those restrictions prescribed by him under section 1(5) of the Act.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The local authority associations will be consulted about the necessary regulations as soon as possible.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to keep open the option of compulsorily transferring the Property Services Agency's executive, administrative and support staff to the Government-owned company.

Mr Chope *[pursuant to his reply, 22 January 1990, c. 582-83]:* If PSA is incorporated as a Government-owned company it is intended that the staff in it will be transferred under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. The PSA will use its best endeavours, in advance of that incorporation, to find other posts within Government for staff who do not wish to transfer.

Dogs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to ensure that dogs are taken into care prior to any court hearing when an allegation of cruelty is made against a dog owner.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

The court has power to make such an order after an offender has been convicted of cruelty to an animal; but we have no plans to provide for the prior removal of the animal.

New Zealand Flatworms

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the prevalence of flatworms from New Zealand in soil; what assessment he has made of the potential damage to soil the presence of this worm presents; and what action he proposes to take to protect soil fertility.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

Agricultural Departments are aware of the press reports. These worms need damp conditions and are unlikely to survive in well drained agricultural land. They appear to be established in Northern Ireland and there have been sporadic sightings in Scotland over a considerable length of time. The latest recorded sighting in England was in 1965. The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland is studying ways of controlling them.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Brussels Agriculture Council held on 22 and 23 January.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting together with my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), Parliamentary Secretary in this Department.

The Council had a first exchange of views on the Commission's proposals for 1990 farm prices. I emphasised the need for a settlement to redress the unfair burden which the green pound gap lays on the British farmer and to complete the dismantling by 1992 at the latest; to continue and consolidate the process of CAP reform and to take full account of the stabilisers fixed for certain products; to respect budgetary guidelines; to be consistent with the Community's GATT commitments; and urged that greater scope for market forces should be introduced into the CAP, including providing for a reduction in the degree of external protection. Like several other Ministers, I questioned the need for the new non-price support measures proposed by the Commission. The Council will next consider the proposals in more detail at its meeting in February.

On bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), the Council considered a Commission proposal, which would have the effect of banning most United Kingdom exports of live cattle over six months old to other member states. I opposed on the ground that the scientific evidence showed clearly that such restrictions were unnecessary. No decision was reached, but the rules allow the Commission to adopt the proposal as it stands, which it is now expected to do with effect from 1 March. Of some 266,000 live cattle exported from the United Kingdom in 1988, 249,000 (94 per cent.) would still have been able to be exported had the present proposal then been in force. The most important effect of such a ban is likely to be on exports of breeding animals. However, the Commissioner confirmed that authoritative veterinary advice made it clear that there were no grounds for suspecting that beef produced in the United Kingdom posed any risk to public health. He stated that all member states should now act in accordance with this fact and that any measures interfering with trade in beef would be contrary to Community law. The German authorities will now be reflecting on this statement and I hope that they will soon remove their unjustified measures, which are hampering trade.

I urged the Commissioner to bring forward proposals for Community measures to deal with salmonella infection in poultry, so that all eggs produced in the Community can reach the same high health status as those produced in the United Kingdom. He stated that he would produce wide-ranging proposals as soon as possible.

The Council agreed a tranche of emergency food aid for Romania and agreed in principle that further tranches both to Romania and to Poland should be made when the necessary legal formalities have been completed.

Agricultural Products (Trade)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish details of the occasions in each of the last five years when article 36 of the European Communities treaty has been used to ban the trade in agricultural products between member states, indicating in each case the product, the stated reason for the ban and the countries involved.

Mr. Curry: The information requested by the hon. Member is not available. Article 36 of the treaty of Rome provides an exception (applicable in specified circumstances) to the provisions of articles 30-34 of the treaty. It is not in the nature of a statutory power. Consequently, a member state would not expressly cite article 36 in a legislative or administrative measure regulating trade with other member states, even if it considered that the measure was justified under the exception provided by that article.

Dumping Licences

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences for the dumping of materials at sea were issued by his Department in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1989; what materials they were issued for; what quantities were involved; what areas of sea were used; and what organisations or companies received them.

Mr. Curry: Licences are issued in respect of England and Wales. Figures for 1989 are provisional. The information is as follows:

	1988		*1989*	
	Licences Issued	*Licensed Tonnage*	*Licences Issued*	*Licensed Tonnage*
Dredged Spoil	133	61,644,923	141	66,663,150
Liquid Industrial Waste	19	311,411	16	292,968
Solid Industrial Waste	10	5,856,200	10	5,928,917
Sewage Sludge	16	7,503,580	15	8,321,305

Disposal sites are approved by the Ministry for each licence. Licensees are normally harbour and port authorities, dredging operators, operators of sewage treatment works and industrial companies producing waste or their agents.

Details of each licence are available on a public register held by the Ministry.

Animal Feed (Contamination)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each county in England and Wales the number of farms *(a)* currently under restrictions and *(b)* from which restrictions have been lifted following the recent contamination of animal feed.

Mr. Curry: A total of 1668 farms in England and Wales are currently under restriction. To date, 536 farms have been released from all restrictions. The breakdown by county is as follows:

County	*Number of farms currently restricted*	*Number of farms released from all restrictions*
Avon	82	48
Cornwall	246	84
Derbyshire	1	0
Devon	600	169
Dorset	104	10
Dyfed	7	4
Gloucester	192	73
Gwent	66	44
Hampshire	4	2
Herefordshire	43	7
Leicestershire	1	0
Mid Glamorgan	43	8
Oxfordshire	6	1
Powys	2	2
Somerset	150	28
South Glamorgan	31	2
Warwickshire	2	2
West Glamorgan	7	2
Wiltshire	65	48
Worcestershire	16	2

In addition, all dairy farms were released from milk restrictions by 13 December last year and approximately 117,000 individual animals have so far been released under livestock clearance arrangements.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the total loss of milk production to date, by volume and value, arising from restrictions placed on producers following the recent contamination of animal feed.

Mr. Curry: I am not aware of any loss of production, as all the milk from farms under restriction was collected by the Milk Marketing Board. It will not be possible for the board to assess the extent of any loss in sales income until the milk powder and butter have been sold.

Cattle and Cattle Products (Export)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by value and volume the exports of *(a)* live cattle and *(b)* cattle products to each importing country during *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

i. Exports of live cattle

	Quantity (tonnes)	*Value (000 ecu)*
1988		
France	7,025	27,913
Belgium-Luxembourg	70	178
Netherlands	5,451	18,169
Federal Republic of Germany	859	2,453
Italy	353	1,316
Ireland	6,863	12,847
Denmark	76	374
Greece	13	62
Sweden	22	119
Finland	25	274
Austria	2	11
Portugal	624	1,393
Spain	133	370
Soviet Union	61	482
Morocco	58	107
Nigeria	3	18
Uganda	54	121
Zimbabwe	17	56
South Africa	41	336
United States of America	8	104
Canada	5	24
St. Lucia	4	14
Lebanon	1	3
Japan	10	72
Australia	5	68
1989 (January to July)		
France	3,618	15,749
Belgium-Luxembourg	29	59
Netherlands	1,520	6,393
Federal Republic of Germany	378	1,405
Italy	84	201
Ireland	2,912	6,507

	Quantity (tonnes)	Value (000 ecu)
Denmark	36	130
Austria	14	38
Portugal	312	890
Spain	147	469
Soviet Union	8	53
Uganda	27	55
United States of America	4	37
Canada	5	79
St. Lucia	24	61
Peru	10	67
Uruguay	2	23

Source: Eurostat.

11. Exports of cattle products

	1988		1989 (January-July)	
	Quantity (Tonnes)	Value (000 ECU)	Quantity (Tonnes)	Value (000 ECU)
To EC				
Fresh, chilled, beef and veal	74,801	248,892	47,953	173,463
Frozen beef and veal	15,168	56,528	11,535	42,347
Fresh chilled and frozen edible offal	5,744	11,889	4,408	10,423
Meat of bovine animals salted, in brine, dried or smoked	3	29	2	23
Prepared or preserved meat, offal or blood of bovine animals	2,616	7,130	1,412	4,242
Fats of bovine animals[1]	8,127	2,867	6,577	2,279
To Third Countries				
Fresh, chilled, beef and veal	1,263	3,313	552	1,622
Frozen beef and veal	26,212	60,574	14,585	36,388
Fresh chilled and frozen edible offal	632	1,387	341	1,202
Meat of bovine animals salted, in brine, dried or smoked	—	—	1	6
Prepared or preserved meat, offal or blood of bovine animals	538	1,424	324	909
Fats of bovine animals[1]	57	43	936	369

[1] Also includes fats from sheep and goats.
Source: Eurostat.

Detailed raw information, which may include later information for 1989, is contained in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the value of hill livestock compensatory allowance expressed at 1986 prices.

Mr. Curry: The values of the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowance are as follows:

	Rate per head	
	1989 (£)	Equivalent value at 1986 prices (£)
Severely Disadvantaged Area		
Cows	54·50	46·33
Hardy breed ewes	6·75	5·74
Other ewes	4·50	3·83
Disadvantaged Area		
Cows	27·25	23·16
Ewes	2·25	1·91

Algae Poisoning

Mr. Latham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department's veterinary service has in its departmental library a copy of the article on algae poisoning contained in the 1976 edition of "Black's Veterinary Dictionary"; and whether the veterinary service is familiar with its scientific findings.

Mr. Maclean: My Department's veterinary service has in its library a copy of the article on algae poisoning contained in the 1976 edition of "Black's Veterinary Dictionary." It is familiar with its scientific findings and also has knowledge of more recent articles on the subject.

Whitefish Fishery

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department has given any north-east English fishing ports directions as to the number of days that boats engaged in the whitefish fishery should be laid up to ensure distribution of quotas.

Mr. Curry: We are consulting the industry about how to meet our commitment, agreed at the December 1989 Fisheries Council, to reduce United Kingdom fishing for North sea haddock in 1990 by 30 per cent. Our proposals include a number of ideas, among which is the possibility of reducing days at sea. We shall decide what measures to introduce in the light of the industry's views.

Lead Contamination

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to lift the lead contamination restrictions from the Sherrell herd of pedigree-accredited British Friesians at Great Prideaux, Membland, Newton Ferrers, Plymouth, Devon.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry has a scientific programme in hand to assess the rate of decay of lead in the tissues of cattle which received contaminated feed. In the light of this and continuing study of the impact of the contaminated feed, we are looking at all possible ways of easing the restrictions as soon as it is safe to do so without risk to public health or consumer confidence in meat.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how much cod from the United Kingdom cod quota was conceded to Denmark in the negotiations for allocation under the common fisheries policy;

(2) how much cod was traded off to Denmark in order to obtain agreement on United Kingdom cod and haddock quotas within the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Curry: As part of the final overall settlement which enabled the December Council of Fisheries Ministers to reach agreement, the United Kingdom, Germany and France transferred respectively 500 tonnes, 260 tonnes and 240 tonnes of their 1990 North sea cod quotas to Denmark. The outcome of the Council was very satisfactory to the United Kingdom and we secured all our major objectives, including increasing the Commission's proposed TACs for North sea cod and haddock, maintaining relative stability in the allocation of quotas at Greenland, securing recognition of our Hague Preference in relation to North sea haddock and flexibility to fish part of our western mackerel quota in the North sea, as well as the deletion of fishery management proposals that we did not like, maintenance of the minimum mesh size of 100 mm in the cod box in the German Bight, and the introduction of a seasonal control on the take of western horse mackerel.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has formally responded to the report of the Tyrrell committee on research into bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend's response to the report of the Tyrrell committee on research into BSE comprised his written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 9 January (*Official Report*, column *572*).

Equines (Slaughter)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many equines, in weight tonnage, were slaughtered for meat in each of the past three years; how much of this total was accounted for by Southall horse market; how many animals are estimated to have been involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Records of the number of horses slaughtered for meat or sold for slaughter for meat are not available.

Single Market

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether all green currency systems and MCAs will be abolished before the single market is enacted on 1 January 1993.

Mr. Curry: The Council of Ministers and the Commission are agreed that monetary gaps, and therefore MCAs, should be removed by the end of 1992.

Food (Sell-by dates)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce legislation prohibiting the sale of food products which have passed their use-by dates.

Mr. Maclean: I am presently considering this very matter.

Poultry

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the sale of thawed, previously frozen poultry, advertised as fresh; and whether he will introduce legislation to prohibit the practice.

Mr. Maclean: I have received no representations on this matter. The Food Labelling Regulations 1984 already require the name used for poultry meat which has been previously frozen and thawed to include or be accompanied by the words, "previously frozen—do not refreeze". It it also an offence under the Food Act 1984 to apply a false or misleading description to food.

Eggs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has raised at the Council of Ministers the issue of a common health standard for egg production; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend the Minister raised this issue at the meeting of the Agriculture Council on 22-23 January and pressed for Community measures to control salmonella in poultry flocks to be introduced as quickly as possible.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take to prevent the sale of imported eggs in cartons labelled "British Packed".

Mr. Curry: It is a requirement of the EC egg marketing standards regulations that producers and packers who put terms of origin on their egg packs should keep special records. These records have to be made available to the egg marketing inspectorate for any necessary checking and reconciliation.

Aflatoxins

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what system of regular testing for aflatoxins is undertaken on imported foodstuffs; and if he will make a statement on the findings of such tests during 1989.

Mr. Maclean: Port health authorities, which are responsible for controls on imported food under the Imported Food Regulations 1984 are fully aware of the possibilities of aflatoxin contamination and carry out such testing as they consider appropriate to ensure that food is fit to eat. Details are not held centrally. However, in the case of fig consignments, problems in 1988 led my Department to introduce special testing arrangements. Of the 99 containers of figs tested in 1989, seven of fig paste and three of whole dried figs were refused entry because samples contained more than the action level of 10 micrograms of aflatoxins per kilogram of figs.

Hill Farm Support

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to be able to announce the levels of hill farm support for the current year.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 23 January 1990 (*Official Report*, column 641).

Fish Stocks

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has as to what the decline in fish stocks would have been if the recent quota reductions had not been introduced.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The estimates available to Fisheries Ministers, principally from the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas, on the impact of various possible catch levels on the status of stocks show that, for example, had fishing continued at the 1989 level for North sea cod and haddock, there would have been serious and further depletion of the spawning stock biomasses by nearly 40 per cent. for haddock and 15 per cent. for cod. Such serious further depletion of the stocks would have been very damaging to future prospects for fishing. The quotas agreed represented the highest level recommended by ACFM for haddock and a slightly more cautious approach for cod.

Sulphadimidine

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the results for the tests he has carried out on the presence of sulphadimidine in different types of livestock carcases for 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Department has an action level based on advice from the Veterinary Products Committee and endorsed by the Department of Health's Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment. This level incorporates a very significant safety margin. Its purpose is to ensure that if monitored residue levels rise above it, we can take appropriate action even though there may well be no danger to human health. My Department carries out a regular residue sampling programme and in 1989 tests were carried out on 1,142 pig carcases in Great Britain. A total of 94 per cent. of these were below the action level and in the 6 per cent. which were not we carried out follow-up visits to all the farmers concerned to ensure that corrective measures were taken.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what analysis he carried out on livestock carcases for the presence of sulphadimidine; where the samples are taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Kidneys are taken from pigs at randomly selected slaughterhouses and tested for sulphadimidine as part of the residue sampling programme under EC directive 86/469. A thin layer chromatographic procedure is used to screen the samples at the central veterinary laboratory, Weybridge and the level of residues present is determined by high-performance liquid chromatography.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what safe level for the presence of sulphadimidine in tissues of meat products is prescribed by his Department; whether the level was recommended by an advisory committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Our approach is not to rely simply on a "safe level". Instead, we set a maximum residue level, which is very much more stringent. Exceeding this level would not normally represent any danger to human health, but it provides an immediate trigger for follow-up official action. The action level for sulphadimidine is 0·1mg/kg. This level was originally set by the Veterinary Products Committee and has twice been endorsed by the Department of Health's Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT). COT advised that this level offered a considerable safety margin for consumers of products from treated animals.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 25 January 1990

TRANSPORT

Dock Workers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many former registered dock workers have been made redundant on a port-by-port basis since the abolition of the dock labour scheme; how much the Government have contributed to the redundancy payments; how many of these redundancies are because firms went into liquidation and how many through shedding of labour; how many stevedoring firms have gone into liquidation and where; what is his estimate of the cost of further redundancies on both these bases still to come; and if he will make a statement on the liquidations.

Mr. McLoughlin: Total Government expenditure to date on compensation under the Dock Work Act 1989 is £84·5 million, of which £27·7 million relates to employees of firms which became insolvent. I am not able to forecast the numbers of redundancies or any insolvencies during the remaining period of the compensation scheme, but over 90 per cent. of the claims so far received were in the first three months since the scheme started in July. The table shows redundancies in each port.

Port	*Total redundancies*	*Number of employers who became insolvent*	*Resulting redundancies (including in first column)*
Aberdeen	149	2	149
Ardrossan	15	—	—
Ayr	14	—	—
Barry	21	—	—
Bristol	62	—	—
Blyth	32	—	—
Boston	28	—	—
Cardiff	160	—	—
Charlestown	1	—	—
Clyde	108	—	—
Dundee	95	1	95
Falmouth	7	—	—
Fleetwood	44	—	—
Forth	152	—	—
Fowey	44	—	—
Garston	108	1	29
Goole	78	—	—
Grimsby and Immingham	511	3	374
Great Yarmouth	101	1	101
Hull	314	—	—
Ipswich	50	—	—
Kings Lynn	41	—	—
Liverpool	402	1	69
London	748	1	40
Lowestoft	27	—	—
Manchester	116	—	—
Medway	42	—	—
Newport	84	—	—
Par	28	—	—
Penzance	7	—	—
Plymouth	16	—	—
Port Talbot	4	—	—
Seaham	10	—	—
Sharpness	2	—	—
Silloth	1	—	—
Southampton	250	—	—
Sunderland	31	—	—
Swansea	79	—	—
Tees and Hartlepool	252	—	—
Tyne	59	—	—
Weymouth	4	—	—
Wisbech	11	1	11
Workington	10	—	—
	4,318	11	868

Road Maintenance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* body and *(b)* persons are responsible for listing, collating or co-ordinating the proposals and programmes of major road maintenance on main traffic routes in Greater London; what public notification is given of such works; and if he will consider publishing maps at monthly intervals, showing known works and temporary traffic diversions.

Mr. Atkins: The programming and publicity arrangements for road maintenance works are the responsibility of the highway authority concerned. In the case of trunk roads, the Department announces its annual programme of major schemes shortly before the start of each financial year and publishes maps indicating the location and likely timing of schemes. The Department provides details of planned major lane closures likely to involve delays to road users in fortnightly bulletins, which are circulated to the media and others.

Light Dues

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been paid in light dues to the general lighthouse fund in each of the past four years, specifying the amounts paid by the different types of vessels.

Mr. McLoughlin: Light dues income to the general lighthouse fund was £42·34 million in 1985-86, £48·75 million in 1986-87, £56·14 million in 1987-88 and £50·2 million (provisional) in 1988-89. An analysis of dues collected by different types of vessel is only available for 1985-86 and 1988-89.

	1985-86	*1988-89*
Tankers (Oil)	13,308,897	13,743,034
Tankers (Other)	1,585,544	2,781,020
General Cargo	8,449,257	10,493,157
Bulk Carriers	4,733,613	6,103,137
Container Ships	10,529,134	13,466,394
Passenger (including cruise)	549,922	595,784
Ferries	461,715	716,574
Towed	12,052	40,735
Pleasure (over 20 NRT)	2,421	1,003
Yachts (over 20 NRT)	12,153	15,325
Tugs	9,299	7,825
Fishing Vessels	—	447,361
Other	2,842,889	2,717,434

The analyses by vessel type are cash received figures uncorrected for repayments and other accounting adjustments, and therefore differ in total from the total income figures shown above taken from the GLF accounts.

Near Miss

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the near miss involving an RAF Tornado and flight BA 5950 on Friday 19 January.

Mr. McLoughlin: The incident took place at 13.30 hours, approximately five miles west of Barnard Castle, Yorkshire.

The BA5950 was en route from Heathrow to Newcastle at 12,500 ft and was receiving a radar advisory service from Pennine radar at Manchester. No avoiding action was taken and the Tornado aircraft passed 800 ft below the British Airways aircraft.

The circumstances surrounding the incident will be fully investigated by the independent joint air miss working group.

Viking Trader

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the outcome of his inspectors' visit to the Viking Trader at Fleetwood in the week beginning 15 January.

Mr. McLoughlin: A Department of Transport marine surveyor attended the Viking Trader on 19 January to investigate concerns that had been expressed about one of the securing pins holding the bow visor. Temporary securing arrangements were made to the surveyor's satisfaction, and the vessel allowed to sail. It is understood that the visor has now been welded permanently closed.

A1

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why the A1 southbound carriageway was closed on the afternoon of 22 January south of the A605 interchange; what advance warning was given to the radio networks and motorists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The southbound carriageway was closed to deal with a chemical spillage from an overturned heavy goods vehicle. The closure lasted for three hours, during which a diversionary route was set up by the police. Local radio stations were informed.

Methanol

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of whether there will be a market for methanol as a fuel for cars in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* There is no natural market for methanol in the United Kingdom because of its high production costs and the lack of any manufacturing or distribution infrastructure. When substituted for petrol or diesel, methanol's attractive clean burning properties may be offset by problems such as:

the toxic effects of methanol itself;
relatively high tailpipe emissions of formaldehyde;
its low energy density;
its corrosive properties; and
its cold starting difficulties, unless conventional petrol is used as an additive.

These problems will need to be overcome before a significant market for methanol-fuelled vehicles is likely to develop.

Clean Fuel

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to introduce clean fuel technology in the United Kingdom similar to the legislation proposed by President Bush in the United States of America.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The main thrust of President Bush's proposals is to secure further reductions in the emission of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and the oxides of nitrogen in those areas of the United States of America that are failing to meet air quality standards.

Regulation on vehicle emissions in the United Kingdom requires agreement in the European Community, and we have played an active role in developing new standards.

From 1992, three-way catalysts will have to be fitted to virtually all new cars.

ENVIRONMENT

Rent and Rate Arrears (Lambeth)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the present level of *(a)* rent arrears and *(b)* rate arrears owed to Lambeth borough council.

Mr. Chope: The arrears of rent reported by Lambeth borough council on its housing subsidy claim return at the end of March 1989 were £17·5 million.

Local authorities report rate arrears to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and these are published in "Rate Collection Statistics". The latest reported figure for Lambeth shows rate arrears of £33·3 million at the end of March 1986.

Authorities have a statutory duty to make their accounts within six months and to publish them within nine months of the end of the financial year; Lambeth borough council has not yet published accounts for the years 1986-87 to 1988-89. For the latest position on arrears I would therefore refer the hon. Member to the chief executive.

Humberside

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the report from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Wales regarding the possibility of abolishing the county of Humberside.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The commission was directed to carry out the further review of Humberside by the end of January 1990 if possible. Its programme of work is, however, for it to determine with the resources at its disposal, and I understand that the review is not expected to be completed before late spring. I regret that I cannot at present give a firmer forecast.

Dogs

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the registration of dogs during 1989.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave him on Wednesday 13 December 1989 at column *721*.

London Authorities (Accounts)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which London authorities in each of the last complete financial years have been unable to file unqualified audited accounts with his Department.

Mr. Chope: Local authorities are not required to file their statement of accounts with the Department.

Glis glis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions his Department has issued licences to trap glis glis during each of the last five years; under what circumstances and to whom such licences were issued; how many animals were taken; and what conditions he imposed on the handling and disposal of the trapped animals.

Mr. Trippier: Licences to trap glis glis have been issued on two occasions to the seven local authorities within whose boundaries the species occurs. The first licence ran from June 1987 to February 1988 and the current one from March 1989 to February 1991. These licences were issued for the purpose of preserving public health or public safety or preventing serious damage to property. A total of 102 animals were taken under the first licence; figures for the numbers taken in the first year of the second licence will be available shortly. The current licence is subject to specific conditions which were introduced following consultation with the Nature Conservancy Council. One of these obliges the licensee to send a written report to the Secretary of State detailing numbers of animals taken and killed, numbers taken and released elsewhere, if any, numbers taken and disposed of in another manner, to be specified; the type of trap or traps used; the particular circumstances that justified the taking of the animals.

Privately Rented Housing

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the Acts of Parliament since 1960 and their dates of implementation which relate to the operation of the privately rented housing market.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is given in the table. In some cases the commencement date refers only to the relevant part or parts of the Act.

Act	*Commencement Date*
Protection from Eviction Act 1964	17 December 1964
Rent Act 1965	8 December 1965
Rent Act 1968	8 June 1968 (consolidation Act)
Housing Act 1969	25 August 1969
Rent (Control of Increases) Act 1969	1 January 1970
Housing (Finance) Act 1972	10 August 1972
Counter-Inflation Act 1973	22 March 1973
Furnished Lettings (Rent Allowances) Act 1973	29 April 1973
Rent Act 1974	14 August 1974
Housing Rents & Subsidies Act 1975	11 March 1975
Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976	1 January 1977
Protection from Eviction Act 1977	29 August 1977 (consolidation Act)
Rent Act 1977	29 August 1977 (consolidation Act)
Housing Act 1980	28 November 1980
Rent (Amendment) Act 1985	23 May 1985
Housing Act 1988	15 January 1989

Local Government Finance

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the standard spending assessment for Ashfield district council, Nottinghamshire, was arrived at.

Mr. Chope: The standard spending assessment for Ashfield district council was calculated according to formulae set out in the revenue support grant distribution report (England) approved by the House of Commons on 18 January.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice has been given to employers about their responsibility for collecting cash from poll tax defaulters.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* Attachment of earnings is one of the remedies available to a charging authority that has obtained a liability order from a magistrates court in respect of an individual who has failed to pay the community charge. The attachment order served on employers will contain all the information necessary for the correct deductions to be made. Community charge practice note No. 15 contains a model form of attachment order and explanatory notes which a local authority may use in correspondence with individual employers. Employers will be entitled to deduct £1 towards their administrative expenses each time an attachment is made.

County Councils

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to abolish county councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Rateable Values

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the rules by which valuation officers arrive at the rateable value of manufacturing, commercial and retail premises.

Mr. Chope: The principles of rating valuation, which govern assessments made by the valuation officer, are set out in schedule 6 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and are supplemented by a number of regulations and orders made under that schedule. Apart from these provisions, there are no rules for the assessment of any class of property.

OMNIPAC

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will reply to the letter from the Manufacturing, Science and Finance trade union of 12 September 1989 on the subject of OMNIPAC.

Mr. Trippier: I can find no trace of the letter. If the Manufacturing, Science and Finance trade union would be kind enough to send me a further copy of its letter, I will ensure that it receives a reply.

Dangerous Wastes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to revise the controls on dangerous and difficult wastes.

Mr. Trippier: We have today published a consultation paper which reviews the operation of the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980 (SI 1980, No. 1709) and sets out the changes that the Government propose to make to strengthen and improve the controls applied to dangerous and difficult waste.

The proposals made in the consultation paper are complementary to the measures on waste disposal included in the Environmental Protection Bill. However, they are designed to deal with those wastes that are particularly dangerous or difficult to dispose of and for which special provision is required. We have carried out a fundamental review of the 1980 regulations. The starting point of the review was the announcement in December 1985 of our conclusions on the report of the joint review committee. We have subsequently taken account of the proposal for a directive on hazardous waste which the European Commission published in July 1988 to supersede the existing directive on toxic and dangerous waste (78/319/EEC); complementary work on the definition of hazardous waste carried out by the OECD; and the definition of such waste contained in the Basel convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal which the Government signed on 6 October 1989.

The changes proposed in the consultation paper include:

(a) a new, broader definition of special waste. In future, special waste will be defined by reference to eleven characteristic properties and will explicitly include substances which present an immediate, delayed or accumulative risk to the environment as well as those harmful to human health. It will also include clinical waste;

(b) a requirement that before special waste is removed from the producer's premises there must be a contract which ensures its disposal at an appropriately licensed site;

(c) a requirement on disposal authorities to recover a reasonable charge for consignment note forms, including the cost to authorities of administering and monitoring the operation of the consignment note system;

(d) a prohibition on disposers accepting special waste unless they have contracted to do so and have a licence which authorises its disposal. On rejection of a consignment the carrier will be required to return it without undue delay to the person from whom he collected it;

(e) a prohibition on carriers mixing different consignments of special waste and from mixing special waste with non-special waste. Disposers will also be prohibited from mixing special waste with non-special waste except for the purpose of improving safety during disposal or ensuring that it is disposed of without causing danger to public health, serious detriment to local amenities or risk to the environment; and

(f) a requirement on disposal authorities to keep a public register of consignment notes for each licensed site in their area. Safeguards will be provided to prevent the disclosure of information which would prejudice to an unreasonable degree the producer's commercial interests.

The Government are committed to improving standards in waste management and disposal. These proposals are specifically designed to ensure that dangerous and difficult waste is managed and disposed of safely, without endangering human health or harming the environment. I am arranging for copies of the consultation paper to be placed in the Library of the House.

Sellafield

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions during the past 10 years discharges *(a)* to the air and *(b)* to water from the Sellafield nuclear complex have been found to exceed maximum permissible limits; what is the frequency of official inspections; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: During the past 10 years there have been no occasions recorded when radioactive discharges to the air, or to water, from the Sellafield nuclear complex have been found to exceed maximum permissible limits. Other discharges to air are subject to the requirement that the best practicable means are used to prevent emissions and are not subject to maximum permissible limits. Other discharges to water are the responsibility of the National Rivers Authority. Currently HMIP inspectors spend an average of about five man days per month on the Sellafield site.

Turton Report

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will now declassify the Turton report on the Crown Suppliers; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library;

(2) what criteria are used for classifying Government documents; and how these were applied in the case of the Turton report on the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Chope: Government documents are given a security classification if unauthorised disclosure would damage the interests of the nation. The Cabinet Office review team's report of September 1985 on the future of the Crown Suppliers was not classified. It did, however, contain commercially sensitive information and other sensitive material given to the review team in confidence. The trade unions were consulted on the report, excluding only such sensitive material, in December 1985. It is not usual for officials' advice to Ministers to be disclosed. I, therefore, see no reason to change the decision taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) not to publish it more widely; nor do I propose to place a copy in the Library.

Local Government Superannuation Schemes

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis it is now proposed that the cost of pensions increases should be transferred to the local government superannuation funds in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the then Minister for Local Government announced on 24 April 1989 that he proposed, subject to consultation with the relevant local government interests, to transfer the cost of pensions increases to the local government superannuation funds as from 1 April 1990 on the basis that the

present requirement that they should be in a position to meet all foreseeable future liabilities in respect of basic pensions only should be replaced by a provision that they should be able at any point in time to meet three quarters of a combined liability for basic pensions and pensions increases. He estimated that on that basis most local authorities in England and Wales would be able to reduce their overall annual expenditure on superannuation by about £6 per head of adult population.

Local government interests have made representations to the effect that it may be appropriate for the funds to be required to meet a rather higher proportion of their new combined liability at any one time. I have come to the conclusion, however, that a 75 per cent. rate of funding would be entirely prudential, as explained by my right hon. Friend, and would minimise the number of authorities who were required to increase expenditure on superannuation in consequence of the transfer of responsibility for payment of pensions increases to the funds.

I shall, however, keep the level of liabilities that funds are required to be in a position to meet under review, with a view to increasing it in future years as such increases become appropriate.

Bathing Water

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the results of the survey of bathing water quality made in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The results for the survey carried out during the 1989 bathing season showed that 76 per cent. of the 401 identified bathing waters in England and Wales met the mandatory coliform bacteria standards of the EC bathing water directive. This compares with 66 per cent. of the 364 identified bathing waters in 1988.

These figures are encouraging, though some of the improvement is no doubt attributable to the good weather last year. Nevertheless, the results show that we are continuing to make good progress in cleaning up our bathing waters. We have already announced a £1·4 billion capital investment programme over the next 10 years as a result of which we expect over 95 per cent. of our bathing waters to meet the directive's standards by the mid-1990s and to achieve full compliance within 10 years.

The 1989 results for England and Wales are set out in the table in summary form. I shall arrange for a more detailed summary of the results to be placed in the Library, and we shall also be sending the results to the Commission of the European Communities.

Bathing Waters Survey—1989 Results for England and Wales Compliance with Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC): COLIFORM STANDARDS

	Pass	*Fail*	*Total*
Northumbrian Region	20	12	32
Yorkshire Region	18	4	22
Anglian Region	23	5	28
Thames Region	3	0	3
Southern Region	45	20	65
Wessex Region (South Coast)	25	2	27
South West Region	113	19	132
Wessex Region (Bristol Channel)	6	5	11
Welsh Region	40	8	48
North West Region	11	22	33
Totals	304	97	401

Landfill Sites

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will give the location of the landfill sites officially described as poor by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in its evidence to the House of Commons Environment Select Committee inquiry into toxic waste, HC22 1988-89.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The responsibility for enforcing landfill site licences rests with the waste disposal authority. The HMIP monitors the performance of waste disposal authorities, which includes visiting a selection of sites. In view of the historical nature of much of the information, it would be neither fair nor helpful to give the locations of those previously listed as "poor".

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Loans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received from banks on the subject of student loans.

Mr. Jackson: None.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much the establishment of the headquarters of the Student Loans Company in Glasgow will cost the Government.

Mr. Jackson: The terms of the lease required by the Student Loans Company are commercially confidential. If asked to reveal the terms in confidence by the National Audit Office or the Public Accounts Committee, we shall of course do so. The rent payable is within the terms of the departmental minute laid before the House on 22 November.

Teacher Training Places

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teacher training places there will be this autumn; how many applicants there are so far; and what were the comparable figures in previous years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: A total of 23,244 places have been allocated to teacher training institutions in England and Wales for 1990. Equivalent target intake allocations for 1986 to 1989 were 18,613, 19,637, 20,509 and 21,187 respectively.

Data on applications are collected by the Central Register and Clearing House Ltd. and 40,325 applications for teaching places in 1990 were recorded at mid-January. Figures for 1986 to 1989 are not comparable with current figures. They no longer include applications to 19 institutions that now recruit through UCCA. The basis for the collection of data has also changed. However, the figures at mid-January for 1986 to 1989 were 20,839, 22,019, 20,532 and 36,314 respectively.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to change the principles upon which teachers are remunerated; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: No.

Homosexuality

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the Government's current policy with regard to teaching about homosexuality in sex education lessons in schools.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Guidance on teaching about homosexuality in maintained schools in England is provided in the Department's circular 11/87 which was issued to all such schools in England in September 1987. A copy of the circular is in the Library.

School Budgets

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how long schools will have to adapt to their new budgets under the LMS system.

Mrs. Rumbold: Circular 7/88 on LMS provides for the budgets of county and voluntary schools generally to be determined entirely by their LEA's formula by 1 April 1994 where schemes will have been introduced on 1 April 1990. LEAs may propose a longer transitional period for individual schools with particularly high staff costs.

Student Grants

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many OECD member countries provide full cost-of-living student grants and free tuition to all first degree students.

Mr. Jackson: None. The analysis in annex C of the White Paper "Top-up Loans for Students" showed that, by international standards, the British system is generous in the level of the grant after means-testing, in the proportion of higher education students provided for, and in including free tuition. No other country attempts to provide support at this level to such a high proportion of these students.

National Curriculum

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he proposes to take to deal with concern about key stage 4 of the national curriculum.

Mr. MacGregor: I am today inviting the National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council to undertake a number of tasks designed to help secondary schools accommodate the curricular needs of pupils in the last two years of compulsory education. I am also today setting out in a speech to the Society of Education Officers the flexibility which will be available to schools in planning the curriculum in these years. A copy of the speech has been placed in the Library and the texts of the letters are as follows:

Duncan G. Graham, Esq. CBE
Chairman and Chief Executive
National Curriculum Council
15-17 New Street
York YO1 2RA

25 January 1990

Dear Duncan,

In my speech today to the Society of Education Officers I am making a statement of general policy on Key Stage 4 in the National Curriculum. I enclose a copy of the speech. I recognise that the education service has had a number of anxieties about Key Stage 4 which need to be addressed now. What I have to say benefits from useful advice which I have received from you and your colleagues and from the School Examination and Assessment Council.

Much of the planning for Key Stage 4 needs to be carried out by individual schools, using the various flexibilities that I am describing in my speech. But there is also preparatory work to be done at the centre, and I hereby invite NCC to undertake some of that work. I am writing similarly to Philip Halsey about the work that I want SEAC to undertake, and I expect your two Councils to keep in touch with each other and with my officials in carrying out the work.

The tasks that I wish NCC to undertake are threefold. First, I believe that it would be of value to schools to have illustrations of curriculum planning for Key Stage 4. Schools must make their own planning decisions, but it would help them to see various possibilities illustrated in a booklet. It would be especially valuable to give examples of planning based on the thinking of actual schools. I ask NCC to work on a draft booklet with the aim that it should be published in the Summer of this year.

The second task concerns the curriculum for pupils who will not take a full GCSE course in non-core foundation subjects of the National Curriculum. I suggested in my response to the interim report of the Geography Working Group that the Group might consider how schools might be enabled to select a range of content, still within the statutory requirements, from the full curriculum for Key Stage 4, so as to preserve the depth, vigour and challenge of geographical studies up to age 16. I now confirm my view that schools should be able to select from a range of options for pupils who do not take a full GCSE course in single National Curriculum subjects, and that there should be scope for schools to combine these options, or parts of them, with each other or with subjects outside the National Curriculum to form a GCSE course.

The draft attainment targets and programmes of study for technology are, I believe, flexible enough to accommodate a range of courses at Key Stage 4 and to be combined with other subjects inside and outside the National Curriculum for GCSE purposes. I ask NCC to give attention to these possibilities in writing non-statutory guidance for technology. For all future foundation subjects, I shall ask NCC to give particular attention during the statutory consultation process to the arrangements for those not taking a full GCSE course in the subject at Key Stage 4.

You will see from my letter to Philip Halsey that I expect Examining Groups to develop proposals for combined GCSEs and submit them to SEAC; and that SEAC will need to work out procedures to ensure that such GCSEs are rigorous and conform to the requirements of the National Curriculum where appropriate. I should be glad to know, however, if you feel NCC can make any further contribution in this area in addition to relevant material in non-statutory guidance on particular subjects.

I am considering the arrangements that might be made to allow a small number of pupils, exceptionally, to drop certain subjects before the end of Key Stage 4. I do not intend, however, that any pupils shall be able to drop English, maths, science, technology, and a modern foreign language.

Arrangements will be needed for pupils who obtain a good GCSE in one or more of these subjects before the end of Year 11, or who have already reached level 10, and remain in Key Stage 4. You have given me some preliminary thoughts on this in relation to the core subjects, but you then noted that more work needed to be done. I now ask NCC, in consultation with SEAC, to advise me on the curricular options and associated examination arrangemens that should be available for such pupils. I would like this advice by September of this year. For modern foreign languages I expect advice in the first place from the Working Group which is now considering attainment targets and programmes of study for modern languages in the National Curriculum.

I am copying this letter to Philip Halsey at SEAC and Hywel Evans at the Curriculum Council for Wales.

Yours sincerely,
John MacGregor

Philip Halsey Esq. CB LVO
Chairman and Chief Executive
School Examinations and Assessment Council
45 Notting Hill Gate
London W11 3JB 25 January 1990

Dear Philip,

In my speech today to the Society of Education Officers I am making a statement of general policy on Key Stage 4 in the National Curriculum. I enclose a copy of the speech. I recognise that the education service has had a number of anxieties about Key Stage 4 which need to be addressed now. What I have to say benefits from useful advice which I have received from you and your colleagues and from NCC.

Much of the planning for Key Stage 4 needs to be carried out by individual schools, using the various flexibilities that I am describing in my speech. But there is also preparatory work to be done at the centre, and I hereby invite SEAC to undertake some of that work. I am writing similarly to Duncan Graham about the work that I want NCC to undertake, and I expect your two Councils to keep in close touch with each other and with my officials in carrying out the work.

I am reaffirming today that there should be a single framework of assessment with 10 levels of achievement on the National Curriculum scale for all pupils; and that at the end of Key stage 4 the GCSE will be the main form of assessment. SEAC already have work in train to develop revised GCSE National Criteria embodying the statutory attainment targets and programmes of study for the core subjects; and new GCSEs will similarly need to be developed against revised National Criteria for each of the other foundation subjects. I would hope that the revised assessment instruments thus developed could also be used to assess attainment against the National Curriculum levels within a narrower range of knowledge, skills and understanding than required to obtain a full GCSE.

But I am also concerned that there should be flexibility in the development of GCSEs that combine parts of two, or conceivably more, foundation subjects, or that combine a foundation subject with a subject outside the National Curriculum. It will be for Examining Groups, with LEAs and schools, to develop proposals for such GCSEs and submit them to SEAC. But I would like to be assured that there will be machinery in place to scrutinise such proposals carefully, and to consider their curricular implications. Such GCSEs will need to be rigorous and to confirm where appropriate to the requirements of the National Curriculum. I ask SEAC to work out procedures for their consideration, in consultation with NCC, and to report to me by the end of this year.

I am also declaring today that I expect the vocational examining bodies to be able to submit for approval qualifications covering parts of the National Curriculum. I ask SEAC to work out principles for the guidance of the vocational examining bodies, consulting NCC, and to report to me on this also by the end of the year.

I am copying this letter to Duncan Graham.

Yours sincerely,
John MacGregor

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be writing to the School Examinations and Assessment Council and the Curriculum Council for Wales shortly about the involvement of the CCW in this work.

Civil Plutonium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 11 January, column *693*, if the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament document (CND-5), was amongst the deemed relevant information to which he refers.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

My Department is well aware of the views expressed in CND-5. The creation of a civil plutonium safeguards agency would merely duplicate the existing arrangements which are working satisfactorily.

Incentive Allowances

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Woolwich of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *253*, in March 1988 and March 1989 how many teachers were employed by each local authority in England; how many teachers were in receipt of an incentive allowance for each local authority in England; what percentage this was of the total employed by each local authority; and how many teachers in receipt of an incentive allowance in each local authority in England held allowances that were *(a)* incentive A, *(b)* incentive B, *(c)* incentive C, *(d)* incentive D and *(e)* incentive E.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* The table shows for each LEA in England for which figures are available the numbers and percentages of full-time main scale teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools (MNPS) who held an incentive allowance in March 1988. There are 17 authorities from whom the March 1988 return has not yet been received or whose return has not been fully processed. The England total includes an overall estimated component for the missing authorities. Similar figures are not yet available for March 1989.

Full-time mainscale teachers in MNPS in 1988 by LEA and Incentive allowance

	Incentive Allowances						*Total with allowance*	*All main scale teachers*	*Per cent. with allowance*
	None	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*			
Barking	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Barnet	1,317	61	402	3	192	65	723	2,040	35
Bexley	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Brent	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Bromley	826	48	425	14	203	71	761	1,587	48
Croydon	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Ealing	1,240	35	392	—	176	47	650	1,890	34
Enfield	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Haringey	1,039	1	285	3	165	43	497	1,536	32
Harrow	680	53	289	5	84	35	466	1,146	41
Havering	1,033	47	412	6	189	36	690	1,723	40
Hillingdon	757	42	392	10	192	45	681	1,438	47
Hounslow	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Kingston	497	30	186	3	85	25	329	826	40
Merton	434	145	262	6	128	7	548	982	56
Newham	672	140	442	5	152	59	798	1,470	54
Redbridge	787	56	354	7	129	41	587	1,374	43
Richmond	489	27	140	1	55	25	248	737	34

	Incentive Allowances						Total with allowance	All main scale teachers	Per cent. with allowance
	None	A	B	C	D	E			
Sutton	519	37	224	19	109	44	433	952	45
Waltham Forest	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
ILEA	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Birmingham	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Coventry	1,478	6	477	6	285	78	852	2,330	37
Dudley	1,327	133	512	18	192	67	922	2,249	41
Sandwell	1,542	73	548	7	238	71	937	2,479	38
Solihull	873	102	372	10	162	27	673	1,546	44
Walsall	1,510	129	528	5	203	59	924	2,434	38
Wolverhampton	1,345	108	435	10	171	66	790	2,135	37
Knowsley	829	69	303	3	143	35	553	1,382	40
Liverpool	2,261	6	1,013	8	417	113	1,557	3,818	41
St. Helens	986	45	317	2	99	43	506	1,492	34
Sefton	1,158	104	436	12	204	44	800	1,958	41
Wirral	1,395	125	527	1	236	80	969	2,364	41
Bolton	1,379	99	348	24	141	59	671	2,050	33
Bury	766	65	233	5	113	23	439	1,205	36
Manchester	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Oldham	1,270	126	290	1	114	15	546	1,816	30
Rochdale	1,278	3	371	4	113	24	515	1,793	29
Salford	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Stockport	1,296	150	373	2	157	42	724	2,020	36
Tameside	1,136	5	293	—	123	47	468	1,604	29
Trafford	771	93	308	3	98	30	532	1,303	41
Wigan	1,874	6	548	2	201	59	816	2,690	30
Barnsley	1,188	49	261	1	136	31	478	1,666	29
Doncaster	1,576	12	412	5	186	66	681	2,257	30
Rotherham	1,368	126	330	5	184	48	693	2,061	34
Sheffield	2,084	51	1,049	13	383	70	1,566	3,650	43
Bradford	2,835	117	709	2	324	65	1,217	4,052	30
Calderdale	912	20	343	4	144	36	547	1,459	37
Kirklees	1,989	178	532	16	219	46	991	2,980	33
Leeds	3,087	171	1,358	16	569	90	2,204	5,291	42
Wakefield	1,568	47	414	2	211	35	709	2,277	31
Gateshead	937	78	298	1	112	33	522	1,459	36
Newcastle	1,330	111	460	5	193	39	808	2,138	38
North Tyneside	1,203	80	279	—	130	19	508	1,711	30
South Tyneside	853	47	227	—	102	25	401	1,254	32
Sunderland	1,501	171	502	9	188	51	921	2,422	38
Avon	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Bedfordshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Berkshire	2,760	251	1,062	7	377	74	1,771	4,531	39
Buckinghamshire	2,404	191	939	8	355	82	1,575	3,979	40
Cambridgeshire	2,610	239	803	—	382	90	1,514	4,124	37
Cheshire	3,982	116	1,436	40	635	218	2,445	6,427	38
Cleveland	3,027	189	929	21	391	41	1,571	4,598	34
Cornwall	1,829	179	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	1,003	2,832	35
Cumbria	2,131	219	655	12	242	17	1,145	3,276	35
Derbyshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Devon	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Dorset	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Durham	2,946	101	691	2	270	126	1,190	4,136	29
East Sussex	2,268	90	693	5	333	62	1,183	3,451	34
Essex	5,816	543	2,157	16	800	287	3,803	9,619	40
Gloucestershire	1,977	229	657	11	340	31	1,268	3,245	39
Hampshire	5,649	538	1,955	17	1,011	88	3,609	9,258	39
Hereford	2,502	291	1,005	16	336	104	1,752	4,254	41
Hertfordshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Humberside	3,912	200	1,600	10	526	129	2,465	6,377	39
Isle of Wight	436	56	165	6	60	17	304	740	41
Kent	5,281	567	2,248	33	891	280	4,019	9,300	43
Lancashire	6,110	453	1,850	4	778	156	3,241	9,351	35
Leicestershire	4,076	119	1,693	23	555	128	2,518	6,594	38
Lincolnshire	2,126	112	836	10	271	51	1,280	3,406	38
Norfolk	2,791	164	960	9	345	54	1,532	4,323	35
North Yorkshire	2,614	295	926	25	351	89	1,686	4,300	39
Northampton	2,644	136	960	4	407	132	1,639	4,283	38
Northumberland	1,359	144	420	21	174	37	796	2,155	37
Nottinghamshire	4,445	266	1,613	11	693	126	2,709	7,154	38
Oxfordshire	1,796	151	737	25	341	79	1,333	3,129	43
Salop	1,857	1	602	6	349	25	983	2,840	35
Somerset	1,440	287	612	53	229	34	1,215	2,655	46
Staffordshire	4,028	317	1,840	10	641	175	2,983	7,011	43
Suffolk	2,446	205	953	11	287	77	1,533	3,979	39
Surrey	3,185	360	938	10	562	112	1,982	5,167	38
Warwickshire	1,702	168	787	10	335	48	1,348	3,050	44

	Incentive Allowances						Total with allowance	All main scale teachers	Per cent. with allowance
	None	A	B	C	D	E			
West Sussex	2,475	288	707	6	334	87	1,422	3,897	36
Wiltshire	2,184	137	669	49	306	59	1,220	3,404	36
England	198,000	14,100	70,000	1,000	29,400	7,000	121,500	320,000	38

[1]— Incomplete return for March 1988.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will update the table on surplus school places given in the answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, *Official Report*, 16 February 1989, column *319*, with the latest available information for 1988-89, and any estimate for 1989-90.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* I presume that the hon. Member should have referred to column *315*, rather than column *319*. The information for 1988-89 is given in the table. Figures from local education authorities of the number of surplus places which they removed in 1989-90 are not yet available.

Year	The number of surplus school places removed 000s (a)	The Public Expenditure White Paper target 000s (b)	Per cent. a/b
1988-89	118	137	86

The figure in column (a) is a grossed up total based on returns from 86 local education authorities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC Directives

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement *(a)* regulation 4056/86 relating to competition rules to maritime transport and *(b)* regulation 3975/87 relating to competition rules to air transport;

(2) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement directive 88/593 relating to jams;

(3) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement directive 85/573 relating to coffee and chicory extracts;

(4) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement *(a)* directive 88/380 relating to the certification of seeds and *(b)* directive 88/572 which amends directive 77/93 relating to plant health;

(5) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement directive 89/105 relating to price transparency in the prices of medicines and social security refunds;

(6) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement *(a)* directive 85/323 and *(b)* directive 85/324 on microbiological controls;

(7) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement directive 86/197 relating to the obligation to indicate ingredients and alcoholic strengths;

(8) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement directive 86/102 relating to emulsifiers (modification);

(9) what representations he has made to the European Commission over the failure of France to implement directive 88/320 relating to good laboratory practices and the non-clinical testing of chemicals.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* My Department has made no specific representations about failure by the French authorities to implement the directives mentioned. However, if my hon. Friend is aware of any specific difficulties caused for United Kingdom business we would of course be willing to take this up with the Commission or bilaterally with the French authorities. Responsibility for ensuring member states' compliance with EC directives rests with the Commission which can take a member state to the European Court of Justice for failure to comply with EC legislation.

The United Kingdom has, however, led the way in bringing the issue of implementation to the fore at political level in Brussels, and through our bilateral contacts with other member states. This has in itself put pressure on Governments with a record less good than ours.

Of the measures mentioned I should point out that two directives 85/323 and 85/324 cannot be implemented until further decisions are taken in Brussels. The United Kingdom has not implemented these directives. A further two directives 89/105 and 89/593 were not required to be implemented in member states at the time the Commission produced its latest report on implementation of single market measures.

Postage Stamps

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many complimentary presentation packs of new definitive stamps were sent to hon. Members of Parliament in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1988 and *(c)* 1987; and what was the cost to the Post Office;

(2) what is the cost to the Post Office of sending each hon. Member of Parliament a complimentary presentation pack of new definitive stamps to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the introduction of the penny post.

Mr. Forth: This is an operational matter for the Post Office and I am asking the chairman to write to my hon. Friend about it.

Microwave Television Channels

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry following his Department's announcement of 23 August on choice of frequency for microwave television

channels what progress has been made in exploring the feasibility of establishing networks at 40 GHz; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: As indicated in the announcement on 23 August, technology to operate microwave television delivery services at 40 GHz exists, but development is needed to make equipment generally available. Consultations showed that a number of organisations are interested in developing equipment, and the firm decision to make frequencies available at 40 GHz should enable them to make decisions about the development and production of equipment in time for the new local delivery services proposed in the Broadcasting Bill. It will be for the Independent Television Commission to specify the areas to be served and to oversee the planning of the services.

Merchant Shipbuilding

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *315*, he will list the types and tonnages of the merchant vessels ordered and the shipyards which were awarded these orders.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following is the information:

Builder	*Type of Vessel*	*Gross Tonnage (Estimated)*
D. Abels Boat Builders	Passenger ferry	106
Brook Yachts International	Yacht	1,042
Appledore Shipbuilders Ltd	Trailing suction dredger	3,499
Aluminium Shipbuilders Ltd	Wave piercing catamaran ferry	400
Campbeltown Shipyard Ltd	Fishing Vessel	220
Cochrane Shipbuilders Ltd	Trawler	555
	Cargo vessel	2,275
	Cargo vessel	2,275
	Ro-ro ferry	2,970
Richard Dunston (Hessle) Ltd	Cargo vessel	2,275
	Cargo vessel	2,275
	Mooring vessel	400
	Mooring vessel	400
	Docking tug	700
FBM Marine Ltd	Fast ferry	420
Harland and Wolff Ltd	Crude oil tanker	78,400
	Crude oil tanker	78,400
	Crude oil tanker	78,400
Kvaerner Govan Ltd	LPG tanker	34,800
	LPG tanker	34,800
McTay Marine	Ro-ro ferry	750
	Ro-ro ferry	750
	Survey vessel	105
	Tug	475
Richards (Shipbuilders) Ltd	Tug	350
Swan Hunter (Wallsend) Ltd	Antartic logistic/ Research vessel	5,650
Yorkshire Dry Dock Ltd	Passenger vessel	1,700
Total		334,392

Missile Technology Control Regime

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *56*, how many export licence applications have been refused by his Department as a result of the United Kingdom's commitments under the missile technology control regime; and if he will list them.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Bicycles

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of standard EN71 on bicycle safety *(a)* as a toy safety standard for cycles up to 435 mm maximum seat height, and *(b)* for bicycles of 635 mm used by older young persons;

(2) what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of standards EN71 and BS 5665 taken together *(a)* for bicycles up to 435 mm and used by children up to four years of age and *(b)* for cycles up to a maximum seat height of 635 mm used by older children; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what consideration he has given in considering the safety of bicycles between 435 mm and 635 mm maximum seat height, to the advice of the independent testing authority that compliance with ISO 8098 is an adequate and equivalent test to the proposals effected on 1 January 1990;

(4) what representations he has received from the cycle industry about the effect of standard EN71 on safety, when applied *(a)* to cycles up to 435 mm and *(b)* to those up to 635 mm; and if he will temporarily suspend the application of directive EN71.

Mr. Forth: The Toys (Safety) Regulations 1989 came into force on 1 January 1990 and implement the toy safety directive which is a Community obligation. A manufacturer, importer or retailer is under an obligation to supply toys which conform to the essential safety requirements. Compliance and CE marking may be achieved by self-certification when the toy is manufactured in accordance with European harmonised standards (EN 71). Alternatively, when toys do not conform in whole or in part to harmonised standards, type approval may be sought from an approved body. The approved body is concerned to establish that the model submitted for approval meets the essential safety requirements and in so doing may, if the harmonised standard is inappropriate, have regard to other appropriate tests.

Representations have been made by the cycle industry about the level of safety and appropriateness of EN71 (BS 5665). I am concerned by the suggestions that the tests specified in the European harmonised standard may not provide the level of safety required by the essential safety requirements. The United Kingdom delegation to the European committee for standardisation (CEN) sought to have the braking test specified in the International Standard Organisation's standard 8098 incorporated into the harmonised standards but there was insufficient support for this from other CEN delegates. The matter is being urgently considered. If the Department concludes that any harmonised standard does not meet the essential requirements the procedure is for the Government to refer the matter to the standing committee set up under the directive for reconsideration. If appropriate we will proceed accordingly. In the meantime my officials have been in touch with the manufacturers concerned and advised them about the type approval means of compliance.

Soil Scientists

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the reasons for the withdrawal of funding to soil scientists involved with the International Standards Organisation Committee on Soil Quality and Pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* The assisted international travel scheme provides assistance towards the travel costs of delegation leaders and principal experts attending standards meetings overseas. The intention is to help individuals, representatives and employees of organisations which are not directly or indirectly public funded. The Government provide a substantial allocation of funds, but it would not be appropriate to accept an open-ended commitment. The Department has therefore given BSI, which administers the scheme, a priority ranking for claims on those funds which gives top priority to meetings of European standards bodies engaged on work to complete the single market.

THE ARTS

British Library

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether, pending the sale of the Store street site, Her Majesty's Government will advance funds to the British Library to enable the safekeeping of the oriental collections in their present accommodation until such time as the St. Pancras building is ready to house them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The British Library board has already decided in principle to take advantage of the opportunity to unite the oriental collections and the India Office library and records before the St. Pancras building is completed. This is expected to bring benefits to both management and readers. I am confident that the British Library will continue to exercise a proper concern for the safekeeping of its collections and the needs of readers.

Sir Douglas Bader (Log Book)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister for the Arts if his Department has any plans to bid for the log book of Sir Douglas Bader at the forthcoming auction.

Mr. Luce: The Office of Arts and Libraries does not bid for any items at public auction. Decisions on bidding for Sir Douglas Bader's log book are a matter for the trustees of the individual museums.

National Railway Museum

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Minister for the Arts, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside of 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *210-11*, what approaches were made for funding from his Department to assist with the replacement of the roof of the national railway museum at York; what response he made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* The national museums and galleries for which I am responsible submit a corporate plan to my office every year detailing their priority concerns and their bids for funding. As a result of the priorities put forward in the science museum's 1988 corporate plan, I announced in November 1988 that the provision for the building programme funds at the science museum included additional allocations of £1 million in both 1989-90 and 1990-91 towards the cost of reroofing the national railway museum.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Investment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer further to his reply dated 4 December concerning investment in manufacturing industry, *Official Report*, column *19*, what is the corresponding increase in the motor vehicles, mechanical engineering, textile and clothing industries, respectively; and if he will publish a table showing the increase in investment in those industries between 1973 and 1988 at constant prices together with the increase in output, exports and imports.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Figures comparable to those provided in my earlier reply are not available at this level of industry detail. Estimates of exports and imports at constant prices had not been produced prior to 1978, and reliable investment figures by industry are not yet available for 1988. The information available is:

	Percentage change in		
	Investment	*Output*	
	1973-1987	*1973-1987*	*1973-1988*
Mechanical engineering	−22	−22	−15
Motor vehicles	+10	−34	−24
Textiles, leather, footwear and clothing	−33	−18	−19

Note: The industries are defined in terms of the Standard Industrial Classification (Revised 1980) as follows:
Mechanical engineering: Class 32
Motor vehicles: Class 35
Textiles, leather, footwear and clothing: Classes 43-45

Taxation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received, and from whom, concerning the taxation of company cars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received a number of representations concerning the taxation of company cars.

British Rail

Mr. Snape: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of British Rail's investment programme of £3·75 billion over the next three years will be financed from *(a)* their own internally generated cash flow, *(b)* PSO level crossing and section 20 grants and *(c)* external finance, excluding PSO, level crossing and section 20 grants.

Mr. Norman Lamont: British Rail's investment programme of £3·75 billion over the next three years will be financed from its own internally generated cash flow, which includes payments from passenger transport executives under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968 in

respect of services operated by British Rail in metropolitan areas, and from external finance. The Government's public expenditure plans for the next three years provide for a total of £2·2 billion of external finance of which grants (PSO and level crossing) account for £1·25 billion.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of a carbon tax on the rate of inflation.

Mr. Ryder: It has not been the practice to publish estimates of the economic effects of hypothetical new taxes.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing any change to the Central Office of Information cash limit and running costs limit for 1989-90; and whether he is proposing any changes to the services provided on an allied basis by the Central Office of Information for 1989-90.

Mr. Ryder: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for Class XIX, Vote 1 will be increased by £50,000, from £1,273,000 to £1,323,000. The additional expenditure is for a new service, the media advisory service and will be charged to the reserve. At the same time the running costs limit will be reduced by £779,000 from £21,850,000 to £21,071,000 in line with the latest forecast of expenditure on repayment services.

Central Statistical Office

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing any change to the Central Statistical Office's cash limit or running costs limit for 1989-90.

Mr. Lilley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for Class XIX, Vote 18, will be increased by £508,000 from £15,342,000 to £15,850,000 and the running cost limit by £413,000, from £11,967,000 to £12,380,000. Part of the increase reflects a further transfer of provision from the Department of Trade and Industry following the establishment of the Central Statistical Office as a separate Department: a corresponding reduction will be included in a Supplementary Estimate for the Department of Trade and Industry (Class V, Vote 3). In addition, the increase reflects a transfer of provision from the Cabinet Office; Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (Class XX, Vote 1) of £5,000 in respect of the challenge funding scheme for senior management development training. Finally, the remainder reflects provision to meet some of the additional administrative expenditure which arises for the Central Statistical Office as a separate Department, which will be charged to the reserve.

Media (Wartime Advisory Service)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made regarding the Government's response, Cmnd. 9499, to the proposal made in the study group chaired by Sir Hugh Beach, Cmnd. 9112, that an advisory service for the media be established to operate during a time of tension or war.

Mr. Ryder: After consultations involving Government Departments, regional authorities and the national and regional media a report on the feasibility of a media advisory service (MAS) was produced last year. The Government have accepted the main conclusion that the basis for a MAS to operate during a time of tension or war should be established. Such a MAS has now been formed in the Central Office of Information under Mr. Peter Brazier, a COI group director. It is expected to cost around £150,000 a year.

Capital Gains

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any proposals to amend the definition of a group of companies for capital gains purposes.

Mr. Lilley: We are proposing to include one technical change to the capital gains definition of a group in the 1990 Finance Bill. This is to prevent a company being treated as leaving a group when arrangements are entered into under which rights to profits or assets may be reduced at a future date. We propose that in general the change should be effective from Budget day 1989, when the present definition of a group took effect. But groups will be able to elect for the change to apply only from midnight tonight.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

China

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the refusal of the Consul-General (ref: VC/C/27035/89) in Bejing, China, to allow Peng Ling to join her British husband Peter Flak in Britain.

Mr. Sainsbury: Peng Ling has not applied for a visa to come to the United Kingdom. She has been refused a visa by the Hong Kong authorities to join her British husband in Hong Kong, where her husband is understood to be working until 1991.

Under an agreement between the Hong Kong Government and the Chinese authorities residents in China who wish to join spouses in Hong Kong can apply for a one-way permit from the Chinese authorities.

Argentina

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new regulations there are on the exclusion zones to Argentine shipping and aircraft figures around the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the joint statement issued after the Anglo-Argentine talks in Madrid last October, a copy of which, as I stated in my reply of 20 October to my right hon. Friend, the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), was placed in the Library of the House, it was announced that two small changes to the Falkland Islands protection zone would be made:

(a) the limits of the protection zone would be aligned with that of the Falkland Islands Interim Conservation and Management Zone, reducing its size slightly in the South West corner;

(b) the requirement that Argentine merchant shipping should not enter the protection zone without prior agreement would be dispensed with.

These changes subsequently came into effect on 1 December and 1 January respectively.

Palestine Liberation Organisation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last had communications with members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation; what was discussed; and what decisions were made.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Qaddumi in Paris on 22 December and I met Bassam Abu Sharif on 8 January, as part of our continuing dialogue with the PLO on the prospects for peace in the middle east.

Middle East

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to offer the good offices of Her Majesty's Government for talks, in London between members of the Israeli Government and members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We support the expansion of contacts between Israelis and Palestinians, including the PLO. The present efforts to arrange talks between the Israeli Government and representative Palestinians in Cairo offer the best way forward.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 12 January, column 796, on the non-proliferation treaty, what response he has made to the proposal by Dr. Lowry to which his reply makes reference.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department replied that it was not United Kingdom or NATO strategy to make premature reductions in defence commitments. There would therefore be no immediate diversion of manpower into tackling the problems of pollution.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has concerning the policy of *(a)* the Republic of South Africa and *(b)* Namibia towards the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: The South African Government have expressed interest in acceding to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and we have made it clear that we would welcome a decision on their part to do so. With regard to the second part of the question, only independent states may accede to the treaty and it will be for Namibia, once independent, to decide its policy on this matter.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy towards the imposition of sanctions upon countries which transgress the terms and conditions of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: We adhere strictly to our own obligation under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty not in any way to assist, encourage or induce any non-nuclear weapon state to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

British Diplomats

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to increase the number of British ambassadors and high commissioners who are *(a)* black and *(b)* Asian.

Mr. Sainsbury: FCO recruitment literature makes clear that the FCO is an equal opportunities employer.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultation his Department has had with the Norwegian Government about the dumping of toxic industrial waste in the North sea.

Mr. Waldegrave: None. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is in touch with the Norwegian and other interested Governments through the Oslo commission. The waste which the United Kingdom permits to be dumped in the North sea is not toxic.

Daya Bay Power Plant

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress, and any problems encountered, in the construction of the two units for the Daya Bay nuclear power plant joint venture with the Guangdong Power Company; when Daya Bay is expected to be commissioned and at what cost in *(a)* Hong Kong dollars and *(b)* pounds sterling; and what safety oversight role is being carried out by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. Maude: Construction of the Daya Bay plant is proceeding according to schedule and in compliance with the quality requirements. Units I and II of the plant are scheduled to be commissioned by October 1992 and July 1993 respectively. The project costs are not expected to exceed the budget of HK$28·7 billion or £2·7 billion. As far as we are aware the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority is not carrying out any safety oversight role in connection with the project.

Tibet

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made, and intend to make, to the Government of China to end the state of martial law in Lhasa.

Mr. Maude: The Chinese Government are well aware of our hope that, following the lifting of martial law in Peking, they will take further steps to strengthen the protection of human rights in China, including the lifting of martial law in Lhasa. Together with our European Community partners, we intend to register our concerns about human rights in China, including Tibet, in the forthcoming meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's assessment as to whether *(a)* Argentina, *(b)* Brazil, *(c)* Iraq, *(d)* Israel, *(e)* Iran, *(f)* India, *(g)* Pakistan, *(h)* North Korea and *(i)* the Republic of South Africa have developed the capability to build and deliver nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Iraq and Iran are both states party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and, as such, have undertaken not to develop a nuclear weapons capability. North Korea, although not recognised as a state by Her Majesty's Government, is also a party to the NPT. South Africa has expressed interest in adhering to the NPT, and has held talks with the depositary powers. Argentina and Brazil have both signed the treaty of Tlatelolco, which bans nuclear weapons in Latin America. All of the countries listed in the question have always declared that their nuclear activities are exclusively for peaceful purposes. We take every suitable opportunity to stress the importance of the international non-proliferation regime and of securing universal adherence to the NPT.

East Timor

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the position of Her Majesty's Government at the forthcoming United Nations Human Rights Commission on the question of East Timor and abuse of human rights.

Mr. Sainsbury: East Timor is not, at present, on the agenda for the forthcoming UNCHR session. We support the role of the UN Secretary-General in encouraging a bilateral settlement between Indonesia and Portugal which fully takes into account the interests of the people of East Timor. We should also examine carefully any report of human rights abuses.

Ivory

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made an assessment of the effect of his decision to release for sale ivory stocks in Hong Kong on the population of African elephants.

Mr. Maude: Hong Kong is committed to comply in full with the CITES ban. The United Kingdom reservation is designed to give the territory a reasonable period in which to adjust to this. In the meantime, Hong Kong has imposed a total ban on exports to all CITES parties and on imports, which will ensure that there is no loophole for the entry of illegal ivory onto the market. There should, therefore, be no adverse consequences for the African elephant.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Sentencing

146. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases of alleged over-lenient sentencing have been referred to him under the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1988; and how many sentences have been revised upwards in consequence.

The Attorney-General: Sixty-seven cases of alleged unduly lenient sentencing have been referred to me. I have applied for leave to refer the sentencing in nine cases to the Court of Appeal. Leave has been granted in seven such cases and sentences have been increased in six of the cases. I have withdrawn two cases in the light of later information. I have referred one case to the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland: the sentence in that case was also increased.

Duty Solicitors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the operation of the duty solicitor scheme.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *317*. I have nothing further to add.

Civil Justice Review

Mr. Soley: To ask the Attorney-General when the Government will publish their consultation paper on the housing aspects of the civil justice review.

The Attorney-General: The civil justice review consultation paper on housing cases was published in 1987. Following the publication of the civil justice review's final report (Cm. 394) in June 1988 the Lord Chancellor said that there would be further consultation with court users and others with an interest in housing matters before changes were made to the procedures for handling housing cases in the county courts. He expects the consultation to be completed before the end of this year.

Mr. Kevin Taylor

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will consult the Director of Public Prosecutions with a view to him asking a police force, other than that of Greater Manchester, to investigate what transpired necessitating the discontinuance of the Taylor prosecution and, in particular, the implications arising from the application to the judge which was wrongly based.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has referred to the chief constable of Greater Manchester certain aspects of evidence given by police witnesses for the prosecution, for the chief constable to consider whether a police investigation should be instituted. The decision whether there should be such an investigation (and, if so, by whom) is one for the chief constable.

EMPLOYMENT

Ko Hsuan School, Chawleigh

145. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what work permits have been issued to teachers and staff at the Ko Hsuan School at Chawleigh in North Devon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of Thursday 11 January 1990, *Official Report*, column *702*.

Ethnic Background Data

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will give the ethnic background data for YTS trainees, for the latest available date, separately for each youth training scheme operating in *(a)* each of the training agency areas of Greater London, *(b)* Manchester, *(c)* Birmingham and Solihull and *(d)* Coventry and Warwickshire;

(2) if he will give the ethnic background data for YTS trainees, for the latest available date, separately for each youth training scheme operated through the YTS large companies unit.

Mr. Nicholls: Because of the length of the replies, I will write to the hon. Member with the available information, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to appoint trade union representatives to the Merseyside training and enterprise council.

Mr. Eggar: It will be up to key business leaders in Merseyside to prepare an application for a training and enterprise council (TEC) and to decide whether to invite a trade union representative to join the TEC board.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the newly appointed members of the Merseyside training and enterprise council together with their qualifications and experience.

Mr. Eggar: Key business leaders are now preparing an application for development funding for a Merseyside training and enterprise council. That application will set out the proposed board of directors for the TEC.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the payment in salary or expenses of the members of the Merseyside training and enterprise council.

Mr. Eggar: Training and enterprise council board members will not be entitled to draw a salary or other remuneration from public funds other than out-of-pocket expenses.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline the level of unemployment in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow at the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: I have been asked to reply.

There were 5,014 unemployed in the Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency in December 1989, the most recent date for which information is available.

PRIME MINISTER

Lancashire

Q37. **Mr. Michael Jack:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Lancashire.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Scotland

Q67. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next plans to visit Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Wild Animals

Q102. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will co-ordinate Government legislation to prevent unnecessary suffering to wild animals.

The Prime Minister: Existing legislation, which has been greatly strengthened over the last decade, is already well co-ordinated. Wherever necessary, non-captive animals are protected in law, and the Protection of Animals Act 1911 forbids the causing of unnecessary suffering to all animals in captivity. The law has been further strengthened in recent years notably through the Protection of Animals (Penalties) Act 1987, the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1988 and the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988.

Summer Time

Q136. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the implications of the recent directive on summer time arrangements in the Community.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Alloway

Q137. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Alloway.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Rutland Water

Q163. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Prime Minister, whether she will pay an official visit to Rutland Water, in the county of Rutland.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Gloucestershire

Q172. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Gloucestershire.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Ivory

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library copies of all representations she received before 18 January on the release of Hong Kong ivory stocks on to the market.

The Prime Minister: No. It is not my normal practice to release such correspondence.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment she has made of the implications for the survival of the African elephant species of the sale of impounded poached ivory on to the world market; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Following the decision of the seventh conference of parties to CITES the African elephant was added to appendix I on 18 January. Conference resolution 2.15 adopted by the second conference of parties to CITES indicated that confiscated appendix I specimens
"should not be returned to commercial utilisation in any form".

West Wiltshire District Council

Mr. Randall: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions she has had about the conduct of West Wiltshire district council; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None. Questions relating to the conduct of West Wiltshire district council are for the district auditor. I understand that he has begun an investigation.

Pay Settlements

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a further statement on the current level of pay settlements.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave on Tuesday 23 January at column 738.

Cabinet Office

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if there are any proposals to change the 1989-90 cash limit and running costs limit for the "Cabinet Office: other services".

The Prime Minister: Both the overall cash limit and the running costs limit for "Cabinet Office: other services" (Class XX, Vote 2) have been reduced. Cash limit has been reduced by £37,000 from £16,461,000 to £16,424,000 and running costs by £44,000 from £17,905,000 to £17,861,000. These decreases go to offset corresponding increases in the cash limit and running costs limit of the Department of the Environment: administration (Class 10 Vote 5) of £61,000 and £68,000 respectively. This reflects a transfer of functions. In addition, the Cabinet Office is to receive a transfer of £24,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry: administration, regulation of domestic trade and industry and consumer protection (Class 5 Vote 3) which will increase both running costs and cash limit by the same amount. The reason for this increase is that the Office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has transferred to the Cabinet Office.

Engagements

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. French: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many inquiries he has received from hon. Members during the past six months relating to the family credit system; and if he will make a statement on the working of this benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: During the past six months over 120 letters about family credit have been received from right hon. and hon. Members; these have mainly been concerned with individual cases rather than the system as such. Family credit is an income-related benefit and therefore it is necessary to ask for detailed information about earnings and other income in order to determine entitlement in accordance with the rules laid down in the legislation. In general, these arrangements work well, but we shall continue to be prepared to consider the need for changes in the light of practical experience.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families in Scotland are in receipt of family credit; and what estimated proportion these families represent of those entitled to this benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest information is for September 1989 when the number of families receiving family credit who were living in Scotland at the time their award was made was 39,000. Information about the total number of families eligible for family credit can be obtained only for Great Britain and only retrospectively, from family expenditure survey data.

Income Support

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for income support have been made since 11 April 1988 at the local offices of his Department in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; and how many of these claims were determined.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is as follows:

	Number of income support claims made since 11 April 1988[1]	Number of income support claims determined since 11 April 1988[1]
(a) Greenock ILO	16,433	16,300
(b) Port Glasgow ILO	7,148	7,128
(c) Strathclyde	397,017	394,571
(d) Scotland	803,789	798,770

[1] Figures do not include claims received and determined after 29 December 1989.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people are in receipt of income support in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; and what are the corresponding figures for those in receipt of supplementary benefit for each year since 1979;

(2) how many people were in receipt of supplementary benefit in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988; and how many are now in receipt of income support in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is in the table.

Year	Supplementary Benefit/Income Support live load			
	Greenock ILO	Port Glasgow ILO	Strathclyde	Scotland
1979	6,317	2,814	166,426	294,116
1980	6,794	3,069	183,629	320,260
1981	7,999	3,704	221,403	385,238
1982	9,812	4,156	252,679	439,419
1983	9,720	4,128	265,180	461,461
1984	10,381	4,541	283,600	492,775
1985	10,705	4,990	295,392	508,970
1986	12,195	5,285	309,578	543,025
1987	12,338	5,369	315,735	548,272
1988	11,423	4,659	284,381	499,890
1989	11,652	4,637	284,056	505,052

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action, which include a number where benefit payment has ceased but other action is continuing.

Social Security Staff

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of staff employed in local offices of his Department in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland at the latest available date; if any changes are envisaged in the number of those employed therein the near future; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The total number of staff employed in the Department's local offices on 1 January 1990 in Scotland was 6,924·5 (excluding casual staff). Included in this figure are 3,634 staff employed in Strathclyde and 213·5 in Greenock and Port Glasgow local offices. No changes in staffing are envisaged in the near future. The annual recomplementing exercise will take place in April 1990.

Hostels

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on his plans for the long-term financial arrangements to compensate hostels which have lost income as a result of the income support changes introduced in April 1989;

(2) *(a)* on what date transitional payments direct to hostels will cease to be made and *(b)* what financial arrangements are to be brought in from the date when transitional payments cease.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Changes to income support for hostel dwellers were introduced from 9 October 1989. The temporary arrangements for protecting hostels' income will cease from April 1991. After that date, the money being paid by the central unit will be transferred to other Departments to be channelled through existing funding sources. We expect to announce the detailed financial arrangements shortly.

Budget and Crisis Loans

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number of claimants on income support were repaying a budget or crisis loan at the social security offices in *(a)* Caernarfon and *(b)* Porthmadog for each month since January 1989; what number of *(a)* one parent families, *(b)* sick and disabled claimants, *(c)* pensioners and *(d)* unemployed claimants on income support were repaying budget or crisis loans at (i) Caernarfon and (ii) Porthmadog for each month since January 1989.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The information available is given in the tables. The figures represent the number of loans being repaid on the last day of each month.

Caernarfon

	Number of income support claimants	Lone parents	Disabled[1]	Pensioners	Unemployed
BUDGETING LOANS					
1989					
January	321	138	26	25	119
February	352	152	28	29	131
March	366	163	29	29	130
April	357	156	28	29	126
May	365	159	31	29	126
June	375	167	31	34	124
July	380	165	33	37	125
August	357	166	31	34	110
September	340	155	29	33	120
October	362	168	32	33	120
November	371	174	27	35	128
December	364	173	24	32	127
CRISIS LOANS					
1989					

	Number of income support claimants	Lone parents	Disabled[1]	Pensioners	Unemployed
January	26	3	2	—	19
February	32	3	1	—	26
March	37	4	2	—	28
April	49	8	3	1	35
May	45	6	1	—	35
June	52	12	1	—	38
July	61	13	1	—	45
August	72	18	1	—	48
September	84	18	—	—	61
October	102	18	1	—	76
November	79	20	1	—	55
December	61	14	1	—	47

[1] Applicants receiving a disability premium. It is not possible to identify separately applicants who are sick and not receiving a disability premium.

Porthmadog

	Number of income support claimants	Lone parents	Disabled[1]	Pensioners	Unemployed
BUDGETING LOANS					
1989					
January	147	58	12	13	57
February	167	66	13	15	67
March	181	70	14	18	72
April	193	79	14	17	77
May	194	76	11	16	85
June	182	68	11	18	79
July	184	67	13	16	81
August	180	66	12	15	79
September	175	70	12	18	75
October	174	72	11	17	69
November	181	74	13	16	70
December	196	80	14	16	79
CRISIS LOANS					
1979					
January	13	2	—	—	11
February	19	4	—	—	15
March	14	2	—	—	12
April	15	1	—	—	14
May	23	3	—	—	20
June	17	1	—	—	16
July	15	—	—	—	15
August	13	—	—	—	13
September	15	1	—	—	21
October	22	1	—	—	18
November	18	—	—	—	8
December	15	1	—	—	13

[1] Applicants receiving a disability premium. It is not possible to identify separately applicants who are sick and not receiving a disability premium.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of income support claimants at the social security offices at *(a)* Caernarfon and *(b)* Porthmadog were (i) repaying a budgeting crisis loan from their benefit, (ii) repaying a budgeting or crisis loan at 10 per cent. or more of their benefit and (iii) repaying a budgeting or crisis loan at 15 per cent. or more of their benefit for each month since January 1989.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Information regarding the percentage rate at which loans are being repaid is not collected. Information about the national and local income support caseload is collected on a quarterly basis and the number of loans being repaid on the last day of each quarter is shown in the table.

Caernarfon[1]	*Budgeting Loans* per cent.	*Crisis Loans* per cent.
February 1989	6·227	0·570
May 1989	6·661	0·821
August 1989	6·072	1·224
November 1989	6·462	1·602
Porthmadog[1]		
February 1989	3·560	0·405
May 1989	4·534	0·537
August 1989	4·391	0·296
November 1989	4·728	0·380

[1] Quarter ending.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of budgeting or crisis loans out on loan to claimants on income support from the offices of *(a)* Caernarfon and *(b)* Porthmadog for each month from January 1989.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The information available is set out in the table. The information represents the amounts outstanding on the last day of each calendar month.

	Budgeting loans £	*Crisis loans* £
Caernarfon		
January 1989	46,358·39	2,387·73
February 1989	49,334·83	2,288·22
March 1989	50,457·04	1,935·39
April 1989	47,202·96	2,605·87
May 1989	48,819·33	2,752·90
June 1989	49,154·83	3,487·62
July 1989	51,045·79	4,314·49
August 1989	49,485·72	4,700·18
September 1989	49,739·02	5,657·84
October 1989	55,007·98	7,281·69
November 1989	60,301·21	7,152·50
December 1989	59,995·43	8,261·09
Porthmadog		
January 1989	32,716·58	967·22
February 1989	34,936·28	1,132·00
March 1989	35,087·15	1,011·55
April 1989	36,365·47	1,079·50
May 1989	36,476·63	1,377·96
June 1989	34,499·69	1,335·57
July 1989	33,012·67	1,162·61
August 1989	30,578·93	1,306·96
September 1989	30,090·01	1,552·51
October 1989	29,010·37	2,176·98
November 1989	29,286·21	2,564·60
December 1989	29,328·03	2,257·77

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Cox: To ask the Lord President of the Council on what date he expects the new parliamentary building in Bridge street, Westminster, to be open for use by hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

As I advised the House on 28 July the contractor, Fairclough Building Ltd., had reported that the work was behind schedule and was not expected to be finished until October 1990.

The latest forecast from the contractor indicates that their revised programme has slipped by a month.

Subject to there being no further slippage the building should be fitted out and ready for occupation around Easter 1991.

Queen's Consent

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many Bills in the current Session have required the Queen's consent to proceed; and how many have received that consent.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Of the Bills introduced in the Commons and printed so far this Session, one will require the Queen's Consent on Second Reading and six will require the Queen's Consent on Third Reading. Consent has not yet been signified in respect of any Bill during the Session.

ENERGY

French Nuclear Power Stations

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will institute an inquiry into potential dangers posed to the United Kingdom by French nuclear power stations located near to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: There is no reason to suppose that the standards of safety adopted by the French are any less rigorous than those applied in the United Kingdom. French reactors are built and operated to the highest safety standards. Moreover, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate has a formal exchange of information arrangement with the French nuclear safety regulatory body—the Service Central de Surete des Installations Nucleaires (SCSIN). Under this exchange the SCSIN has undertaken to inform the nuclear installations inspectorate of any matters which could affect the safe operation of plant.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action his Department is taking in respect of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England's complaint to the European Commissioner for competition, seeking an investigation under articles 85, 86, 90, 92 and 93 of the treaty of Rome, of the provisions of the Electricity Act relating to a nuclear levy and associated subsidies, to nuclear power.

Mr. Baldry: As is normal, the Department has been discussing its proposals with the European Commission. We are confident that the arrangements for the new industry will be consistent with the United Kingdom's Community obligations.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to publish the annual plutonium production and storage figures in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Baldry: The information referred to by the hon. Member is detailed and specialised and is already circulated widely as a press release by my Department.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy in respect of his departmental press release No. 180 of 5 December 1989, how the estimate in paragraph 1.B(a) and (b) of plutonium contents of fuel is made; how the figures in paragraph 2(C) quoted for plutonium oxide were reached; why the figures in paragraph 2(d)(i) and (iii) for cumulative stocks of plutonium aggregate BNFL and overseas customers; what is the reason for the rounding of plutonium figures to 50 kg; and whether the figures are forwarded to the safeguards authorities with the same rounding.

Mr. Baldry: The estimates in paragraphs 1B(a) and (b) of plutonium contents of fuel are made from a knowledge of the irradiation levels of fuel elements. The plutonium content of these is calculated using standard computer codes and then summed for all the elements in the reactor or in the irradiated fuel stores as appropriate.

Plutonium oxide which has been separated in the reprocessing operation (paragraph 2(c) is analysed to measure its precise composition and weighed very accurately.

The format of the press release and its predecessors followed a recommendation by the Sizewell inquiry that details of plutonium in the United Kingdom's civil reactors should be published. The column of figures at paragraph 2(d) of the release, which shows stocks belonging to BNFL and its overseas customers, is additional information included to indicate the overall stock of safeguarded plutonium held by BNFL at Sellafield. The stock of BNFL's own plutonium is less than 0·5 tonne.

Information on stocks of plutonium, to the nearest gramme, is supplied to Euratom who are aware that some of the figures have been calculated as described above.

Dr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what revisions have been made in the estimates of amounts of plutonium in spent nuclear fuel, as referred to in his Department's press release No. 180 of 5 December 1989, on annual civil plutonium figures.

Mr. Baldry: As stated in press release 180, since the figures for 1986-87 and 1987-88 were published some revisions have been made in the estimates provided by the generating boards of the amounts of plutonium in spent fuel. The changes to the estimates of plutonium were:

Reactor discharges estimated kg of plutonium rounded to nearest 50 kg Pu

	Previous figure	*Revised figure*
1986-87		
Heysham 1	50	0
1987-88		
Heysham 1	100	50
Oldbury	350	300

No amendments have been necessary to any measured quantities of plutonium. All of this material is accounted for and remains under safeguards.

Uranium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of *(a)* world uranium consumption and *(b)* United Kingdom uranium consumption in each year since 1960; what has been the percentage annual growth in each case; and what levels are predicted to be reached by 2000.

Mr. Baldry: For world uranium consumption I refer the hon. Member to the 1986 OECD/IAEA publication "Uranium Resources, Production and Demand". On United Kingdom consumption I am advised by the British Civil Uranium Procurement Organisation (BCUPO), which procures all civil uranium for electricity generation in the United Kingdom, that uranium consumption by the CEGB and the SSEB in the years in question was as follows:

	tu
Pre-1970	[1]10,000
1970	900
1971	1,000
1972	1,200
1973	1,300
1974	1,400
1975	1,300
1976	1,400
1977	1,300
1978	1,100
1979	1,900
1980	1,900
1981	1,300
1982	1,300
1983	1,300
1984	1,500
1985	1,500
1986	1,800
1987	1,500
1988	2,000
1989	1,900

[1] The BCUPO is unable to provide annual figures for the period prior to 1970.

Based on the requirements currently advised to the BCUPO by the CEGB and the SSEB, consumption in 2000 is expected to be around 1,200 tonnes.

Nuclear Reactors (Decommissioning)

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many statements he or Ministers in his Department have made since May 1979 *(a)* in Parliament and *(b)* outside Parliament on decommissioning of nuclear reactors; and if he will indicate the source of the outside information relied upon for each statement.

Mr. Wakeham: Department of Energy Ministers have made a number of statements about the decommissioning of nuclear reactors both in Parliament and elsewhere since May 1979. Such statements are not recorded centrally, and the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In the majority of cases the source of any outside information relied upon would have been the Central Electricity Generating Board.

Magnox Nuclear Plants

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will conduct a comparative costing study of Magnox back-end fuel cycle financial requirements in those OECD countries possessing Magnox nuclear plants.

Mr. Baldry: No.

Nuclear Electric

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will set out the grounds on which he based his estimate that the new nationalised nuclear generation company will be cash positive.

Mr. Baldry: The Government intend that Nuclear Electric will have a positive cash flow. The precise cash position of the company will depend on the outcome of contractual negotiations with the area boards. The initial contracts will be subject to Government approval.

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will direct the new nuclear company to make public information currently restricted by commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Baldry: Nuclear Electric plc will be operating in a commercial market. It would not be in the taxpayer's interest to have different practices on commercial confidentiality for the company than for other participants in the market.

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the new nationalised nuclear company will hold title to all plutonium currently in the civil sector in England and Wales; and what restrictions will apply to the company's freedom to sign uranium enrichment, fuel fabrication and reprocessing contracts with French or Japanese fuel cycle companies.

Mr. Baldry: Nuclear Electric will take over responsibility for the Central Electricity Generating Board's plutonium. Contracts for nuclear fuel services will be entered into on a commercial basis.

Biblis Nuclear Plant

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what volume of low level wastes will arise from the spent fuel from the Biblis nuclear plant, contracted to British Nuclear Fuels plc by the RWE Electrical Utility in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Baldry: It is estimated that approximately 1000 cu m of conditioned low-level waste will arise from the reprocessing of the Biblis fuel contracted to British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to publish the consultation document on the scheme for the promotion of energy efficiency in low-income households.

Mr. Peter Morrison: It is my intention that the consultation document should be available before discussion of clause 10 of the Social Security Bill takes place in Standing Committee.

Magnox Reactors

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will set a maximum operational life period for the Magnox reactors.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Energy on 14 December 1989 at column *778*.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when the safety audits of the 11 Magnox stations are expected to be completed.

Mr. Baldry: Long-term safety reviews (LTSRs) of Magnox power stations are scheduled to take place as shown in the table. The stations will of course continue to be subject to normal regular inspections by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate.

Column 1 *Station*	*Column 2* *Licensee's LTSR completion dates*	*Column 3* *Possible next LTSR (note 2)*
Calderhall (1956)	1982; 1989	1996
Chapelcross (1959)	1982; 1989	1996
Berkeley (1962)	Closed 1989	—
Bradwell (1962)	1987	1992
Dungeness A (1965)	1990	1995
Hinkley Point A (1965)	1990	1995
Hunterston A (1964)	Closing in 1990	—
Oldbury (1967)	1991	1997
Sizewell A (1966)	1991	1996
Trawsfynydd (1965)	1990	1995
Wylfa (1971)	1991	2001

Notes:
1. ( ) = Date of commissioning.
2. If licensees wish to extend the station's operation beyond the date shown in column 3, then, a further LTSR would have to be completed by the licensee and considered by the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) by that date.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encepholopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy for each county of England and Wales for the four-week period ended 16 January.

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

County	*Number*
Avon	14
Berkshire	2
Buckinghamshire	3
Cambridge	3
Cheshire	19
Cleveland	3
Clwyd	5
Cornwall	81
Cumbria	16
Derbys	8
Devon	85
Dorset	83
Dyfed	20
Essex	1
Gloucestershire	21
Gwent	2
Gwynedd	1
Hampshire	24
Hereford & Worcestshire	12
Hertfordshire	4
Isle of Wight	9
Kent	11
Lancashire	12
Leicestershire	26
Lincolnshire	4
Norfolk	2
Northamptonshire	3
Northumberland	1
Nottinghamshire	6
Oxon	11
Powys	11
Shropshire	15
Somerset	60
Staffordshire	11
Suffolk	12
Surrey	6
Sussex East	8
Sussex West	13
West Midlands	1
Warwickshire	8
Wiltshire	35
Yorkshire North	23
Yorkshire South	3
Yorkshire West	1
Total	699

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what number of animals were identified at *(a)* slaughterhouses and *(b)* livestock markets and for each of 1987, 1988 and 1989 as bovine spongiform encephalopathy suspects; and how many of those subsequently were confirmed as bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected.

Mr. Maclean: The information is available from 21 June 1988, when BSE became a notifiable disease, up to 30 September 1989, the end of the most recent quarter for which figures are currently available.

Period	*Slaughterhouses*		*Markets*	
	Reported	*Confirmed*	*Reported*	*Confirmed*
21 June 1988-31 December 1988	33	27	24	16
1 January 1989-30 September 1989	73	52	57	40

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the banning of ruminant-derived protein for use as animal feed for animals other than ruminants.

Mr. Maclean: I have received a number of representations seeking a ban on the feeding of ruminant derived protein to non-ruminants, and a number pointing out that there is, however, no scientific justification for such action.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that

foodstuffs imported into Britain do not contain the bovine offals currently banned from human consumption in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Such measures are unnecessary as BSE has not been confirmed in any other country except the Republic of Ireland, where the incidence is too low to justify a similar ban.

Livestock Welfare

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of livestock when slaughtered by religious methods he proposes not to implement; which would require primary legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government's response to the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on religious slaughter was published on 29 October 1987 (MAFF press release No. 326/87) and a copy is available in the Library of the House. This explains the Government's conclusions on each of the council's recommendations and the reasons for them.

Proposals for regulations to implement many of the council's recommendations were issued for public comment on 20 June 1989. Representations received are now being considered and regulations will be laid before Parliament in the near future.

Primary legislation is required to implement a council recommendation that deer should not be slaughtered by religious methods in abattoirs, although my understanding is that no such slaughter takes place. The legislation will be introduced as soon as the parliamentary programme permits.

Food Irradiation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what departmental representation there was at the international meeting on food irradiation organised through the international consultative group on food irradation, held in the United States between 27 November and 1 December.

Mr. Maclean: There was no departmental representation; the meeting was concerned solely with the harmonisation of regulations on trade in irradiated food between the countries on the continent of America in which the process is applied.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to offer new guidance concerning the disposal of organophosphate sheep dips; and if he has any proposals to ban the use of soakaways for this purpose.

Mr. Maclean: Sheep dip disposal is currently being reviewed by the pesticide disposal working group, which reports to the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides. Moreover sheep dip product licences—including organophosphates—are being included in a review of ectoparasiticide product licences commencing this year. In the light of the conclusions of these reviews I shall consider whether to revise existing guidance. Increased restrictions on the use of soakaways would be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Nitrates

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals to introduce maximum limits of nitrates permissible in winter vegetables grown in intensive growing systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Levels of nitrates in vegetables are kept under close review as part of the Government's ongoing programme of food surveillance. The committee on toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment has examined the results of this monitoring and concluded that any possible risk to health from dietary intake of nitrates is likely to be small. Accordingly, I have no proposals to introduce maximum limits.

Cattle Imports

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date he was notified of each of the bans imposed by those countries operating restrictions against the import of live cattle from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The table provides information in respect of those countries which at present do not permit the import of live cattle from the United Kingdom because of concerns about bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Country	*Date of notification*
Sweden	21 October 1988
Australia	1 December 1988
New Zealand	20 December 1988
Finland	4 January 1989
United States of America	24 July 1989
Member states of the European Community:	
(i) Cattle born before 18 July 1988	28 July 1989
(ii) Cattle more than 6 months of age	With effect from 1 March 1990
Israel	Not applicable[1]

[1] Israel has issued no licences for imports of cattle from the United Kingdom for a number of years.

Overfishing

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he is giving to the ruling by Sheriff Douglas Risk at Aberdeen sheriff court on 19 January that charges of overfishing are not a criminal offence under the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967; whether he has any plans to seek to amend current legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office.

United Kingdom Fishing Fleet

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the extent of the required reduction of the United Kingdom's fishing fleet in *(a)* percentage terms, *(b)* terms of gross registered tonnage and *(c)* engine power and approximate number of vessels under the multi-annual guidance programme over the next two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

	GRT		Engine power (kw)	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Active fleet size				
30 June 1989	165,878	—	849,032	—
Target reductions				
31 December 1990	150,336	9·4	785,340	7·6
31 December 1991	141,620	14·6	748,145	11·9

Notes:
1. Figures are based on commercially active fishing vessels.
2. Flags of convenience vessels are excluded.
3. Figures are currently being renegotiated with commision officials.
4. Vessels numbers are not required for MAGP purposes.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the size of the United Kingdom's fleet of active, commercial fishing vessels in each of the past seven years.

Mr. Curry: The size of the United Kingdom's fleet of active, commercial fishing vessels in each of the past seven years is as follows:

Year	Number of vessels
1982	6,797
1983	7,227
1984	7,584
1985	7,920
1986	8,166
1987	8,193
1988	8,125

Information for 1989 is not yet available. The figures have been taken from MAFF's annual publication "Sea Fisheries Statistic Tables" published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office and are as at 31 December of each year.

Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to include a site or sites in south Wales on the short list of locations for relocation of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce, Reading.

Mr. Curry: A site in south Wales has been shortlisted, along with sites in other parts of the United Kingdom, for the relocation of a major part of the work of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce a decision on the relocation of part or all of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce, Reading.

Mr. Curry: As soon as my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland, and for Northern Ireland and the Minister of Agriculture have concluded their consideration of the advice received from the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce.

Livestock Welfare

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of livestock—red meat animals—at the time of slaughter, he proposes not to implement; which would require primary legislation to implement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government's response to the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of red meat animals at slaughter was published on 20 August 1985 (MAFF Press Release No. 235) and a copy is available in the Library of the House. This explains the Government's conclusions on each of the council's recommendations and the reasons for them.

A number of the council's recommendations are included in proposals for regulations which were issued for public comment on 20 June 1989. Representations received are now being considered and regulations will be laid before Parliament in the near future.

Primary legislation is needed to:

require local authorities to designate an official to be responsible for welfare supervision in red meat slaughterhouses;

enable Ministers to issue directions to local authorities on supervision and enforcement matters relating to welfare;

give Ministers power to require slaughterhouse management to nominate a member of staff to be specifically responsible for animal welfare;

give Ministers powers to issue codes of practice with statutory backing on matters relating to welfare of animals in slaughterhouses;

add rabbits to the species covered by the welfare provisions of the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 and the Slaughter of Animals (Scotland) Act 1980;

require licences for slaughterhouses to be renewed on an annual basis in Scotland (this is already a requirement in England and Wales);

provide additional powers necessary for the training and licensing of slaughtermen.

Primary legislation will be introduced as soon as the parliamentary programme permits.

Quarantine

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if animals imported into the United Kingdom for experimentation purposes are subject to normal quarantine regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There are no exceptions to the general quarantine regulations.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the figures for the total numbers imported into the United Kingdom for experimentation purposes during 1989 of *(a)* dogs and *(b)* primates.

Mr. Maclean: During 1989 647 dogs and 3,671 primates were imported into the United Kingdom for research purposes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts over £92,500 have been let by his Department in the 1988-89 financial year and in the current financial year to date; and how many of these were *(a)* automatically renewed and *(b)* open to competition by advertisement throughout the European Community.

Mr. Cope: The number of contracts awarded by Northern Ireland Departments and covered by the provisions of the EC supplies directive, for which the current threshold is £92,000, was 23 in the 1988-89 financial year and 26 in the current financial year to date. Of these 11 were awarded following advertisement in the EC journal and 38 were considered to be exempt from advertising and may have been awarded to the previous supplier.

Police Liaison Committees

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many district councils in Northern Ireland have official or unofficial police liaison committees.

Mr. Cope: A total of 21 of the 26 district councils have police liaison committees.

Recruitment Advertising

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the amount expended on recruitment advertising for the last three years by each Northern Ireland Department and the total amount, together with a breakdown of the spending between *(a)* regional press, *(b)* national press, *(c)* specialist or periodical press and *(d)* other.

Mr. Cope: Recruitment of all permanent non-industrial staff for NI Departments is the responsibility of the Civil Service Commission for Northern Ireland and expenditure cannot be disaggregated. Total expenditure for the last three financial years for NI Departments and the NIO is given in the table.

The recruitment of industrial staff is usually done through job markets with some expenditure on local press advertising as follows:

Department	*1986-87* £	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £
DFP	Nil	Nil	Nil
DOE	175	175	50
DED	Nil	Nil	Nil
DENI	Nil	Nil	Nil
DHSS	Nil	Nil	5,290·81
DANI	1,525	2,001	1,667
NIO	Nil	Nil	Nil

Recruitment advertising costs incurred by the Civil Service Commission and the NIO

Financial Year ending	*Regional press (NI)* £	*National press (United Kingdom)* £	*Professional journals etc* £	*Other* £	*Total* £
31 March 1987	83,948·70	13,393·19	34,800·93	2,381·40	134,524·22
31 March 1988	84,301·05	20,722·09	38,771·50	Nil	143,794·72
31 March 1989	87,723·22	22,252·29	23,415·70	4,617·40	138,008·61

Bathing Water

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will announce the results of the survey of bathing water quality made in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The results for the survey carried out during the 1989 bathing season showed that all of the 16 identified bathing waters in Northern Ireland met the mandatory coliform bacteria standards of the EC bathing water directive. The corresponding figure for 1988 was 14.

The 1989 results for Northern Ireland are set out in summary form. Arrangements have been made to place a more detailed summary of the results in the Library and also to send copies to the Commission of the European Communities.

	Result
Magilligan	Pass
Castlerock	Pass
Portstewart	Pass
Portrush (Mill Strand)	Pass
Portrush (Curran Strand)	Pass
Ballycastle	Pass
Brown's Bay	Pass
Helen's Bay	Pass
Crawfordsburn	Pass
Ballyholme	Pass
Groomsport	Pass
Millisle	Pass
Newcastle	Pass
Cranfield (Nicholson's Strand)	Pass
Cranfield (Cranfield Bay)	Pass
Tyrella	Pass

RUC (Firearms Section)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civilian employees, and of what grades, are employed in the Royal Ulster Constabulary firearms section; what are their salaries; and what were the numbers, grades and salaries five years and 10 years ago.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable has informed me that the information on staffing levels and salaries as at 1 January 1990 and five and 10 years ago is as follows:

Grade	*Numbers*	*Salary £ (each)*
January 1990		
Executive Officer II	1	9,686
Administrative Officer	5	8,029
Administrative Assistant	27	6,529
Typist	2	6,754
Total	35	
January 1985		
Executive Officer II	1	7,481
Administrative Officer	3	5,748
Administrative Assistant	16	4,628
Total	20	
January 1980		
Administrative Officer	5	3,123
Administrative Assistant	21	2,600
Total	26	

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the reasons for the increase in cost of a new firearms certificate to the present level in January 1990.

Mr. Cope: Fees for firearms certificates are set so as to recover the costs of administering the licensing system, the largest single element of which is police staff costs. The fee for a new firearms certificate was increased from 1 January 1990 to reflect the increased costs since the fee was last set in 1986.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many firearms certificates have been issued to visitors to Northern Ireland in each of the last five years for *(a)* shotguns, *(b)* ·22 rifles, *(c)* rifles of a calibre larger than ·22 and *(d)* other firearms.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has informed me that the information is as follows:

At 31 December	*(a) shotguns*	*(b) ·22 rifles*	*(c) Full bore*	*(d) Other firearms*
1989	156	37	42	8
1988	70	29	13	6
1987	83	15	21	4
1986	108	4	7	3
1985	153	7	26	5

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many persons in Northern Ireland hold certificates as firearms dealers.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has informed me that there are 155 registered firearms dealers in Northern Ireland.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons in Northern Ireland, not being firearms dealers, have firearms certificates on which are listed more than 10 firearms which are a mixture of muzzle loading and cartridge firing weapons; whether such persons are treated as collectors of firearms; and what were the numbers of such persons five and 10 years ago or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has informed me that the information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many residents of *(a)* private residential homes, *(b)* private nursing homes, *(c)* National Health Service residential homes and *(d)* National Health Service nursing homes are in receipt of income support; and if he will give details for each health board unit of management.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The information in relation to *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* is not readily available and there are no Health Service nursing homes. The available figures are as follows:

Numbers of income support recipients in private and voluntary homes: May 1989

Board/unit of management	*In homes for persons in need*[1]	*In nursing homes*
Northern		
Antrim/Ballymena	84	139
Magherafelt/Cookstown	28	79
Coleraine/Ballymoney/Moyle	166	191
Larne/Carrickfergus/ Newtownabbey	42	259
Southern		
Armagh/Dungannon	74	119
Craigavon/Banbridge	10	132
Newry/Mourne	86	183
Eastern		
South Belfast	323	51
East Belfast/Castlereagh	102	72
North and West Belfast	172	242
Down	149	151
North Down/Ards	158	169
Lisburn	32	16
Western		
Omagh	10	37
Fermanagh	13	33
Londonderry/Limavady/Strabane	192	51
Totals	1,641	1,924

[1] Excluding Abbeyfield Homes.

Numbers of income support recipients in health and social services boards homes: May 1988, 980 (Not available by area. *Source:* 5 per cent. sample).

Post Office Counters Ltd.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether Post Office Counters Ltd. was requested, prior to the nominated date of 15 January 1990, to register with the Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland in accordance with the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 23 January 1990 at column *635*.

Cerebral Palsy

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of children born in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available, who have been diagnosed as having cerebral palsy.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* This information is not available centrally.

Mines

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list his powers in relation to the licensing of the opening or operation of mines in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* With the exception of precious metals the responsibility for the licensing of any prospecting or mining operations in Northern Ireland falls to the Department of Economic Development under the Mineral Development Act (NI) 1969. The Act vests ownership of most minerals in the Department and empowers it to grant prospecting licences and mining leases, licences, and permissions. Mining applications are subject, of course, to the normal planning procedures operated by the Department of the Environment (NI). The licensing of precious metals is dealt with by the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Brandywell Stadium

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the safety and fire regulations that apply to the Brandywell stadium.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 23 January]:* Duties are laid upon the employers of work people in the Brandywell stadium and upon the persons in control of the Brandywell stadium by the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978.

Regulations made under that order which the Department of Economic Development's health and safety inspectorate considers applicable to work activities at the Brandywell stadium are:—

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1979.
The Safety Signs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1981
The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982
The Petroleum—Spirit (Plastic Containers) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1983
The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1986.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Brandywell football ground was last inspected in regard to fire and safety regulations and if any improvements were required.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The last inspection of the Brandywell football ground by an inspector from the Department of Economic Development's health and safety inspectorate was on 8 April 1986. At this inspection it was confirmed that certain improvements had been made in compliance with recommendations arising out of an earlier inspection on 9 July 1985.

The last inspection by the Northern Ireland fire brigade was on 14 December 1989. No improvements were required.

Sporting Events (Disturbances)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those sporting events in Northern Ireland in 1989 at which there were disturbances either during the event or among supporters preceding or following the event which required action by the police; how many persons were arrested at each such disturbance; and what were the events and teams involved.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has informed me that the information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tourism

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show for each of the last three years the sums paid by the Government to each district council in Northern Ireland to encourage tourism; what sums for capital expenditure have been paid to each council for tourist amenities; and what are his projections for the current and future two years.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* Government assistance to district councils for tourism development takes the form of grants toward the cost of providing tourist amenities. The amounts paid in each financial year are as follows:

District council	*1986-87 actual* £	*1987-88 actual* £	*1988-89 actual* £	*1989-90 estimated* £
Antrim	0	7,602	0	53,030
Ards	151,367	64,654	83,290	119,596
Armagh	10,147	1,461	12,751	3,096
Ballymena	0	0	0	0
Ballymoney	1,875	0	8,772	59,639
Banbridge	3,532	0	0	4,156
Belfast	133,753	216,521	196,444	97,698
Carrickfergus	0	3,474	0	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	405,183	34,444	89,531	159,385
Cookstown	0	0	10,005	50,000
Craigavon	0	0	13,124	690
Derry	2,772	17,957	10,465	33,815
Down	58,807	14,571	95,044	123,591
Dungannon	2,176	20,329	20,602	54,523
Fermanagh	61,407	160,732	42,245	74,066
Larne	49,959	55,363	143,653	35,778
Limavady	50	10,910	51,990	93,393
Lisburn	0	0	0	12,000
Magherafelt	0	0	0	22,000
Moyle	99,288	52,633	0	0

District council	1986-87 actual £	1987-88 actual £	1988-89 actual £	1989-90 estimated £
Newry and Mourne	17,193	25,552	28,624	53,423
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0
North Down	11,070	3,787	0	14,682
Omagh	8,503	7,450	18,338	122,268
Strabane	0	655	18,588	45,512
TOTAL	1,017,082	698,095	843,472	1,232,341

Present estimates for the total expenditure for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are £1·17 million and £1·2 million respectively. Expenditure in respect of each council will depend on the extent and speed with which that council takes forward eligible projects.

Suckler Cows

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to what was the average gross margin for a suckler cow in Northern Ireland in the years 1984 to 1989; and what information he has as to the average net profit per cow.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 January 1990]*: Average gross margins for suckler cows for the years 1984-85 to 1988-89 are presented in the table.

Suckler cow gross margins (£s per cow)

Cow Type	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
Lowland	233	140	140	277	229
Original Less Favoured Area	232	191	180	253	299
New Less Favoured Area[1]	—	—	234	282	330

[1] Insufficient data in 1984-85 and 1985-86 to justify publication.
Source: The Northern Ireland Farm Business Survey.

An estimate of net profit per cow would require that farm fixed costs are allocated to individual enterprises. It is not possible to do this on a realistic basis.

Animal Feeds

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what safeguards have been implemented to ensure that imported grain which has been contaminated with lead or other substances dangerous to animal health will not be incorporated into animal feeds sold in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 January 1990]*: It is a requirement that animal feed, including imports and imported ingredients, comply with the Feeding Stuffs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1988. These regulations, which are enforced by inspectors of the Department of Agriculture, prescribe the maximum permitted limits for undesirable substances, including lead, in animal feed.

Students Unions

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums from public funds were paid to the student's union in each of the following institutions of higher education in Northern Ireland in the academic years 1987-88 and 1988-89, or financial years if more convenient *(a)* Queen's university, *(b)* University of Ulster, Coleraine, *(c)* University of Ulster, Jordanstown, *(d)* University of Ulster, Londonderry, *(e)* Stranmillis college, *(f)* St. Mary's college and *(g)* St. Joseph's college.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]*: The sums are as follows:

	Academic Years 1987-88 £	1988-89 £
(a) The Queen's University of Belfast[1]	464,162	358,315
(b-d) University of Ulster[2]	453,450	528,000
	Financial Years 1987-88 £	1988-89 £
(e) Stranmillis College	34,500	36,980
(f-g) St. Mary's College[3]	27,793	28,935

[1] At QUB there was an apparent decline in funding, but this reflects the rationalisation of overspending in a previous year.
[2] It is not possible to subdivide the amount of funding between the various campuses of the University.
[3] St. Joseph's college ceased to exist as a separate entity when it merged with St. Mary's college on 1 September 1985 to become St. Mary's college.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a separate audit is carried out into the costs of the firearms section of Royal Ulster Constabulary headquarters.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]*: No, but the firearms section records and associated accounts are open to audit by the National Audit Office in the same way as other accounting records maintained by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland.

SCOTLAND

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the future levels of hill livestock compensatory allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 23 January, column *641-42*.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure each year since 1986 on hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total expenditure in Scotland on hill livestock compensatory allowances in each year since 1986 was as follows:

	£ million
1986	43
1987	43
1988	44
1989	[1]45

[1] Provisional.

Local Authority Spending

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average increase in local authority spending in Scotland in each of the past two years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authority spending in Scotland showed an average increase of 8·3 per cent. in 1988-89 and a budgeted increase of 10·9 per cent. in 1989-90.

Local authorities have been warned that they cannot expect such increases to be endorsed through corresponding increases in central Government support. If they persist with such overspending it will lead inevitably to higher community charges for which they will be responsible and answerable to their local electorates.

Environmental Protection

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make funds available to local authorities for recycling and other environmental protection measures.

Mr. Rifkind: I support expenditure by local authorities through aggregate external finance, which assists the provision of the full range of local authority services. Within their environmental services recycling can become largely self-financing.

Marine Fish Farms

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many consents have been granted by each of the water authorities in the regions and islands for marine fish farms in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scotland, responsibility for aquatic pollution control and issuing consents for discharges to water lies with the river purification authorities, the seven mainland river purification boards and the three islands councils. The information requested by the hon. Member is not held centrally, but is recorded in the public registers maintained by the RPAs under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the number of people who were classified as long-term unemployed in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in January 1980, January 1983, January 1989 and for the most recent date for which figures are available;

(2) how many and what percentage of claimants in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole were classified as long-term unemployed people at the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: The available information is given in the table. Unemployment is analysed by duration quarterly and October 1989 is the latest date for which information is available on the number of long-term unemployed. Direct comparisons of unemployment by duration since 1979 are not possible because of the changes in October 1982 from a count of registrants at jobcentres to a count based on unemployed claimants and because of other changes in the coverage of the count.

Long-term unemployed[1]

	Claimants				
	January 1980 Registrants	*January 1983*	*January 1989*	*October 1989*	*October 1989 as a percentage of all claimants*
Scotland	46,915	119,874	106,190	86,192	40
Strathclyde	29,393	75,242	63,515	53,266	52
Greenock and Port Glasgow[2]	29,393	75,242	3,123	2,498	49

Source: Department of Employment.
[1] Unemployed for more than 52 weeks.
[2] Figures on the number unemployed analysed by Parliamentary Constituency are available only from June 1983.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of the unemployment statistics for Greenock and Port Glasgow by district electoral division, or on another convenient basis; and what were the comparable figures for 1988.

Mr. Lang: The table gives a breakdown of the number unemployed in each ward in Inverclyde district in December 1988 and 1989.

Ward Name	*1988*	*1989*
Kilmacolm	125	90
Port Glasgow East	568	424
Port Glasgow South	470	377
Clune Brae	449	353
Port Glasgow West	307	254
Gibshill	623	458
Blairmore	339	284
Bellville	388	330
Greenock East Central	685	554
Broomhill	269	204

Ward Name	*1988*	*1989*
Gateside	259	243
Bow	444	374
Larkfield	392	311
Upper Larkfield	429	314
Greenock South	386	261
Greenock West Central	244	165
Greenock West End	175	108
Cardwell Bay	224	157
Gourock	249	207
Firth	206	159

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of unemployment expressed as a percentage, according to the latest available figures for *(a)* the Greenock travel-to-work area, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; and what were the comparable figures 10 years ago.

Mr. Lang: The table shows the level of unemployment expressed as a percentage for the Greenock travel-to-work area, Strathclyde and Scotland as a whole, calculated on the narrow base, for December 1979 and 1989.

The figures are affected by the changes in the compilation of the counts and are not directly comparable.

	December 1979	*December 1989*
	per cent.	per cent.
Greenock	10·8	15·1
Strathclyde	9·5	12·1
Scotland	8·0	9·7

Council House Sales

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council properties have been sold to council house tenants in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past five years; and what proportion of the total stock of council properties in *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* these sales represent in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 March 1989, *Official Report*, volume 149, column *36*.

Updated information for 1988 and for 1989 is given in the table:

Sales to council house tenants in Inverclyde, Strathclyde and Scotland 1988-89

	Number of sales	*Percentage of stock sold*[1]
1988		
Inverclyde	281	1·5
Strathclyde	10,963	2·5
Scotland	22,622	2·7
1989		
January-September		
Inverclyde	223	1·2
Strathclyde[2]	9,415	2·2
Scotland[2]	21,125	2·6

Source: SDD S3 and Rent Returns

[1] Stock at 30 September of previous year used in calculation.

[2] Cumnock & Doon Valley and Monklands returns outstanding for July-September 1989.

Inverclyde Initiative

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs have been created by the Inverclyde initiative in the Inverclyde area; and, of these, how many are filled by women in full-time employment.

Mr. Lang: The Inverclyde initiative aims to stimulate local economic activity and create opportunities for employment. It does not itself directly create new jobs. Information is not therefore available in the form requested.

However, total jobs created by projects which have been assisted by the Inverclyde initiative between March 1985 and March 1989 are approximately 3,100.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the total amount spent by the Scottish Development Agency, by way of the Inverclyde initiative; and if he will break down the expenditure on the Inverclyde initiative, showing on what it has been spent.

Mr. Lang: Expenditure by the Scottish Development Agency from March 1985 to December 1989 is set out in the table.

	£ million
Environmental improvements	4·5
Acquisition and preparation of sites for industrial/commercial development	10·7
Acquisition/development of industrial/premises	1·8
Total	17·0

Social Work Training

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many social workers have successfully undertaken training programmes, approved by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, in order to qualify as mental health officers under the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 in each of the regional and islands' councils' social work departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Detailed information in the form requested is not yet available. The following social work staff are estimated by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work to have completed a training programme approved, or accepted as comparable to a programme approved, by the council in relation to the requirements of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, as at 31 December 1989.

	Numbers
Lothian and Borders Training Consortium	
Borders Regional Council Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council Lothian Regional Council	88
Northern Training Consortium	
Grampian Regional Council Highland Regional Council Orkney Islands Council Shetland Islands Council Western Islands Council	44
Tayforth Training Consortium	
Central Regional Council Fife Regional Council Tayside Regional Council	62

	Numbers
West of Scotland Training Consortium	
Strathclyde Regional Council	212

Pesticide Research

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he has now received the findings of the research into the effects of Nuvan 500 EC undertaken by members of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries marine laboratory in Aberdeen; if he will place any publications or reports concerning this research in the Library; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has received the findings of the research into less-toxic or non-toxic alternatives to the pesticide Nuvan 500 EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: A wide range of studies is being undertaken by DAFS, and other organisations, on the use and effects of Aquagard (formerly Nuvan 500 EC) and on possible alternative treatments for sea lice infestation of farmed salmon.

A report on the toxicity of Aquagard for other species has been prepared by DAFS scientists and will be published shortly. A copy of this report and any subsequent publications of work by DAFS scientists will be placed in the Library.

Work is in progress on identification and assessment of possible chemical alternatives to Aquagard. The work which is being partly funded by the salmon farming industry is not yet complete. I gave details of other work on other alternatives in my written replies to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 22 November.

Urban Aid Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the total allocation for the financial year 1990-91 under the urban aid programme, *(b)* the amount awarded to voluntary associations within that figure and *(c)* the proportion of the overall amount which is allocated for voluntary associations in respect of (i) Inverclyde, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Lang: The Government's public expenditure decisions, recently announced, will enable approved urban programme expenditure in Scotland in 1990-91 to rise to a total of £68·989 million. This represents a considerable increase over the 1989-90 programme.

Some £39·6 million of this will be taken up by existing projects. The balance will be taken up partly by adjustments to the costs and expenditure phasing of projects already approved, but mainly by new approvals arising from the 1990-91 competition, currently in progress.

Of the £39·6 million already allocated for 1990-91 some £23·1 million, 58·3 per cent. is for projects managed by community and voluntary groups. Approximately 64·7 per cent. of this amount is for projects in Strathclyde and 2·7 per cent. for projects in Inverclyde.

Argyll and Clyde Health Board

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of the chairman and members of the Argyll and Clyde health board, their periods of office and the organisations from which they were recruited, selected and appointed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health board members are appointed as individuals on the basis of their skills and experience. The table gives the names of the chairman and members of Argyll and Clyde health board, their period of appointment and information on any nominating organisation or individual.

Name	*Date of First Appointment*	*Nominated by*
Appointed to 31 March 1991		
Mr. J. D. Ryan CBE *(Chairman)*	1 April 1979	
Mr. J. D. Barnett	1 April 1987	Scottish Episcopal Church, Diocese of Argyll and the Isles.
Mr. A. H. Brabender	1 April 1983	Scottish Conservative Party
Mr. J. Campbell	1 April 1983	Paisley and District Branch of Confederation of Health Service Employees
Mr. L. Capaldi	12 January 1978	Mr. H. Ewing MP
Mr. G. M. Deuchars	1 April 1987	Bank of Scotland
Dr. S. G. McAlpine	1 April 1983	Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons
Mrs. L. C. McKichan	1 April 1987	British Red Cross Society: Health Board
Mr. G. McMillan	1 April 1987	Regional Council
Mr. R. R. Reid	1 April 1983	Argyll and Bute District council and Argyll and Bute Local Health Council
Appointed to 31 March 1993		
Mr. N. M. Faccenda	1 April 1980	Mr. John Mackay
Mrs. M. A. Foggie	1 April 1985	Inverclyde Local Health Council
Dr. A. M. Kelly	1 April 1985	Association of Clinical Biochemists
Mrs. J. C. Le Roux	1 April 1981	Cancer Research Committee
Dr. J. Moffat	1 April 1981	Royal College of Psychiatrists
GENERAL MANAGER		
Mr. I. C. Smith	1 April 1989	

Scottish Development Agency

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of the chairman and directors of the Scottish Development Agency, their periods of office, their annual remuneration and the organisations and associations from which they were recruited, selected and appointed.

Mr. Lang: The information is set out in the table.

Name	*Appointment*	*Term of Office* *From*	*To*	*Remuneration* £
Sir David Nickson	Chairman	1 January 1989 (Member, 1 July 1988 to 31 December 1988)	31 December 1990	35,870
Sir Douglas Hardie CBE JP	Deputy Chairman	3 February 1981 (Member, 15 December 1978 to 2 February 1981)	31 December 1990	18,550
Iain Robertson	Chief Executive	1 September 1987	31 August 1992	57,000
James S. Gordon CBE	Member	1 January 1981	30 June 1990	5,065
Sir Robert Cowan	Member	1 February 1982	31 July 1992	Nil
Ian C. Wood CBE	Member	1 April 1984	30 June 1990	5,065
Sir Peter Main	Member	1 January 1986	31 December 1990	5,065
George F. Robertson FRICS	Member	1 January 1987	31 December 1990	5,065
Gavin H Laird CBE	Member	1 January 1987	31 December 1990	5,065
Sir Graham Hills FRSC, FRSE	Member	1 January 1988	31 December 1991	5,065
Jean McFadden JP, DL	Member	1 January 1989	31 December 1990	5,065

Individuals are appointed to the agency board in recognition of the personal contribution they can make to the work of the agency and not as representatives of particular bodies. They do, of course, bring to bear experience in relevant fields of activity, including industry, property, small businesses, higher education, local government and trades unions, and appointments are made with a view to having an appropriate balance of experience and interests.

Housing Tenure

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the proportion of different forms of housing tenure in Scotland in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is published in Housing and Construction Statistics, part 2, table 2.22—which is available in the House Library.

Sea Bed Monitoring

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the monitoring of the sea bed immediately adjacent to the wreckage of Piper Alpha and the surrounding area.

Mr. Lang: As I indicated in my previous reply to the hon. Member on 25 July last year (volume 157, columns *645-46*) the results of initial monitoring work by DAFS scientists were published and copies of the reports placed in the Library.

In addition, as part of the abandonment programme approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy under the Petroleum Act 1987, Occidental Petroleum (Caledonia) Ltd. and its co-venturers have been required to carry out surveys to determine the disposition of the debris, to examine the remains of the installation for petroleum leakage and to sample water sediment and fish for the presence of PCBs and radioactivity. The results of these surveys have been received and views on them will shortly be invited from representatives of the fishing industry and the Nature Conservancy Council. It will then be for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to decide what further action may be necessary under the abandonment programme in the light of the results of the survey, the views of interested parties and expert advice, including that of Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland marine laboratory, Aberdeen and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate.

DAFS will continue to monitor the area around Piper Alpha as part of its general monitoring of the environmental quality of sea waters around Scotland.

Victim Support Schemes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Scottish Office funding for victim support schemes in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office has assisted the Scottish Association of Victim Support Schemes for the past five years through a grant under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Scottish Office funding for the victim support movement is in line with the Government's policy to improve services to victims of crime generally. Funding has risen from £600 in 1984-85 to £286,000 in 1989-90. In Strathclyde 10 co-ordinator posts in local schemes have been funded by this means.

Apart from a special grant of £13,000 in March 1989 to meet a specific financial difficulty, no central Government grant has been paid to the Strathclyde association (a regional body representing local schemes in Strathclyde). Strathclyde regional council provides significant funding to the Strathclyde association and actively supports the objectives of the Scottish association.

Prison Building Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current prison building programme and renovations to prisons.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current prison building programme is, at nearly £14 million for 1989-90, the largest to date. The projects included in the programme are carefully prioritised to ensure that the most urgent work is carried out first. This includes, in particular, work relating to security, health and safety, hygiene, medical provision and the improvement of inmate and staff accommodation.

Manufacturing Investment

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table, taking 1979 as 100, of investment in real terms in manufacturing in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Lang: The table gives estimated gross domestic fixed capital formation in £ million at current prices by manufacturing industry in Scotland in each year between 1977 and 1987, the latest year for which figures are available. It is not possible to provide estimates in real terms.

Gross domestic fixed capital formation by manufacturing industry in Scotland

	£ millions
1977	491
1978	523
1979	561
1980	645
1981	586
1982	541
1983	470
1984	597
1985	861
1986	788
1987	738

Source: Central Statistical Office.

Ambulance Dispute

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the costs to date to each of Scotland's police forces caused by the industrial dispute in the ambulance service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Police forces in Scotland have responded to over 6,700 calls for assistance since the current dispute in the Scottish ambulance service began.

No claims for reimbursement of the costs incurred have yet been submitted by the police forces concerned to the Common Services Agency.

School Meals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the change in the take-up of school meals, since 1986, in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Lang: Information about school meals in Strathclyde region is collected on an education division basis and is not available separately for Inverclyde. Details on the take-up of meals in Strathclyde and Scotland during the period 1986-89 can be found in the annual reports of the school meal census, copies of which are in the Library.

Crack

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the number of prosecutions concerned with the trafficking in or possession of the drug crack in each of the past two years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no seizures of "crack" recorded by the police in Scotland. The available information on prosecutions relating to cocaine, of which "crack" is a derivative, are published in "Statistics of the misuse of drugs: seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1988—Scotland Tables", a copy of which will shortly be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Manouchehr Tehrani

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received regarding the dismissal of Mr. Manouchehr Tehrani from his employment as a consultant-surgeon at the Inverclyde royal hospital, by the Argyll and Clyde health board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None. Mr. Tehrani's law agents have, however, intimated that they are taking their client's instructions concerning future action relating to his appeal against dismissal. A decision is awaited.

Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Industry

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of people employed in the shipbuilding and marine engineering industry in Scotland in each year from 1979.

Mr. Lang: The table gives the available information, from the censuses of employment in 1981, 1984 and 1987, showing the total number of people employed in the shipbuilding and repairing industry in Scotland in September of each year. There is no comparable information available for 1979.

Employees in employment in Shipbuilding and Repairing[1] in Scotland

	Thousands
September 1981	31·2
September 1984	22·2
September 1987	16·3

Source: Censuses of employment.
[1] Activity heading 3610 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.

Offshore Fabrication Yards

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of people employed in the offshore fabrication yards in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Lang: The table shows estimates of employment in the major offshore fabrication yards in Scotland in June each year from 1980 to 1989.

June	*Employment*
1980	6,420
1981	8,036
1982	9,392
1983	8,425
1984	6,684
1985	4,941
1986	6,817
1987	4,719
1988	2,426
1989	4,052

Source: Training agency.

Kelvin Central plc

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will provide details of the criteria used in selecting the in-house bid for Kelvin Central plc to receive financial assistance from the Scottish Transport Group;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 22 January, why the Scottish Transport Group decided not to provide financial assistance to the employee-led bid for Kelvin Central plc.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Financial assistance was made available by the Scottish Transport Group to the management-employee team led by the managing director of the company in the light of information supplied by the team about the shareholding structure and financing arrangements proposed for their bid. No request for assistance has been received for any other employee-based group.

White Fish Quota Allocation

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail both the white fish quota allocation, by species and areas, and the final catch for the non-sector fishing boats, by species and area, for 1989.

Mr. Lang: The table shows the final allocations made and provisional figures for landings by non-sector vessels for the eight white fish stocks for which there were sectoral allocations in 1989.

	Non-sector allocation for 1989	*Non-sector landings in 1989*[1]
North Sea [IIa(EC), IV]		
Cod	7,901	6,843
Haddock	6,892	6,672
Whiting	5,361	2,849
Saithe	982	853
West of Scotland [Vb(EC), VI(EC)]		
Cod	799	816
Haddock	3,590	2,674
Whiting	1,498	704
Saithe	351	239

[1] Provisional.

Fisheries Conservation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the implications of the Aberdeen sheriff court judgment of 19 January for fisheries conservation policy.

Mr. Lang: The Government are still studying the text of the judgment. Changes may be necessary in the wording of fishing vessel licences and in the basis on which prosecutions for certain categories of offence are brought before the courts. However, alleged breaches of the quotas made to individual vessels by fisheries departments will still be reported for prosecution.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is giving to the ruling by Sheriff Douglas Risk at Aberdeen sheriff court on 19 January that overfishing charges are not a criminal offence under the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967 as amended by the Sea Fish Licensing Order 1983; what action he intends to take to amend current legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The sheriff found that exceeding the allocation made in respect of an individual vessel should be regarded as a contravention of the limitations of fishing vessel licences under section 4(5) of the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967, rather than a contravention of the conditions included in fishing vessel licences under section 4(6) of the above Act. He further found that section 4(6) of the Act could not be regarded as subsuming section 4(5). This judgment has implications for the wording of fishing vessel licences and for the basis on which certain kinds of prosecutions are brought, and the Government are considering these urgently. However, alleged breaches of the quotas made to individual vessels by fisheries departments will still be reported for prosecution. In his judgment, the sheriff acknowledged that prosecutions might be brought under different subsections of the Act or that other steps might be taken to ensure that allocations are adhered to.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each health board and for Scotland as a whole the number of *(a)* acute beds and *(b)* non-acute beds for each year since 1979.

Mr. Rifkind: The information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Bathing Waters

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the results of the survey of bathing water quality made in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The results of the monitoring carried out by river purification boards in 1989 showed that 16 of the 23 identified Scottish waters met the mandatory standards for coliform bacteria set by the European Community bathing water directive, as compared with 12 in the 1988 bathing season.

While this improvement is encouraging, the effects of the better weather in 1989 are likely to have been a factor in the results. In the longer term, progress will be founded on the capital works programme for which my right hon. and learned Friend announced increased provision in December 1989, with the specific objective of enabling water authorities to accelerate their spending on water and sewerage projects, and in particular to meet the target of compliance with the directive's standards at 95 per cent. of bathing waters by the mid-1990s and full compliance within 10 years.

The 1989 results for Scotland are set out in the table. A more detailed summary of the results is being placed in the Library, and the results will also be made known to the Commission of the European Communities.

	Result
Nairn (East beach)	Pass
Cullen	Pass
Fraserburgh	Pass
Aberdeen	Pass
Montrose	Pass
Arbroath	Fail
Carnoustie	Fail
St. Andrew's (West Sands)	Pass
Kinghorn (Pettycur)	Pass
Aberdour (Silversands)	Pass
Gullane	Pass
North Berwick (Milsey Bay)	Pass
Yelowcraigs	Pass
Dunbar (Belhaven)	Pass
Pease Bay	Pass
Sandyhills	Pass

	Result
Girvan	Pass
Turnberry	Fail
Ayr (South beach)	Fail
Prestwick	Fail
Troon (South beach)	Pass
Irvine-Gailes (New Town)	Fail
Saltcoats/Ardrossan (South beach)	Fail

Illegal Dumping

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he takes to monitor the dumping of asbestos in the river Clyde off Cloch point; and what information he has on what other dangerous waste or products have been dumped there.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* The dumping of waste at sea is subject to licences, under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, issued by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. No licences have been issued for disposal of asbestos at sea. Licences are issued by DAFS, however, for the disposal at sea of dredge spoil from Clyde navigation channels.

For the dump site near Cloch point, licence holders are required to submit details of the material they intend to dump and to carry out sampling and analysis of individual consignments for contaminants including asbestos. This process has revealed only trace amounts of asbestos contamination at the Cloch point site and the levels recorded are not thought to present any threat to human or marine life.

Scrutiny of applications and monitoring of dumping operations are carried out in accordance with international obligations of the United Kingdom under the Oslo convention on dumping of material at sea and the Government's commitment to apply to all United Kingdom waters principles laid down in the ministerial declaration of the second North sea conference. Annual reports on dumping operations are submitted to the commission of the Oslo convention.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Crashes

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the level of training and length of experience required before aircrew can take part in Royal Air Force low-flying exercises; and what was the level of training and experience of the aircrew involved in crashes during such exercises during the last two years.

Mr. Neubert: Aircrew are not permitted to take part in RAF exercises, including low-flying exercises, until they have received appropriate training and have demonstrated that they possess the requisite skills. This was the case for all aircrew involved in major accidents during such exercises over the last two years.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft crashes have taken place in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* north-east England and *(d)* north-west England over the past 10 years.

Mr. Neubert: There have been the following major accidents involving British military aircraft since 1 January 1980:

	Number
Wales	[1]18
Scotland	21
North-east England	[1]17
North-west England	5

[1] Each figure includes one aircraft damaged while on the ground.

Near Miss

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the near miss involving an RAF Tornado and flight BA5950 on Friday 19 January.

Mr. Neubert: An air miss report has been filed with the Civil Aviation Authority by the captain of a Boeing 737 aircraft, following an incident on Friday 19 January. The report is being investigated in the normal way. Until the investigation is complete, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Greenham and Crookham Commons

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) of the parcels of land at Greenham common or Crookham common acquired by compulsory purchase if he will specify *(a)* the details of the land acquired *(b)* the names of the vendors, *(c)* the date or dates of acquisition, *(d)* the statutory authority used for the purchases and *(e)* the consultative procedures carried out prior to acquisition;

(2) which parts of Greenham common and Crookham common were purchased under compulsory powers; and which were purchased by voluntary agreement with the vendor by his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No parts of Greenham and Crookham commons were purchased under compulsory powers by the Ministry of Defence. Land was requisitioned under emergency powers during the last war and the freeholds were later acquired by agreement.

Main Battle Tank

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what studies have been carried out to evaluate the M1 Abrams as a replacement main battle tank for the United Kingdom;

(2) what studies have been carried out to evaluate the Leopard 2 as a replacement main battle tank for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Clark: By the time of a decision on the tank to replace the Chieftain tank, each of the contenders will have been subjected to a process of detailed assessment against our requirement.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has made any revision to the United Kingdom's requirement for main battle tanks in the light of recent events in eastern Europe.

Mr. Alan Clark: We keep our investment in all weapons systems, including main battle tanks, under constant review.

Soviet Military Doctrine

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies he has commissioned into the purported change of Soviet military doctrine from an offensive to a defensive one.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We welcome the recent shift in emphasis in Soviet military doctrine towards defensive objectives. In consultation with our allies we are studying closely statements by senior Soviet spokesmen on the subject, and will continue to watch with interest the evolution of Soviet views on "reasonable sufficiency" in defence. We are also monitoring the extent to which force structures are modified to reflect changes in doctrine.

Armed Forces (Re-enlistment)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to encourage re-enlistment in the armed forces in an effort to combat reduced manpower projections for the 1990s; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All three services encourage the reenlistment of ex-service personnel. It is their practice to advise those leaving of the opportunities and the methods for re-enlistment. They also approach selected ex-service personnel to remind them of the possibilities which exist for re-enlistment.

Laser Systems

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to see that laser dazzle sight systems are fitted to all United Kingdom destroyers and frigates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is our policy to ensure that all HM ships are fitted with equipment appropriate to their role and theatre of operations.

Chinook Support Helicopter

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has instructed any evaluation of the Boeing CH-47 Chinook support helicopter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Boeing CH-47 Chinook helicopter is already in service with the RAF. Its capability is kept under regular review.

WALES

Exhibitions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the exhibitions of paintings, photographs and sculpture which he has visited in an official capacity since 1987.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have visited the following exhibitions since June 1987.

Date	*Exhibition*	*Venue*
12 August 1987	Welsh Folk Museum	St. Fagans, Nr. Cardiff
12 August 1987	National Museum of Wales	Cardiff
22 October 1987	"Cadw Collection" launch	Institute of Contemporary Arts
22 October 1987	"Success by Design Exhibition"	Henry Moore Gallery, Royal College of Art
12 November 1987	Save the Children Fund "Treasures of Wales"	Cardiff Castle
10 October 1988	"Jack Jones Recent Paintings of Wales"	Stepton Bartley Gallery
28 February 1989	Paintings by Peter Scott	33 New Bond Street
13 March 1989	Opening of Exhibition of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School Paintings	Cathays Park, Cardiff
11 September 1989	Paintings by David Carpanini	Rhondda Heritage Museum
14 November 1989	Oriel Gallery	Cardiff

Chernobyl Contamination

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether his Department will launch a comprehensive aerial survey into the effects of post-Chernobyl contamination in north Wales.

Mr. Grist: No. It is unlikely that such a survey would add significantly to the data provided through existing monitoring arrangements.

Hill Farmers

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the average income level of hill farmers in each year since 1986.

Mr. Peter Walker: Average farm income figures for hill and upland (LFA) farms for years 1986 and 1987 have been published in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom:

1988." Similar information for later years is due to be published, early next month, in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom: 1989."

Water Act Authorisations

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many *(a)* consents and *(b)* authorisations have been made subject to any conditions in accordance with section 152 (4) or (5) of the Water Act 1989;

(2) how many *(a)* consents and *(b)* authorisations he has made for the disposal of land, or rights or interests in or over any land, in accordance with section 152 (3) of the Water Act 1989;

(3) how many requests he has received for his *(a)* consent or *(b)* general authorisation for the disposal of land, or of any interest or right in or over any land, in accordance with section 152 (2) of the Water Act 1989;

(4) if he will list the location of all land, or the nature and location of any right or interest in or over any land, which has been subject to a request for consent for disposal in accordance with section 152 (2) of the Water Act 1989, specifying which have received his consent or general authorisation under section 152 (4), and what if any conditions were attached under section 152 (4) and (5).

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend has consented, under section 152 (2) and (3) of the Water Act 1989, to the disposal by Dwr Cymru Cyfyngedig of one parcel of land forming a substantial part of the Elan Valley estate in Powys, Mid Wales.

Under section 152 (4), my right hon. Friend gave his consent subject to the condition that disposal was to a charitable trust whose objectives are identified in the conditions of its trust deed.

Water Act Covenants

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions he has had an opportunity to enter into a convenant with a company holding an appointment under chapter I of part II of the Water Act 1989 for the purposes set out in section 152 (7) of that Act; how many convenants have been entered into; on how many occasions he has declined to enter into such covenants; and what were his reasons in each case.

Mr. Grist: None.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the impact of mad cow disease on Wales in 1990.

Mr. Peter Walker: Bovine spongiform encephalopathy is expected to continue to affect cattle in Wales in 1990 at approximately the present level. Precautionary measures have been taken to safeguard human health.

Pig Producers

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pig producers went out of business in Wales between 1980 and 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information is not available in the form requested. The numbers of holdings classified as being of specialist pig, and mixed pig and poultry, types in 1980 and 1988 (the latest year for which figures are available) are shown in the following table:

Number of Holdings

	Specialist pigs	*Mixed pigs and poultry*
1980	143	270
1988	84	105

The figures refer to statistically significant agricultural holdings only.

Urban Programme

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the total allocation for 1990-91 under the urban programme, *(b)* the amount allocated for voluntary organisations within that figure and *(c)* the percentage of the total figure which is allocated for voluntary organisations in respect of (i) the local authorities of South Glamorgan, (ii) the county of South Glamorgan, (iii) the city of Cardiff, (iv) the borough of the Vale of Glamorgan and (v) any other local authorities in South Glamorgan.

Mr. Grist: The information as requested is shown in the following table:

Urban programme	
(a) Total 1990-91 urban programme allocation	£29,187,000
(b) Total allocated to voluntary organisations	£4,493,205
(c) Percentage of voluntary organisations share allocated to:—	
(i) local authorities of South Glamorgan	15·4 per cent.
(ii) South Glamorgan County Council	8·5 per cent.
(iii) Cardiff City Council	6·1 per cent.
(iv) Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council	0·8 per cent.

Family Practitioner Committees

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what considerations are taken into account in deciding the appointment of the general managers of family practitioner committees.

Mr. Grist: In recruiting general managers, the overriding consideration for the employing authorities must be to identify and appoint the best qualified candidates. In making their individual choices FPCs will have been particularly anxious to secure managers able to undertake the additional tasks arising from the White Papers "Promoting Better Health" and "Working for Patients".

Community Health Councils

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that community health councils will have a role to play in ensuring public participation in the planning of health care services.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's proposals for the restructuring of community health councils in Wales, which are currently out to consultation, do not envisage any change in their primary role. They will continue to monitor the quality of services and comment on issues relating to changing patterns of service which have a bearing on the welfare of patients. The consultation

document makes it clear that CHCs are expected to provide the major consumer voice on local health service issues. The proposals are intended to strengthen and focus that consumer voice and provide a more strategic overview of DHA and FPC activity from the consumer perspective.

Health Planning Forum

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to include representatives of consumers on the Welsh health planning forum.

Mr. Grist: Members of the planning forum are selected for their personal contribution rather than as representatives of a particular interest. Nonetheless, the forum sub-groups being established to develop work in the key areas of health gain and people-centred services will have a user input; and we are sympathetic to the forum itself including an explicit consumer voice.

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consult the Welsh counties committee before setting *(a)* the time-limit for transitional arrangements and *(b)* the permanent formula for calculating school staff salary budgets under local financial management.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Advice on the transition arrangements and formula funding is contained in circular 36/88. The Welsh counties committee was included in the list of organisations which were invited to comment on the draft circular.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will extend the proposed transitional period to the year 2000 for variations according to actual, and not average, staff salary bills, in the staff salary component of local financial management schemes in maintained schools.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There are no plans for a general extension of the transition period beyond April 1994. We shall, however, look sympathetically at proposals to extend the transition period selectively for schools which would otherwise be faced with annual reductions of 1 per cent. or more in their total budgets because their staff costs are above the LEA average.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to allow county councils to set a school staff salary formula under local financial management, which reflects actual salary costs in individual schools.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Our position on calculating teacher salary costs in primary schools was outlined in my reply on 20 April last to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard). Secondary schools' budgets will be based on average teachers' salary costs. This is because to fund the actual salary costs of individual schools would mean funding schools according to numbers of teachers rather than numbers of pupils. This would be counter to the policy aim of putting pupil numbers at the heart of funding.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to allow each county council local discretion in setting the formula for the staff salary component under local financial management in maintained schools.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Each LEA was required to devise its own formula having regard to local needs and circumstances and after consultation with the governing body and head teacher of all the schools that will be covered by its LMS scheme. The formula must be based on an assessment of schools' objective needs and conform to the requirements of the Education Reform Act and the guidance in circular 36/88.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that no Welsh health authority implements a decision to close a geriatric hospital on a temporary basis without full consultation with the appropriate county social services department and voluntary organisations;

(2) if he will make it his policy to treat all proposed temporary hospital closures in South Glamorgan as though they were proposals for permanent hospital closures, for the purpose of the consultation procedure laid down.

Mr. Grist: We have no plans to change the present policy in respect of hospital closures in this context. This recognises that temporary closures can be part of the day-to-day management of the resources of a health authority and an issue for local decision. None the less, any such closure amounting to a substantial change in service is subject to such advance consultation as is reasonably possible with the relevant community health council. We would always expect health authorities to give full and careful consideration to the needs of patients when making alternative provision for them.

Inflation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to recompense health authorities for the financial year 1990-91 for the underestimation by the Government of the rate of inflation for 1989 as measured by the Government's published retail price index;

(2) what financial assistance he will make available to South Glamorgan health authority to make good its published estimated financial deficit for the year 1990-91;

(3) what proposals he has for recompensing health authorities drawing up their budgets for the next financial year for the underestimation of inflation, both as measured by the retail price index and by the sectoral health service price index in the year just finished.

Mr. Grist: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), on 11 January. He will note that the recurrent revenue cash increase for hospital and community health services in Wales is 8·2 per cent. and, in addition, health authorities are expected to realise, as a minimum, a further 1·3 per cent. from new cash-releasing cost improvement and income-generation schemes. This gives an effective increase in resources of at least 9·5 per cent.

The estimated excess cost of inflation to be met by authorities in 1989-90 was 1·72 per cent. The recurrent effect of this leaves an increase of almost 7·8 per cent. available for hospital and community health services in Wales in 1990-91 which represents a real terms increase of

nearly 3 per cent. after taking account of the 5 per cent. forecast of general inflation given in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.

The figures will vary as between authorities in Wales depending on the funding they receive for centrally directed developments and the distribution of equalisation provision in accordance with the latest formula assessment relative to resource requirements. The latter is included in the figures given for initial allocations to authorities in my earlier reply.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place copies in the Library of the correspondence between his Department and the South Glamorgan health authority regarding financial recompense in the setting of the authority's 1990-91 budget for the underestimation of the rate of inflation in the current year.

Mr. Grist: Apart from follow-up action to the annual review meeting which is referred to in a separate reply given to the hon. Gentleman today there has been no correspondence between the Department and South Glamorgan health authority regarding the funding of the excess costs of 1989-90 inflation.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place copies in the Library of the minutes of meetings between his Department and Welsh health authorities regarding financial recompense in the setting of the authorities 1990-91 budgets for the underestimation of the rate of inflation in the current year.

Mr. Grist: I presume the hon. Gentleman is referring to the annual review meetings between the Department and Welsh health authorities which were held during the autumn and which included discussion of authorities' 1989-90 financial positions. By mutual agreement these meetings were not minuted, but points of action arising are being pursued with individual authorities. Where authorities projected overspending due to higher than expected inflation during the current financial year, they were reminded of the need to maintain budgetary control and requested to provide details of how they planned to restore financial balance.

School Staff Salary Budgets

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the formula for calculating school staff salary budgets under local financial management for maintaned schools.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have received a number of representations from local education authorities, governing bodies and head teachers of schools, and teacher unions.

South Glamorgan Health Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet the chairman and general manager of South Glamorgan health authority; and what matters he expects to discuss.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to meet the chairman and general manager of South Glamorgan health authority.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each district health authority and for Wales as a whole the numbers of *(a)* acute beds and *(b)* non-acute beds for each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist: The information is shown in the following table:

Average daily available beds

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Acute:										
Clwyd	1,420·5	1,434·4	1,391·1	1,400·8	1,399·3	1,371·2	1,342·6	1,337·2	1,354·9	1,307·1
East Dyfed	761·8	763·9	740·9	742·2	741·6	708·1	690·1	694·9	692·9	691·1
Gwent	1,517·9	1,541·4	1,548·9	1,535·4	1,515·1	1,478·9	1,466·2	1,388·7	1,388·0	1,382·6
Gwynedd	686·2	687·8	681·7	683·6	670·4	685·6	716·5	718·7	705·1	681·7
Mid Glamorgan	1,915·8	1,886·6	1,859·4	1,842·4	1,846·1	1,844·1	1,835·5	1,813·5	1,784·4	1,878·3
Pembrokeshire	245·7	246·5	248·7	254·2	264·1	260·8	261·1	266·6	258·0	266·1
Powys	292·2	240·4	226·8	229·2	241·5	237·4	237·7	221·0	220·3	195·5
South Glamorgan	1,864·9	1,826·3	1,818·4	1,820·3	1,864·1	1,851·4	1,839·3	1,751·0	1,753·7	1,733·1
West Glamorgan	1,428·3	1,447·8	1,455·1	1,440·4	1,450·0	1,398·2	1,421·3	1,448·0	1,339·9	1,336·7
Wales	10,133·3	10,075·1	9,971·0	9,948·5	9,992·2	9,835·7	9,810·3	9,639·6	9,557·2	9,472·2
Non-Acute[1]										
Clwyd	1,632·0	1,580·5	1,600·3	1,525·5	1,551·0	1,522·3	1,469·0	1,431·9	1,335·8	1,271·7
East Dyfed	1,336·5	1,300·2	1,273·8	1,057·9	1,127·3	1,092·0	1,079·9	1,063·3	969·9	943·2
Gwent	2,364·7	2,381·9	2,286·9	2,178·1	2,176·3	2,194·6	2,153·2	2,120·1	2,113·1	2,017·2
Gwynedd	883·3	880·5	863·1	845·6	843·3	856·9	894·1	911·2	905·0	906·3
Mid Glamorgan	3,027·6	2,977·8	2,933·5	2,883·7	2,876·9	2,904·8	2,808·7	2,684·9	2,597·2	2,396·3
Pembrokeshire	220·6	220·1	212·0	219·1	211·3	209·3	206·3	206·4	198·1	198·5
Powys	973·3	940·0	933·8	914·9	846·8	849·9	819·5	793·4	779·8	773·1
South Glamorgan	1,718·7	1,688·4	1,702·5	1,702·6	1,703·0	1,691·9	1,707·1	1,709·3	1,644·2	1,627·0
West Glamorgan	1,166·0	1,158·8	1,162·9	1,165·8	1,146·9	1,151·3	1,181·9	1,126·1	1,110·3	1,056·0
Wales	13,322·7	13,128·2	12,968·8	12,492·9	12,482·8	12,472·5	12,319·7	12,046·6	11,653·4	11,189·5

[1] Includes geriatrics, younger disabled, obstetrics, GP maternity, mental illness, mental handicap, adolescent psychiatry, mental illness children, psychogeriatric and elderly mentally infirm.

Welsh Language Studies

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by grade the total number of staff in his Department above the principal who are able to fulfil the whole of their responsibilities in the Welsh language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* No such criterion is used; but the following information relates to numbers of Welsh speakers above grade 7 (principal):

1 Grade 2
4 Grade 3
1 Grade 4
14 Grade 5
39 Grade 6.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by grade those of his officials whose duties are related solely to the Welsh language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The information is as follows:

1 HEO
2 EO
1 AO
2 Typists

Other staff who are primarily responsible for Welsh language matters also have other duties. In addition, there is a range of posts across my Department in which Welsh language matters form part of the duties of officials.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the applicability of the Council of Europe's charter on minority language to the Welsh language and Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The Government's policies in relation to the Welsh language compare very favourably with the measures outlined in the Council of Europe's draft charter on regional and minority languages.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when and for how long he last visited Nant Gwrtheyrn, on official business.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* I have not yet been able to visit the national language centre at Nant Gwrtheyrn.

CADW

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the annual expenditure of CADW in each financial year since its establishment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The information requested is shown in the following table:

	£000
Outturn	
1984-85	3,611
1985-86	6,205
1986-87	4,173
1987-88	5,806
1988-89	5,250
Plans	
1989-90	5,907

Welsh Office

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the legislation for which the Welsh Office has been the sponsoring Department since 1980.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* My Department has sponsored the following two items of primary legislation since 1980.

Conwy Tunnel (Supplementary Powers) Act 1983
Welsh Development Agency Act [redacted]8

Simultaneous Translations

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what are the responsibilities of his Department's translation unit with regard to simultaneous translation at meetings;

(2) what provision exists within the Welsh Office for simultaneous translation at meetings involving outside bodies.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The main conference room in the Welsh Office has simultaneous translation facilities. The Welsh Office translation unit can arrange for interpreters to be available as needed.

HEALTH

Leukaemia

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will be in a position to give figures of cancer registration data for cases of diagnosed leukaemia in children by *(a)* each year since 1985 to date and *(b)* by regional health authority.

Mr. Freeman: OPCS publishes annual cancer statistics using data collected by 11 regional registries and the Wales cancer registry which are funded by the regional health authorities. The timing of publications is largely governed by when the slowest regional cancer registry provides OPCS with data. For 1985, data from the last registry were not received until September 1989. Additionally, publication of 1985 data has been affected by amendments made to the presentation of the data following consultation between OPCS and users of the data. The targets for the publication of data for individuals diagnosed in 1985 and 1986 are March and July 1990 respectively.

Immunisation

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the most recent results for the immunisation campaign using the multiple mumps, rubella, measles vaccine; and what were the targets announced in 1988.

Mr. Freeman: As measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine was introduced in October 1988, the mid-point of the financial year, full uptake figures are not yet available. However, over the first 15 months since the vaccine's launch, more than 3 million doses have been distributed. This is double the calculated requirement for the two priority groups: children aged 12 to 15 months and those attending for their pre-school boosters. The most encouraging results can be seen in the weekly notification

for measles. Notifications for 1989 have been at the lowest recorded levels and this is likely to be a direct consequence of the keen support of the MMR programme. The uptake targets remain those agreed for the European region of the World Health Organisation—90 per cent. by 1990 for measles, tetanus, polio and whooping cough—and we hope to reach those targets in the financial year 1990-91.

Hearing-related Problems

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the current maximum waiting time and *(b)* the number of people waiting for consultations for hearing-related problems in the Sheffield district health authority.

Mr. Freeman: At 31 March 1989 the maximum waiting time for a first appointment in the ear, nose and throat specialty in Sheffield health authority was 70 weeks. The number of people waiting is not collected centrally and the hon. Member may care to contact the chairman of Sheffield health authority for this information.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average and maximum delay between the prescription of a hearing aid, and its supply and fitting in the Sheffield district health authority.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally. I suggest the hon. Member contacts the chairman of Sheffield health authority for the information he seeks.

Monica Prospero

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement as to why it took 10 years to agree damages to Monica Prospero, following an abortion at Nottingham City hospital that went wrong; how the various percentage elements of the claim were calculated; and whether the health authority has now written to her apologising for the error.

Mr. Freeman: Claims for damages are entirely a matter for the health authority concerned, the claimants and their authorised representatives.

West Midlands Ambulance Personnel

Mr. Denis Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he can now report upon the result of his inquiries into the letter written to all West Midlands ambulance personnel on 18 December by the regional general manager of the West Midlands health authority threatening them and any passengers they might carry with prosecution under the Theft Act; if he has now been able to make inquiries into all the matters submitted to him in the memorandum provided by the Birmingham group of Labour hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The letter of 18 December from the general manager of West Midlands regional health authority to all West Midlands ambulance personnel pointed out that if ambulance personnel drive an ambulance when not authorised by the authority they may be liable to prosecution. This is a factually correct statement. Of course, if ambulance crews turn out in response to a control room this would not apply and West Midlands ambulance personnel are well aware that if they are responding to a call from ambulance control they are authorised to use ambulance service vehicles.

The memorandum submitted to me on behalf of several right hon. and hon. Members for Birmingham constituencies dated 17 January concerns local operational matters which are the responsibility of the West Midlands regional health authority and I will pass the memorandum on to the chairman of that authority so that he can respond.

Social Workers (Training)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers have successfully undertaken training programmes, approved by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, in order to qualify as mental health officers under the Mental Health Act 1984, in each of the area health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In England and Wales, approved social workers are appointed in accordance with section 114 of the Mental Health Act 1983. It is for individual social services authorities to determine how many approved social workers they need to appoint in the light of local circumstances. Information is not available centrally on how many social workers have successfully undertaken training programmes to qualify as approved social workers.

Personal Health Information

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress his Department has made on issuing a health circular on ownership, confidentiality and disclosure of personal health information in the National Health Service; and when he expects to be able to announce the results of the consultation process.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I can add nothing further at this stage to the reply I gave my hon. Friend on 13 December at column *681*.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many secure units exist in each region and for England as a whole in National Health Service hospitals; and what was the number of beds in secure units for each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: There are now 21 regional secure units (RSUs). All regions have at least one, except South West Thames which is at an advanced planning stage. South Western and North Western RHAs each have two secure units, Oxford has three and South East Thames has five. The remaining nine regions have one each. Because of changes in the way the information has been collected since 1980, when the first permanent RSU was opened, it is not possible to provide comparative figures over time. In 1989 there were 660 available and staffed beds in RSUs, including interim units.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for each year since 1979 and for each district health authority, Scottish health authority, regional health authority and for England the numbers of *(a)* acute beds and *(b)* non-acute beds.

Mr. Freeman: Information for 1988-89 has been placed in the Library. For the information for 1979 to 1987-88, I refer the hon. Member to figures which were placed in the Library in connection with my reply to him of 16 May 1989 at column *145*. Figures for Scotland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by the Yorkshire regional health authority headquarters and administration; and if he will list the 20 highest paid personnel and indicate their duties for 1990-91 and for each of the past five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 30 September 1988 there were 3,230 staff in post. This includes consultants and senior registrars whose contracts are held by headquarters but who may work elsewhere in the authority. The further information required is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may like to approach the chairman of Yorkshire regional health authority.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount of funding available from his Department to the Yorkshire regional health authority for 1990-91 and for each of the past five years; and on what basis this is allocated to the district health authorities in Yorkshire.

Mr. Freeman: The table shows total revenue allocations to the Yorkshire regional heath authority since 1985-86.

	£ million
1985-86	686·2
1986-87	739·2
1987-88	816·0
1988-89	892·6
1989-90	[1]965·5

[1] provisional

Initial cash limits for 1990-91 will be announced shortly.

Allocations to districts are a matter for regions. My hon. Friend may wish to write to the chairman of the Yorkshire regional health authority seeking the information she requires about allocations to districts within the region.

NHS Spending (Dewsbury)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the new Dewsbury general hospital and the problems of underfunding it now faces.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Based on resource assumptions for 1990-91 Dewsbury health authority will receive a recurrent cash allocation of £33·8 million: this represents a cash increase of 8·6 per cent., and a real terms increase of 2·8 per cent. over 1989-90. For the three-year period to 1990-91 the district will have received over £2 million in growth money. The funding of individual hospitals is the responsibility of the district health authority concerned.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount of money available for National Health Service health care for Dewsbury health authority for 1990-91; and what was the figure for each of the previous 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: Allocations to Dewsbury health authority are a matter for the Yorkshire regional health authority. My hon. Friend may wish to write to the chairman of the Yorkshire RHA for the information she requires.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the imminent closure of approximately 60 beds, in the new hospital by Dewsbury district health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My hon. Friend made a representation about the financial position of Dewsbury health authority last October to which my noble Friend Baroness Hooper has responded.

Contingency Fund

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has given to *(a)* district health authorities and *(b)* Dewsbury on what patient care their contingency fund should be spent on;

(2) what guidance he has given to *(a)* district health authorities and *(b)* Dewsbury on what is a realistic amount of money to have in their contingency fund;

(3) what guidance he has given to *(a)* district health authorities and *(b)* Dewsbury as to on what contingency their contingency fund should be spent on.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Dewsbury District Health Authority

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairman of Dewsbury district health authority; what matters were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. amd learned Friend the Secretary of State has not met the chairman of Dewsbury health authority recently.

Homosexuality

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's policy concerning the fostering or adoption of children by homosexual couples in stable, long-term relationships.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Courts and child care and adoption agencies are required to give first consideration to promoting and safeguarding a child's welfare. Agencies must act within a framework of primary legislation and regulations which lay serious obligations on agencies to safeguard the welfare of children. These include requirements for thorough investigation and assessment of individual prospective foster parents and adopters. The law does not allow two people to adopt jointly unless they are married.

Disablement Services Authority

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what powers he has in relation to the Disablement Services Authority and the provision of artificial limbs;

(2) which part of his Department is responsible for the Disablement Services Authority.

Mr. Freeman: The Disablement Services Authority is a special health authority with full responsibility for the

provision of artificial limbs and appliances. The authority is accountable directly to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, whose powers in respect of it are the same as those in respect of all other health authorities. General oversight of the DSA is the responsibility of the deputy secretary, health and personal social services policy, supported as necessary by parts of the Department.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time for an artificial limb *(a)* in 1986-87 and *(b)* currently.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the Disablement Services Authority to which the hon. Member should address his question.

Family Practitioner Committees

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the general managers of family practioners committees, their qualifications and their date of appointment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The available information is contained in the following list. Information about the academic, professional or other qualifications of individual general managers is not held centrally. This is a matter for each family practitioner committee as the employing authority.

FPC general manager appointments

FPC and name	*Date of appointment*
Avon—J. Watson	9 January 1990
Barking and Havering—G. Shepherd	16 October 1989
Barnet—Ms. A. Harding	2 January 1990
Barnsley—P. Tallis	20 July 1989
Bedfordshire	[2]—
Berkshire—J. O'Brien	1 September 1990
Birmingham—A. Torbet	13 November 1989
Bolton—A. Seward	31 July 1989
Bradford—D. Martin	1 October 1989
Brent and Harrow—J. Tate	1 August 1989
Bromley—T. Dean	1 November 1989
Buckinghamshire—M. Gaffney	2 October 1989
Bury—P. Emmott	17 July 1989
Calderdale—G. Newbury	1 January 1990
Cambridgeshire—G. Mead	14 November 1989
Camden and Islington—Mrs. S. Shaw	1 August 1989
Cheshire—D. Thomson	[1]—
City and East London—A. Bennett	1 August 1989
Cleveland—J. Lewis	1 January 1990
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly—S. Hattersley	1 January 1990
Coventry—M. Waterland	6 November 1989
Croydon—M. Outhwaite	1 October 1989
Cumbria—R. Macleod	1 August 1989
Derbyshire—K. Houghton	18 July 1989
Devon—E. Herbert	30 October 1989
Doncaster—R. Hemming	10 August 1989
Dorset—J. Knighton	1 August 1989
Dudley—J. Bromley	30 October 1989
Durham—P. Hawkes	23 October 1989
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow—Mrs. E. M. Rose	1 August 1989
East Sussex—L. Screene	3 October 1989
Enfield and Haringey—Ms. H. Scott	9 October 1989
Essex—G. Butland	1 August 1989
Gateshead—Ms. J. Axelby	[1]—
Gloucestershire—S. Golledge	11 September 1989
Greenwich and Bexley—J. Strickland	1 September 1989
Hampshire—G. D. Hayne	25 July 1989
Hereford and Worcester—C. Parr	1 November 1989
Hertfordshire—J. L. Blakey	1 August 1989
Hillingdon—B. Allen	4 August 1989
Humberside—C. Dench	4 July 1989
Isle of Wight—P. Wilkening	31 October 1989
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster J. James	1 August 1989
Kent D. Homeshaw	2 August 1989
Kingston and Richmond P. Hornby	18 September 1989
Kirklees Miss V. Aspey	16 October 1989
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Ms. S. Osborne; Ms. S. Wiliams	8 January 1990
Lancashire G. Pelham	26 July 1989
Leeds A. Garland	9 October 1989
Leicestershire P. Bates	26 July 1989
Lincolnshire J. I. Gilmore	1 August 1989
Liverpool Miss C. Wall	18 September 1989
Manchester J. Dennis	4 December 1989
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth P. Hill	1 August 1989
Newcastle T. W. Marshall	15 January 1990
Norfolk R. Wilcox	1 August 1989
Northamptonshire M. Powell	1 August 1989
North Tyneside	[2]—
Northumberland P. Bower	21 December 1989
North Yorkshire C. M. Towne	2 October 1989
Nottinghamshire A. Ruffell	1 November 1989
Oldham D. Common	1 October 1989
Oxfordshire Ms. J. Griffiths	1 November 1989
Redbridge and Waltham Forest Mrs. L. Noel	16 October 1989
Rochdale E. Jones	16 October 1989
Rotherham K. V. Wilson	25 September 1989
St. Helens and Knowsley J. Cullen	4 September 1989
Salford M. J. Clark	1 November 1989
Sandwell B. Maunder	24 July 1989
Sefton Ms. K. Rogers	1 January 1990
Sheffield G. Walker	1 August 1989
Shropshire C. Foot	1 August 1989
Solihull K. Higgins	1 August 1989
Somerset A. R. Langham	27 November 1989
South Tyneside G. Power	27 November 1989
Staffordshire M. Evans	1 February 1990
Stockport A. Jones	12 July 1989
Suffolk W. Robinson	24 July 1989
Sunderland D. Eltringham	4 September 1989
Surrey Miss A. Sutcliffe	1 August 1989
Tameside B. Thomas	31 August 1989
Trafford Mrs. D. Asher	4 September 1989
Wakefield M. Ramsden	24 July 1989
Walsall Ms. C. Eminson	16 October 1989
Warwickshire E. Evans	1 August 1989
West Sussex T. P. Knott	31 October 1989
Wigan J. Sumner	14 July 1989
Wiltshire M. Warner	1 November 1989
Wirral G. Greenwood	1 January 1990
Wolverhampton D. Lord	1 November 1989

[1] Appointed but not yet in post.
[2] No appointment.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Offenders

2. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the figures for attendance at court by parents in cases where their children who are aged under 18 years are being tried.

53. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the figures for attendance at court by parents in cases where their children who are aged under 18 years are being tried.

69. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the figures for attendance at court by parents in cases where their children who are aged under 18 years are being tried.

Mr. John Patten: When juveniles under 17 appear in court charged with criminal offences the court has the power to require their parents to attend. We do not have statistics on parental attendance, but they should always be there, taking their responsibility.

44. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to make parents more accountable for the behaviour of their own children below the age of 16 years.

102. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his proposals to increase the responsibilities of parents whose children are charged with criminal offences.

Mr. John Patten: We propose to strengthen courts' powers to require parents to attend court with their children and pay fines and compensation orders imposed on their children. We also intend to widen courts' powers to bind over parents to take proper care of and exercise proper control over their children who are convicted of criminal offences.

124. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reaction he has received to his proposal to make parents of young offenders obliged to attend court and to take greater responsibility for their children's behaviour.

Mr. John Patten: It is well recognised that parents have an important responsibility for their children's behaviour, and my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals have been widely welcomed.

128. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people aged under 17 years are locked up in prison establishments at the present time.

Mr. Mellor: According to the records held centrally, which are approximate, on 30 June 1989 about 620 persons aged under 17 were held in prison service establishments in England and Wales.

Violent Crime

10. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now announce new initiatives to combat crimes of violence.

68. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now announce new initiatives to combat crimes of violence.

141. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now announce new initiatives to combat the rising number of crimes of violence.

Mr. John Patten: The most effective crime prevention initiatives are taken locally to tackle local problems. Action already taken by Government includes higher penalties for violent offences; increases in police manpower and resources; and measures to deal with drug trafficking, terrorism and alcohol-related disorder.

97. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was paid out in the form of compensation to the victims of violent crime in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board paid out £69,381,286 in compensation in the year ended 31 March 1989.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

11. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire, Mr. Shaw; and if he will make a statement.

42. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire, Mr. Shaw; and if he will make a statement.

133. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed this case with Mr. Shaw. However, officials in the Home Office have maintained close contact with the Police Complaints Authority, which is supervising Mr. Shaw's investigations into the West Midlands serious crime squad. We will consider carefully whether anything emerges from this investigation which might cast doubt on the safety of the convictions of the Birmingham Six.

17. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if he will make a statement.

58. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if he will make a statement.

129. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed this case with the Director of Public Prosecutions.

34. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the chief constable of the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement.

51. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the chief constable of the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement.

55. **Mr Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed the Birmingham pub bombings case with the chief constable of the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed this case with the chief constable.

35. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Foreign Minister of Ireland to discuss the Birmingham pub bombings; and if he will make a statement.

50. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Foreign Minister of Ireland to discuss the Birmingham pub bombings; and if he will make a statement.

107. **Mr. Leighton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Foreign Minister of Ireland to discuss the Birmingham pub bombings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given earlier to a question from the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore).

43. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on the case of the Birmingham Six.

62. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on behalf of the Birmingham Six.

78. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to representations he has received concerning the Birmingham Six.

88. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the investigation into the Birmingham Six to take place; and if he will make a statement.

116. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his consideration of the new evidence in the Birmingham bombings case.

139. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his consideration of the new evidence in the Birmingham pub bombings case.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his consideration of the new evidence on the Birmingham pub bombings case.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering very carefully the further material which has been presented to him by a solicitor on behalf of the Birmingham Six, and will decide as soon as possible whether it justifies any intervention on his part.

65. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the West Midlands police officers who were involved in the Birmingham pub bombings case and who have subsequently been *(a)* gaoled, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* transferred to non-operational duties and *(d)* severely reprimanded.

93. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the West Midlands police officers who were involved in the Birmingham pub bombings case and who have subsequently been *(a)* gaoled, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* transferred to non-operational duties and *(d)* severely reprimanded.

122. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the West Midlands police officers who were involved in the Birmingham pub bombings case and who have subsequently been *(a)* gaoled, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* transferred to non operational duties and *(d)* severely reprimanded.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None of the police officers who were involved in interviewing those convicted of the Birmingham pub bombing have subsequently been imprisoned, dismissed from the force or reprimanded. Four of the officers concerned have been transferred to non-operational duties. In the absence of any evidence at this stage that these officers have acted improperly it would be wrong to name them.

Prisons

13. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of mentally handicapped people held in prison in England and Wales.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of mentally handicapped people held in prison in England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Mellor: On 30 September 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, a total of 329 inmates in the prison system in England and Wales were reported by prison medical officers to be mentally disordered as defined by the Mental Health Act 1983.

14. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were in prison at the most recent count.

Mr. Mellor: On Friday 19 January, 46,755 people were held in prison establishments in England and Wales. The prison population is now 2,146 lower than at the same time last year.

100. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current prison population; what it was one year ago; and what projections he has made for the prison population over the next five years.

126. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current project prison population; what it was one year ago; and what projections he has made for the prison population over the next five years.

Mr. Mellor: The prison population in England and Wales on 12 January 1990 was 46,504. The corresponding figure for 13 January 1989 was 48,736, including those held in police cells. The figures are an estimated 1,500 lower than would otherwise be the case due to the usual seasonal fall in the population over Christmas and the new year. Projections of the prison population are published annually in spring, in a Home office statistical bulletin "Projections of long term trends in the prison population" (the latest was issue 11/89, dated 6 April 1989). A revised projection taking account of changes in the prison population in the first half of 1989 and the anticipated effects of further measures to divert offenders from custody agreed in current public expenditure plans is as follows:

Projected prison population, England and Wales

	Numbers
1990-91	51,600
1991-92	53,000
1992-93	54,600
1993-94	56,400
1994-95	58,200

Begging

15. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors governed the time taken to produce the figures covering the number of people in the Metropolitan police district prosecuted in 1988 for begging under section 3 of the Vagrancy Act 1824; when he plans to make the 1989 figures available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office collects returns from all police forces covering each defendant appearing in court for a criminal offence. Information for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990. The Home Office is examining whether information could be provided directly from the courts, so reducing delays.

Remand Prisoners

16. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the provision of private sector remand places; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We are considering the results of the further study of the cost-effectiveness of private sector involvement in the remand system which my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) announced in his statement to the House on 1 March 1989. We hope to be able to announce a decision soon.

84. **Mr. Fry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of remand prisoners held in police cells; and what it was one year ago.

96. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest figures for numbers of remand prisoners held in police cells; and what were the comparable figures six months and one year ago.

139. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of remand prisoners held in police cells; and what it was one year ago.

Mr. Mellor: Yesterday, there were no remand prisoners held in police cells in England and Wales. Comparable figures for 21 July 1989 and 20 January 1989 were 192 and 277 prisoners respectively, most of whom were on remand.

108. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that prisoners held on remand are brought to trial within a reasonable period.

Mr. John Patten: Our aim is to reduce both the number of people remanded in custody and the time taken to deal with cases. Bail information schemes are now operating in 42 courts and widespread expansion is planned. These schemes enable the probation service to provide Crown prosecutors with better information on defendants, to help prosecutors decide whether they need to oppose bail. Resources have been provided for the provision of a further 500 places in bail hostels over the next three years.

Custody time limits, first introduced on a limited basis in 1987, are now in operation in most of England and Wales. We intend to extend their operation to the remaining areas—London and eight counties in the south-east—later this year.

Delays in the court system are also being tackled. In the magistrates courts, magistrates and clerks have been urged to concentrate on reducing delays and a new management information system is being introduced. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, has taken steps to tackle delays in the Crown court through improved management and the provision of more resources including additional judges and new court rooms. Separate initiatives are in hand on committals procedure and the development of mode of trial guidelines for magistrates, with a view to reducing the numbers committed for trial and accelerating the procedure.

Security Services

18. **Mr. Aitken:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is planning to reduce the numerical strength and resources of the security service in the light of political developments in eastern Europe.

Mr. Waddington: It is not the practice to make detailed announcement on such matters.

Cocaine and Crack

19. **Dame Janet Fookes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of seizures of cocaine, in the most recent years for which figures are available, was of cocaine entering the United Kingdom from member states of the European Community.

29. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of seizures of cocaine, in the most recent years for which figures are available, was of cocaine entering the United Kingodm from member states of the European Community.

Mr. Mellor: Provisional figures for 1989 indicate that, of a total of 402 seizures (424 kg) of cocaine by Customs, 27 per cent. by numbers of seizures (62·8 per cent. by weight) were known to have been consigned from or routed through other member states of the European Community. This includes one seizure of 153 kg which originated in Ecuador and arrived at Southampton via Le Havre. The origin of a further 20 per cent. approximately, of the total number of seizures of cocaine by Customs was not known or not recorded. These figures may be compared with 1988 figures showing that fewer than 5 per cent. by number (1·5 per cent. by weight) of cocaine seizures by Customs were known to have originated from or arrived in the United Kingdom via other EC countries. (The figures exclude seizures of cocaine made by the police, for which the country of origin is not generally known.)

33. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage increase in the number of cases reported over the last year involving the drug crack.

114. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage increase in the number of cases reported over the last year involving the drug crack.

136. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage increase in the number of cases reported over the last year involving the drug crack.

Mr. Mellor: The provisional total number of seizures of crack reported by the police and Customs in 1989 was 139, an increase of almost 500 per cent. over 1988 (28 seizures).

Drugs

21. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what amount of illegal drugs coming from outside the European Community have been seized during the last 12 months for which statistics are available; and what was the figure in the previous 12-month period.

Mr. Mellor: At present only provisional figures are available for seizures of controlled drugs made by Customs in 1989. Figures for seizures of heroin, cocaine and cannabis coming from outside the European Community in 1989 are, provisionally, 247 kg of heroin, as against 218 kg in 1988; 158 kg of cocaine, as against 178 kg in 1988; and 25,750 kg of cannabis, as against 34,973 kg in 1988.

Comparable figures for police seizures are unavailable since the country of origin is not generally known or recorded.

26. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the annual operating cost of the new anti-drugs network recently announced by the Government.

103. **Mr. Illsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the annual operating cost of the new anti-drugs network recently announced by the Government.

Mr. Mellor: As I stated in my reply to a question from the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on 7 December, subject to Parliament's approval of the Supply Estimates, up to £2·3 million is being made available in 1990-91 for the drug prevention initiative which was announced on 11 October 1989.

39. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures police forces are taking in conjunction with local education authorities to warn pupils of the dangers of drug taking.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) on 5 December at column *176*. Since then, Home Office circular 99/1989 has been issued to the police offering ideas on the way forward on police-schools liaison.

89. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many seizures of illicit drugs have been made by police and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise from 1989 to date; and what is the estimated value of drugs seized.

Mr. Mellor: Customs report a provisional total of 8,026 seizures of controlled drugs in 1989. It is estimated that these would have had an equivalent street value of some £250 million. The provisional figures for January 1990 to date are 262 seizures with an estimated street value of £151,000. Comprehensive figures are not yet available for police seizures in 1989 or 1990; the latest information is for 1988 when police made 32,947 seizures and Customs 5,288 seizures of controlled drugs.

91. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many countries will be represented at the forthcoming world ministerial summit on drug demand reduction.

Mr. Mellor: The world ministerial summit to reduce the demand for drugs and to combat the cocaine threat, which will be held in London from 9 to 11 April, is being organised by Her Majesty's Government in association with the United Nations. Invitations are being extended to the member states of the United Nations, specialised agencies and related organisations, non-member observer states and intergovernmental and other organisations having standing invitations to participate in the sessions and work of the General Assembly as observers. The indications are that most countries will accept the invitation to participate in the work of the conference.

137. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current establishment of the Police national drugs intelligence unit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The unit's complement has doubled since it was established in 1985. Including officers serving overseas, it now has a complement of 100 police, Customs and civilian staff.

Special Constables

22. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to expanding the number of special constables.

32. **Dr. Goodson-Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of special constables now attached to police forces in England and Wales; and what steps he will take to encourage chief constables to recruit more, particularly amongst ethnic minority communities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) earlier today.

Members' Letters

23. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of letters from hon. Members to his Department are answered within one month; and what plans he has to speed up this rate.

Mr. Waddington: During the final quarter of 1989 about 50 per cent. of letters from hon. Members to the Home Office were answered within one month of their receipt. The underlying trend over recent years has been one of steady improvement in our performance and we hope that hon. Members will see further improvements in our service, not least by their taking increased advantage of the scheme for writing direct to the immigration and nationality department with their more routine inquiries in

that area and also by writing direct to local managers about other matters handled away from the centre, where they do not require their letters to be answered personally by Ministers.

Local Government Finance

24. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice or instructions his Department is giving to clerks of magistrates in respect of the expected change in work load following the introduction of the community charge.

Mr. John Patten: None.

Litter

25. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were fined under the Litter Act 1983 in 1989; and what proportion of these received the maximum sentence of £400.

Mr. John Patten: Information for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990. In 1988, a total of 1,560 people were fined under the Litter Act 1983, of which two (0·1 per cent.) received the maximum fine of £400.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with police organisations about enforcing the present anti-litter laws.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None, but bodies representing the police service were invited to submit comments on the proposals about litter which are now contained in the Environmental Protection Bill.

Safer Cities Initiative

27. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many safe cities schemes are now established; how many local initiatives prepared by safer cities teams have now been approved; and in what categories they fall.

60. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many safer cities schemes are now established; how many local initiatives prepared by safer cities teams have now been approved; and in what categories they fall.

Mr. John Patten: Fifteen projects are now operating and one more should be in place next month. Two hundred and sixty grants, totalling over £1·8 million, have now been agreed to support local crime prevention initiatives. The initiatives cover a wide range of activities which come within four broad categories—physical security improvements; activities for young people; changes in local services to take account of the need to prevent crime; and educational and development opportunities for individuals and communities.

Private Security Firms

29. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation regarding the private security industry.

113. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation regarding the private security industry.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans at present to introduce legislation to regulate the activities of the private security industry. However, in the light of the report of a Home Office working group, we have asked officials to consider the scope for improving the self-regulation of the industry.

52. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the chief constable of the Northumbria police on the need for regulation of the private security guard industry.

Mr. John Patten: Last August we received representations from the chief constable of Northumbria police, in favour of legislation to regulate the private security industry.

Electronic Tagging

30. **Mr. Knowles:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the electronic monitoring pilot scheme in Nottingham revealed any technical faults in the equipment used; and whether he will be conducting further trials.

Mr. John Patten: Minor faults in the electronic monitoring equipment used in Nottingham have occurred on 13 occasions, but the trial has shown clearly that the basic technology performs satisfactorily. As indicated in my reply to a question from my hon. Friend on 10 January, we plan to conduct a further trial of electronic monitoring on a larger scale later this year.

47. **Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the electronic tagging system.

59. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the continuation of tagging.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave on 10 January to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) at columns *626-27*.

101. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been electronically tagged in the United Kingdom since pilot schemes commenced.

Mr. John Patten: As of 16 January, 40 defendants have been granted bail subject to the condition that they are electronically monitored.

Serious Crime Squad, West Midlands

31. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the now-disbanded West Midlands police serious crime squad have now been charged with criminal offences; and in respect of how many former members charges are being considered.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The investigation led by Mr. Donald Shaw into the West Midlands police serious crime squad is still at an early stage. No consideration has yet been given to whether or not to institute criminal proceedings against any officer. In November last year criminal proceedings were instituted against four former members of the serious

crime squad, on charges of perjury and attempting to pervert the course of justice. These proceedings followed a separate inquiry by the police.

It would not be appropriate to give details of cases under consideration by the Crown prosecution service which may or may not result in prosecutions of former members of the serious crime squad.

106. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the inquiry by West Yorkshire police, under the auspices of the Police Complaints Authority, into the West Midlands police serious crime squad.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the progress of the inquiry by West Yorkshire police, under the auspices of the Police Complaints Authority, into the now-disbanded West Midlands police serious crime squad.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the investigation team, led by Mr. Shaw, assistant chief constable of the West Yorkshire police force, is in the process of examining the files relating to all the arrests made by the squad since 1986, and has begun to investigate individual complaints made against officers of the squad. The report of each investigation will be submitted to the Police Complaints Authority and the chief constable of West Midlands as it is completed, and it will be some time before all cases have been examined.

Rape

36. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with improving police support for rape victims.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Considerable progress has been made. In order to ensure privacy and comfort for victims it is now normal for the police either to provide special rape examination suites or to utilise facilities in hospitals or doctors' surgeries. Much greater emphasis is being placed on sympathetic and informal treatment of victims, with officers receiving both general awareness training on rape and more specialised training if they are to be directly involved in the investigation of offences.

Summer Time

37. **Mr. Forman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the results of his Department's consultation on the possible introduction of single double summer time.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We shall be informing the House of the results in the near future.

127. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with whom the responsibility for determining the summer time arrangement in the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe from 1993 onwards will lie.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The start and end dates for summer time for 1993 onwards in all member states of the European Community will be determined by negotiation within the EC and ultimately by the Council of Ministers as has been the case since 1981. It is for the United Kingdom alone to determine which time zone it wishes to adopt throughout the year.

Immigration

38. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* spouses and *(b)* children were awaiting entry clearance as at 30 November 1989; and if he will make a statement.

73. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* spouses and *(b)* children were awaiting entry clearance as at 30 November 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is available only for the Indian sub-continent, where 5,800 spouses and 4,300 children were awaiting a decision on their application for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom at 30 November 1989.

134. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a system of language tests for spouses and others seeking migration from the Indian sub-continent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to do so.

Safety of Sports Grounds

40. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of County Councils on the application of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act.

Mr. John Patten: None.

DNA Testing

41. **Mr. Pike;** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is proposed to start the DNA testing scheme for applicants for settlement in the United Kingdom.

104. **Mr. Cabom:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is proposed to start the DNA testing scheme for applicants for settlement in the United Kingdom.

119. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is proposed to start the DNA testing scheme for applicants for settlement in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on 27 November at column *108*.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it takes to obtain a DNA test in paternity suits for each magistrates court in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: Information in the form sought is not readily available. But commercial testers expect to provide reports to courts within four months of a direction to do so.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost to the Exchequer of a DNA test in a magistrates court taken for the purposes of a paternity suit.

Mr. John Patten: The parties to the case pay the fees for blood tests ordered by magistrates courts in civil cases. Some parties are legally aided. The maximum fee that may be charged for a court-directed blood test, which may include a DNA test, is £115·90 per sample exclusive of VAT. So, where a party is legally aided, the maximum cost to the Exchequer of a blood test is £115·90 per sample excluding VAT.

Independent Broadcasting Authority

45. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority; and what will be discussed.

123. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority; and what will be discussed.

143. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Mellor: I have regular meetings with the chairman of the IBA at which a wide range of broadcasting issues are discussed.

Child Pornography

46. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about pornography involving children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 18 January at column *377* to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

Magistrates Courts

48. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the efficiency of magistrates courts.

Mr. John Patten: We are still considering the case for legislation to reconstitute the magistrates courts service as an executive agency on the lines proposed in the report of the 1989 scrutiny of magistrates courts. In the meantime we are taking forward a programme of action largely drawn from the report aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the courts, including the identification and dissemination of best practice on case listing, fine enforcement and other matters; a review of criminal and domestic court procedures; the promotion of court user groups; practical evaluations of pre-trial reviews, new methods of paying fines and the use of bailiffs in executing bail warrants; the preparation of a standard specification for magistrates' courts computers; and the development of resource and other management training programmes for justices' clerks and their staff. As was indicated in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 9 November 1989 at column *262* our intention is to introduce cash limits on grants supporting current expenditure on magistrates courts.

AIDS (Prisons)

49. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the action the Government are taking to reduce the spread of HIV among the prison population.

Mr. Mellor: High priority is given to measures to prevent the transmission of HIV infection in prison. The main plank of the prevention strategy is education. Our latest initiative is a new package of education materials, including a video film, entitled "AIDS Inside and Out". Other measures include medical inquiry and examination at the reception stage, counselling of individual prisoners, and limited regime restrictions for prisoners identified as HIV antibody positive.

83. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons in prison have been diagnosed as HIV positive.

Mr. Mellor: On 17 January 1990 the prison population of England and Wales included 63 prisoners reported as having been identified as HIV antibody positive. By that date 270 such prisoners had been so reported since reporting began in March 1985.

Community Radio

54. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects community radio franchises to be let in west Hertfordshire.

Mr. Mellor: We understand that the shadow Radio Authority plans in the next few months to invite letters of intent from would-be providers of new local radio services. This will assist it in establishing the nature of the demand in different areas, and in drawing up a plan for the progressive introduction of new stations over several years starting early in 1991. It is not possible at this stage to say what will happen in particular areas.

Greenwich Mean Time

56. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the implications of European Community regulations for the maintenance in Britain of Greenwich mean time.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There have been no proposals for European Community regulations which would affect the continuation of Greenwich mean time in Britain; and none is expected unless requested by the United Kingdom.

Trevi Group

57. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to meet his colleagues in the Trevi Group.

Mr. Waddington: I attended a meeting of Trevi Ministers under the French presidency in Paris on 14 and 15 December. I shall be attending the one to be held under the Irish presidency in Dublin in June.

Crime Statistics

61. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest figure for recorded crime in Suffolk.

Mr. John Patten: Information for 1988 was published in tables 2.5 and 2.7 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales, 1988", Cm 847, a copy of which is available in the Library. Further detailed figures for the 12 months to the end of September 1989 for local police force areas have also been placed in the Library. In the 12 months to September 1989, Suffolk police recorded 31,149 offences —125 more than in the previous 12 months.

Neighbourhood Watch

63. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes are currently in operation; and what was the equivalent number for 1979.

87. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes are now established in England and Wales.

112. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes now exist in England and Wales.

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes are now established in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of September 1989 there were estimated to be in the region of 75,000 neighbourhood watch schemes in England and Wales. There were no schemes operating in 1979.

Crime Prevention

64. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will next meet the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss new initiatives in crime prevention.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has at present, no plans to meet the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss crime prevention. Home Office officials regularly meet representatives of ACPO to consider aspects of this subject and expect to be consulting the association in the near future about new inter-departmental guidance on crime prevention.

71. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will next meet the AMA to discuss new ways of preventing crime.

Mr. John Patten: Home Office officials expect to be consulting the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and other bodies in the near future about new interdepartmental guidance on this subject.

Coach Parking (London)

66. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many no-coach-parking signs have been ordered by the Metropolitan police, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the Metropolitan police currently hold a stock of approximately 40 'no coach parking' signs which are distributed according to local demand.

Dogs

67. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to introduce any proposals which would seek to restrict those allowed to be in charge of dogs in public to persons over 16 years of age.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. This is a matter over which we would expect all dog owners to exercise discretion.

National Lottery

70. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the possible introduction of a national lottery.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the 12 months to 16 January 1990, we received letters from 19 hon. Members and from seven members of the public either advocating, or inquiring about the merits of, a lottery or lotteries with major prizes, on a national scale, and one previous parliamentary question about any legislative plans which we might have in this respect.

Fines

72. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the introduction of day or unit fines.

125. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he is giving to the introduction of day or unit fines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Experiments in four magistrates courts have suggested that a unit fine system can be operated successfully. Subject to a full evaluation of these experiments, we are likely to propose a legislative framework for unit fines.

Prison Building

74. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the prison building programme.

75. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the prison building programme.

Mr. Mellor: The prison building programme continues to make good progress. Out of the full programme of 28 new prisons, eight have already opened and 14 are at various stages of planning and construction, leaving only six on which construction work has not yet started. Construction is, however, planned to begin on two of these in 1991-92 and 1992-93. Sites and planning permissions are being sought for the four remaining prisons, but decisions on when and where to start building them have been deferred pending further analysis of the lower projected prison population.

The changes in the projections have allowed the emphasis of the prison building programme to be changed from building new prisons to speeding up improvements to the existing estate. Essential health, safety and security measures are now being brought forward, while at the same time progress is being maintained on a wide range of refurbishment and redevelopment work already under way

at many establishments. Some of these developments involve virtually rebuilding older prisons which are in such excellent locations that they need to be preserved. Most important to the general quality of life in the older prisons, a substantial reduction in slopping out is a major part of the expanded programme.

Corporal Punishment

76. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to reintroduce corporal punishment for serious crimes of violence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No. Corporal punishment was abolished in 1948. Its reintroduction would be contrary to the United Kingdom's obligations under the European convention on human rights.

Juvenile Crime

77. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of reported crime was committed by juveniles in the years 1978 and 1988.

Mr. John Patten: The available information relates to the number of offenders who were cautioned by the police or convicted for indictable offences by the courts. In 1978, 34 per cent. of those cautioned or convicted were juveniles and in 1988 the figure was 23 per cent. Such information is available from "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", 1988 (table 5.22), a copy of which is in the Library.

Drug Trafficking

79. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest totals for assets confiscated from convicted drug traffickers, and assets frozen, pending trials for drug trafficking offences.

Mr. John Patten: The figures are substantially as given in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 7 December at column *381*, except that the national drugs intelligence unit's current estimate is that more than £16 million has been ordered to be confiscated since the Drug Trafficking Offences Act came into force in January 1987.

142. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the efficiency of the Drugs Trafficking Offences Act 1986 in dealing with drug traffickers.

Mr. Mellor: The Government have kept the provisions of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act under close scrutiny since they came into effect in January 1987. The Act has worked well and has been a major weapon in the fight against drug trafficking, both domestically and internationally. In a recent case, for example, nearly £3 million was ordered to be confiscated from a group of convicted drug traffickers, bringing current estimates of the total ordered to be confiscated under the Act to more than £16 million.

The Government accept, however, that a provision of such significance may need adjustment in the light of experience. Some changes to the drug trafficking and money laundering provisions, to bring them fully into line with the requirements of the 1988 United Nations convention against illicit drug trafficking, are proposed in the Criminal Justice (International Cooperation) Bill, now before Parliament. The Government are also considering the relevant recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee report on drug trafficking and related serious crime (HC 370), and is discussing with practitioners how the working of the Act might be further improved. This is a continuing process, and the Government will not hesitate to make any changes which may be found to be necessary.

144. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent of drug trafficking in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor: The ministerial group on the misuse of drugs, which I chair, receives regular assessments of the extent of drug misuse and trafficking in the United Kingdom. The picture as regards heroin is mixed: although provisional figures show an increase in Customs seizures in 1989 of over 40 per cent. to 332 kilos, latest reports indicate a levelling off in some areas in the supply of heroin at street level. It is, however, clear that the United Kingdom is facing an increasing threat from cocaine: provisional figures of Customs seizures of this drug in 1989 increased by some 50 per cent. to 424 kilos and more cocaine than heroin has been seized by Customs in each of the past three years. Traffic in other drugs such as amphetamines, cannabis, LSD and MDMA (ecstasy) remains of concern.

Victims of Crime

80. **Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government funding for victim support.

105. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government funding for victim support.

Mr. John Patten: In 1989-90 the Home Office granted £3·7 million for local victims support schemes and £210,000 to victim support headquarters. Details of funding for 1990-91 will be published shortly in the public expenditure White Paper.

Rehabilitation of Offenders

81. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will re-examine the working of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act; and if he will make a statement.

85. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the working of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

Mr. John Patten: The working of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 is kept under review. Much of the pressure for change is to extend the categories which are excepted from the provisions of the Act. We consider that the Act does, on the whole, strike a reasonable balance between the need to protect the interests of the public and the interests of former offenders.

The effectiveness of the Act depends on its provisions being made known to ex-offenders. With that aim we issue free of charge large numbers of the leaflet "Wiping the Slate Clean", which is available for example, to all citizens advice bureaux.

Visas

82. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards a common visa regime within the EEC after 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Members for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) earlier this afternoon.

Ambulance Dispute

86. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the costs to date to the Metropolitan police force arising from the ambulance dispute.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The costs incurred by the Metropolitan police in providing assistance are recoverable. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that claims for £1·5 million for the period up to 19 November have been presented and paid. Claims for a further £3·4 million for the period up to the end of December have been submitted.

Knives

90. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 provisions banning the public carrying of knives.

Mr. John Patten: Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 came into force on 29 September 1988. During 1988, there were 150 prosecutions for this offence. Information for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

West Midlands Police

92. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chief constable of the West Midlands police; and what was discussed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no meetings with the chief constable since he took office as Home Secretary.

BBC

94. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next proposes to meet the chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation; and what matters he intends to discuss.

Mr. Mellor: I meet the chairman of the BBC regularly in order to discuss a wide range of broadcasting issues.

Video Surveillance

95. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any proposals to bring the regulation of video surveillance into line with article 8 of the European convention on human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I am not persuaded that video surveillance is inconsistent with article 8 of the convention.

Passports

98. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimated response time to postal applications for passports during the Easter and summer peak periods as well as off-peak periods.

117. **Ms. Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimated response time to postal applications for passports during the Easter and summer peak periods and in off-peak periods.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The passport department will be aiming in 1990 to process all straightforward, non-urgent passport applications within a maximum of 30 working days during the peak period between January and June, and within 20 working days at other times. Urgent cases will receive priority and should not normally be subject to delay.

Director of Public Prosecutions

99. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what was discussed.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier to the question from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith).

Under-age drinking

109. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has considered extending the powers of the police to suppress under-age drinking of alcohol; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Licensing Act 1988 made it easier for police to take action against landlords who sell alcohol to people under 18. I am satisfied that police powers in enforcing the licensing law are sufficient and effective. There is also a part for schools to play in providing health education about the dangers of alcohol misuse, and for parents in discouraging their children from drinking alcohol.

Punishment in the Community

110. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on his policy on punishment within the community.

Mr. John Patten: The Government's legislative proposals for punishment in the community will be explained in a White Paper on criminal justice, which we hope to publish shortly.

Sunday Trading

111. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has considered the implications of the judgement of the European Court of Justice on Torfaen borough council against B and Q concerning Sunday trading; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 7 December 1989 at columns

463-64. It is now for the courts which made referrals to the European Court to determine their cases in the light of the judgment of the court.

Vandalism

115. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he collects on the current annual number of prosecutions in the United Kingdom against vandals using paint spray aerosol cans to deface walls in public places.

Mr. John Patten: No information is separately collected on such prosecutions. Such offences are included as criminal damage in the statistics collected by the Home Office.

Police Manpower

118. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional police posts are to be created for 1990-91; and what proportion of these will be allocated to provincial forces.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on 23 November 1989, at column *12*.

13. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequency of the present strength of the Devon and Cornwall police force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend with advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, has decided to approve an increase of 17 posts for the Devon and Cornwall constabulary with effect from 1 April 1990.

Drink-related Crime

12. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of criminal offences by young adults are drink-related.

Mr. John Patten: A total of 9 per cent. of young adults (those between 17 and 20) convicted in 1988, the latest year for which figures are available were convicted of drunkeness or drink-driving offences. No reliable estimate can be made of the extent to which the offences for the remaining 91 per cent. convicted were alcohol related.

Regional Crime Squads (Drugs Investigations)

121. **Mr. Andrew Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are now employed in regional crime squad drugs wings.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There were 232 officers on the strength of regional crime squads drugs wings on 16 January. In No. 9 region, which covers the Metropolitan police district, drugs investigation is not undertaken by the regional squad but by the Metropolitan police central drugs squad. Its strength on 16 January was 110.

My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 23 November at columns *12-13* that he is prepared to approve a further 51 police posts for regional crime squads specifically for their work in connection with drugs.

Terrorism

131. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will report on progress in the fight against international terrorism.

Mr. Waddington: We continue to work vigorously with like-minded countries to strengthen the international co-operation which is crucial in preventing and combating international terrorism. The 44th United Nations General Assembly recently reaffirmed its unequivocal opposition to terrorism and urged all Governments to act firmly against it. Practical measures are being developed in bodies like the International Civil Aviation Organisation, which as part of its continuing work to improve aviation security is making good progress on a new international regime for marking explosives for detection. In the Trevi Group, EC member states have strengthened their procedures for informing one another about terrorist threats and incidents and counter terrorist measures. The group is studying further measures such as action against the financial base of terrorist groups.

The fruit of such co-operation can be seen in the current prosecutions in Europe and the United States of a number of people suspected of involvement in terrorist activities threatening United Kingdom interests.

Religious Broadcasting

132. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about religious broadcasting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have recently received written and oral representations on these matters from a number of groups and individuals, and we are taking careful account of the views put to us. The Broadcasting Bill retains certain safeguards, closely based on provisions in existing legislation, against abuse of religious broadcasting. But it provides for a less restrictive regime for religious sponsorship and advertising, and would also allow Christian and other religious groups to own radio stations in the United Kingdom for the first time. More generally, it proposes a framework under which the number of outlets for religious broadcasting could increase significantly.

Police Rent Allowance

135. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the outcome of representations he has received on his decision to set aside certain elements of the police negotiating board's recommendations on rent allowance.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Draft regulations that would give effect to my right hon. and learned Friend's decisions on the police negotiating board's recommendations were sent to the board for comment on 4 January. The board was asked to submit any comments by 26 January and my right hon. and learned Friend met representatives of the staff side of the board on 17 January. We shall carefully consider their representations before laying regulations before Parliament.

Television Shopping

140. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the European directive on broadcasting in so far as it relates to television shopping.

Mr. Mellor: The EC directive on broadcasting, which was adopted on 3 October 1989, provides in article 18 that member states shall limit to no more than one hour per day the broadcasting of forms of advertisements such as direct offers to the public for the sale, purchase or rental of products or for the provisions of services. Article 20 enables member states to lay down different conditions in respect of broadcasts intended solely for reception within their national boundaries and which may not be received, directly or indirectly, in one or more other member states.

The Government are currently considering the detailed implementation of the directive, which must be complied with by 2 October 1991 at the latest.

Prison Medical Officers

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prison hospital officers have nursing qualifications; what is the complement of full-time and part-time prison medical officers in England and Wales; and how many posts in each category are currently filled.

Mr. Mellor: About 13 per cent. of hospital officers hold a recognised nursing qualification. Of 117 authorised full-time medical officer posts 110 are currently filled. The corresponding figures for part-time medical officer posts are 129 and 112.

Deaths

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by year since 1980, the number of persons who have died *(a)* while in police care and *(b)* through police shootings.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of persons who died while in police care has been published, since 1980, in the annual reports of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, in respect of the Metropolitan police district and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, for all other police forces. Since 1982 the statistics have included brief details of the circumstances surrounding the death, and from 1987 information about persons who have died as a result of injuries caused by police officers acting in the execution of their duty. Information which is not recorded in the annual reports is not available centrally.

Dr. Sinha

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on when Dr. Sinha, a constituent of the hon. Member for Newham, North-East, will be told of the further allegations to be made against him or informed that no charges are to be made.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is understood that a meeting has been arranged for 25 January, at which time Dr. Sinha, in the presence of his solicitor, will be interviewed by police officers about the further allegations that have been made against him.

Forensic Science

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on shortages in the forensic science available to the police and to his Department.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In its reply to the Home Affairs Select Committee report in May the Government accepted the difficulties facing the Home Office forensic science service in keeping pace with the demands on it. Eighteen additional staff have been recruited to the service and at least 10 more have been approved for 1990-91, bringing the total staff in post up to 598. Work is also in hand to improve the way in which the service's available resources are used to meet the needs of its customers.

Horserace Betting Levy Board

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of the chairman and members of the Horserace Betting Levy Board, their periods of office, their annual remuneration and the organisations and associations from which they were recruited, selected and appointed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Section 24(2) of the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 provides that the levy board shall consist of a chairman and seven other members, of whom the chairman and two other members shall be appointed by the Secretary of State. Following is the information requested as to the names, periods of office and remuneration of the chairman and those two other members:

Name	*First appointed*	*Expiry of present appointment*	*Annual salary with effect from 1 January 1990*
Sir Ian Trethowan (Chairman)	1 October 1982	31 December 1990	£33,300
Sir Patrick Meaney (Deputy Chairman)	18 March 1985	28 February 1991	£13,300
Mrs. Anna McCurley	1 April 1988	31 March 1991	£ 9,950

Those appointed to the board by the Secretary of State are to be persons who he is satisfied have no interests connected with horseracing which might hinder them from discharging their functions as members of the board in an impartial manner. At the time of their respective appointments, Sir Ian Trethowan had recently been the Director-General of the BBC, Sir Patrick Meaney was (and is) chairman of the Rank Organisation, and Mrs. McCurley was a public relations executive with Dewe Rogerson and formerly the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde.

Section 24(2) of the 1963 Act further provides that the other members of the levy board shall comprise three appointed by the Jockey Club, one of whom is now customarily the chairman of the Horseracing Advisory Council (HAC), and the chairmen for the time being of the

Bookmakers' Committee and of the Horserace Totalisator Board (the Tote) respectively. In their capacity as members of the levy board, these members receive expenses only. The names of these five members, and information as to the capacities in which they sit as members of the levy board and their periods of appointment, are as follows:

Name	*Appointed by or as*	*First appointed*	*Expiry of current appointment*
Mr. M. E. Wates	The Jockey Club	1 January 1987	31 July 1990
Captain H. M. Gosling	The Jockey Club	1 July 1989	31 July 1992
Sir Nevil Macready Bt. CBE (Chairman, HAC)	The Jockey Club (ex-officio)	2 September 1986	1 September 1990
Mr. L. P. Cowburn	Chairman of the Bookmakers' Committee	24 October 1989	23 October 1991
Lord Wyatt of Weeford	Chairman of the Tote	1 May 1976	30 April 1991

Mr. Kevin Taylor

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Greater Manchester as to what measures are being taken to ensure the security and preservation of all police operational logs, notebooks and diaries relating to the case of Mr. Kevin Taylor.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable that all possible steps have been taken to secure the material relevant to the case.

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Greater Manchester police as to whether he was involved directly or indirectly in the decision of the Greater Manchester police to investigate the affairs of Mr. Kevin Taylor.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The chief officer of any force is responsible for all operational matters.

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors are taken into consideration when deciding whether a chief constable is the appropriate person to determine alleged serious misconduct by senior officers of his force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The police authority, not the chief constable, is the disciplinary authority for officers above the rank of chief superintendent in police forces other than the Metropolitan police force.

BOM Holdings

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received any representations about proposed land sale transactions by BOM Holdings plc.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Homosexuals

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men are currently imprisoned in the United Kingdom for consenting homosexual acts with males between the ages of 16 and 21 years; and what is the average sentence being served by such men.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Deportation Orders

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each of the last 12-month periods from October 1986, how many deportation orders were found to be invalid subsequent to the signing of the order; and for what reasons and in how many cases the orders were revoked or withdrawn following representations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each year for which records are available how many times senior executive officers or members of the Home Office case working section have changed decisions to deport when they have been authorised by immigration inspectors.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A study of the cases handled by the immigration service between 1 August 1988 and 31 July 1989 has shown that up to 5 September 1989, a total of 22 of the 2,096 decisions taken by inspectors had been changed by members of the Home Office deportation section.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each 12-month period from June 1985 how many notices of intention to deport have been issued under section 3(5)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971 *(a)* for working in breach of condition and *(b)* for breach of limited leave to enter; of these, how many have been initiated by the deportation case working section of the Home Office; how many by immigration officers and/or inspectors; of the total, how many resulted in removal from the United Kingdom; and how many deportees were then permitted to remain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The readily available information about the number of notices of intention to deport issued and the number of deportation orders enforced under section 3(5)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971 is published in table 24 of the Home Office volume "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1988" (Cmnd. 726) and in table 14 of Home Office statistical bulletin issue 45/89 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Third Quarter 1989", copies of which are available in the Library.

The breakdown of information between overstayers and workers in breach is not available before August 1988. In the 12 months ending June 1989, a total of 2,666 notices of intention to deport were issued under section 3(5)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971, of which 713 were authorised by the deportation section for overstaying; 1,953 were authorised by inspectors of which 1,295 were for overstaying and 658 for working in breach. Information about these subsequently permitted to remain is not available.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how immigration officers and inspectors

obtain access to Home Office information and representations in respect of intended deportees; and when the officers seek authorisation from inspectors to serve a notice of intention to deport.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In some cases information is available to the immigration service before inquiries are initiated. In other cases it may be obtained by telephone, or the decision will be deferred until the information is available. All members of the immigration service engaged in enforcement work are aware that they must not reach a decision until satisfied that all the relevant information has been taken into account.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) of cases referred by immigration officers to immigration inspectors for authorisation to serve a notice of intention to deport for breach of condition or overstaying under section 3(5)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971, on how many occasions immigration inspectors have declined to give authorisation in each six-month period for the last five years;

(2) of cases referred by immigration officers to the Home Office deportation case working section for authorisation to serve a notice of intention to deport under section 3(5)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971, on how many occasions the case working section has declined to give authorisation in each six-month period for the last five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not available.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which Home Office office the head of the immigration service reports.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The chief inspector of the immigration service reports to one of the two assistant under-secretaries in the immigration and nationality department of the Home Office.

Immigration Act 1988

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many training courses or seminars have been held about the operation of section 5 of the Immigration Act 1988; when they were held, who attended; and what information was made available to attendants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A seminar about the provisions of the Immigration Act 1988 was held in June 1988, attended by training liaison officers representing all immigration service ports. Local training seminars then followed and videos of the original talks were distributed for the information of all grades. In August 1988 a seminar was attended by deportation section staff and those inspectors with delegated authority to authorise the issue of a notice of intention to deport. This was followed up by a further seminar in June 1989 to review the operation of these arrangements. Immigration service law enforcement courses from September 1988 have specifically covered the deportation provisions of the Immigration Act 1988 and include lectures from senior officers of the immigration service and the deportation section of the relevant division of the immigration and nationality department. There have been nine such courses so far covering some 150 staff.

Risley Remand Centre

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the full report of the Home Office inquiry conducted by the director of the prison service, south-west region, into the disturbances at Risley remand centre in May 1989.

Mr. Mellor: The full report was an internal management document, but a summary including the list of all the recommendations resulting from the inquiry has already been placed in the Library, and action taken as indicated in the reply of my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) to a question by the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) on 25 July 1989 at columns *607-08*.

Prisoners (Psychiatric Treatment)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners currently on remand have been psychiatric inpatients; and how many prisoners currently on remand were unable to give a permanent address when the order for their remand was given;

(2) if he will give the numbers of convicted prisoners who *(a)* have received and *(b)* are receiving psychiatric treatment for the latest available date;

(3) if he will give, for the latest available date or whole year, the numbers of prisoners on remand who have previously received or are receiving psychiatric treatment, for each remand centre.

Mr. Mellor: The number of inmates who have received or are undergoing psychiatric treatment, or who were unable to give a permanent address when the order for their remand was given, is not recorded centrally.

Remand Centres (Suicide)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each remand centre, the numbers of inmates who committed suicide for each year since 1983; and if he will give similar figures for the prison officers.

Mr. Mellor: The table gives the numbers of inmates who have died in remand centres and local prisons in each of the last seven years, and in respect of whom a suicide verdict was returned at the inquest. The figures in brackets give the numbers of those inmates who were being held on remand.

Before 1 January 1990 no central record was kept of the causes from which serving prison officers died. The information requested is therefore not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Establishment	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	[1]*1989*
Ashford	—	—	—	1(1)	1(1)	—	—
Bedford	—	—	—	1	—	1(1)	—
Birmingham	—	—	2(2)	—	1(1)	1(1)	—
Brixton	4(4)	5(5)	2(2)	2(2)	3(3)	1(1)	1(1)

Establishment	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	[1]*1989*
Canterbury	—	—	—	1(1)	3(3)	—	1(1)
Cardiff	—	—	—	1(1)	1	—	—
Dorchester	—	—	—	—	—	1(1)	—
Durham	—	1(1)	2(2)	—	3(3)	1(1)	2(1)
Exeter	—	2(2)	1	1(1)	1	1	1(1)
Gloucester	1(1)	—	1	—	—	—	—
Hull	—	—	—	—	1(1)	—	—
Leeds	1(1)	1(1)	2(2)	—	2(2)	4(4)	2(2)
Leicester	—	1(1)	2(2)	—	—	—	—
Lewes	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Lincoln	—	—	1(1)	1(1)	2(2)	1	—
Liverpool	2	—	—	—	—	—	2
Manchester	1(1)	—	1(1)	2(2)	3(2)	—	3(3)
Norwich	1(1)	2(1)	—	1(1)	1(1)	—	—
Pentonville	1	1(1)	2	—	2(2)	1(1)	—
Risley	—	—	1(1)	1(1)	3(3)	4(4)	—
Shrewsbury	—	1	—	—	—	1(1)	—
Swansea	—	1(1)	—	—	—	1(1)	—
Wandsworth	—	1	2	—	3	1	1
Winchester	2(2)	—	—	—	1(1)	—	2(1)
Wormwood Scrubs	—	1	2(2)	1(1)	2(2)	2(2)	1(1)
Total	13(10)	18(13)	21(15)	13(12)	33(27)	21(18)	17(11)

[1] Inquests have yet to be held on eight other inmates who died in 1989 and whose deaths were thought to have been suicides. These deaths occurred at Risley (2); Brixton (2); Cardiff, Hindley, Swansea and Manchester, and five of the inmates were being held on remand.

Speed Limits (Enforcement)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues to police forces concerning different courses of action to be pursued against motorists exceeding speed limits.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. The responsibility for enforcing road traffic law, including the speed limit, rests with individual chief officers of police.

Prisoners' Pay

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the basic pay paid to inmates in prisons in England and Wales; when this was last increased; and what is the highest weekly pay that can be earned by an inmate who is in full-time employment in a prison establishment in England and Wales.

Mr. Mellor: The basic pay, which is paid to inmates who are unemployed or incapacitated through illness or injury, is £1·65 per week. The maximum pay that can be earned under various incentive schemes is £5·55 per week. Rates were last increased in April 1989.

Violence, Drugs and Sex

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of people at present serving sentences in Her Majesty's prisons are doing so for offences which involve violence, drugs or sex.

Mr. Mellor: Nearly 50 per cent. in 1989, compared with less than a third in 1979.

Judicial Inquiries

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the criterion in the past when independent judicial inquiries have been instituted to inquire into matters of national importance and interest; and whether these criteria are applicable in the matters appertaining to Mr. John Stalker.

Mr. Waddington: Successive Home Secretaries have reserved such inquiries for circumstances where the whole efficiency of a force is called into question, or where there has been serious public disorder, or some similar circumstance where wide-ranging and serious disquiet is felt about a matter affecting a large proportion of a force.

I do not consider that these criteria apply to the events surrounding Mr. John Stalker's suspension from the Greater Manchester police force and his subsequent reinstatement therein.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 26 January 1990

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Haberdashers' Aske's Schools

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to ensure that pupils registered at the five north Lewisham sixth form consortium schools, who begin the study of any of their A-level courses at the Haberdashers' Aske's school in September, will be able to complete the second year of those courses without interruption or disruption due to the conversion of the Aske's schools to a city technology college in September 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Haberdashers' Company has repeatedly stated its wish that the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college, once established, should remain within the north Lewisham sixth form consortium. How this is achieved will be a matter for the governing body of the CTC and for the London borough of Lewisham.

Governing Bodies, Humberside

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to be able to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Beverley of 19 September 1989 regarding local education authority representatives on school governing bodies in Humberside.

Mrs. Rumbold: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 22 January explaining the current position.

Departmental Circulars

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the title and numbers of all his Department's circulars issued since June 1979; and what action has been taken to ensure that they have been implemented.

Mrs. Rumbold: Following is a list of the titles and numbers of all circulars issued since June 1979. Circulars give guidance on the implementation of Government policy on education matters and progress is kept under review in a number of ways.

Circular number	*Date*	*Title*
Circulars 1979		
1/79	24 January	Rate Support Grant Settlement 1979-80
2/79	29 March	The Government's Expenditure Plans (Cmnd. 7439): Implications for Local Authority Expenditure 1979-83
3/79	27 March	Tuition Fees in Further Education 1979-80
4/79	9 July	Local Authority Expenditure in 1979-80
5/79	12 July	Tuition Fees and Admissions to Further Education Establishments and Awards 1979-80: Race Relations Act 1976
Amendments to Circulars		
	31 October	Circular 295 (Amendment No. 22) Education Grants for Service Children [Circular 295 Issued 8 November 1955]
Circulars 1980		
1/80	2 May	Education Act 1980
2/80	14 July	Procedure affecting proposals made under Sections 12-16 of The Education Act 1980
Amendments to Circulars		
	10 June	Circular 295 (Amendment No. 23) Education Grants for Service Children [Circular 295 issued 8 November 1955]
	10 October	Circular 295 (Amendment No. 24) Education Grants for Service Children [Circular 295 issued 8 November 1955]
Circulars 1981		
1/81	5 March	Education Act 1980: Admission to Schools, Appeals, Publication of Information and School Attendance Orders (Sections 6-11 and Schedule 2)
2/81	16 June	Falling Rolls and Surplus Places
3/81	23 June	Boarding Education for Service Children
4/81	30 June	Education Act 1980: School Government
5/81	31 July	Directive of the Council of the European Community on the Education of the Children of Migrant Workers
6/81	1 October	The School Curriculum
7/81	21 October	Education Act 1980: Sections 27 and 33(3): Regulations
8/81	7 December	Education Act 1981
Circulars 1982		
1/82	9 February	Approval of Advanced Further Education Courses in England
2/82	April	RE: Disabled Persons Act 1981
3/82	27 May	Section 14 of The Education Act 1981: Discontinuance of Maintained Special Schools
4/82	8June	Statutory Proposals for Secondary Schools and Falling Rolls
5/82	25 June	Approval of Advanced Further Education Courses in England: Revised Arrangements
6/82	8 Sepember	The Youth Training Scheme: Implication for the Education Service
7/82	15 October	Education Act 1980, Sections 27 and 33(3): Regulations: Teachers
Circulars 1983		
1/83	31 January	Assessments and Statements of Special Educational Needs
2/83	18 February	The Initial Training and Qualification for Teaching of Holders of Certain Specialist Qualifications
3/83	31 March	The In-Service Teacher Training Grants Scheme
4/83	14 July	Arrangements for The Approval of Advanced Further Education Courses in England
5/83	22 July	Reduction of Teaching Posts in Advanced Further Education: Redundancy Compensation
6/83	2 November	The Approval of Special Schools
7/83	6 December	Education Act 1980: Application of Section 2 to Maintained Special School
8/83	8 December	The School Curriculum
Circulars 1984		
1/84	30 January	Crime Prevention
2/84	29 March	Certification of Local Authority Claims for Exchequer Grants and Subsidies

Circular number	Date	Title
3/84	13 April	Initial Teacher Training: Approval of Courses
4/84	4 May	The In-Service Teacher Training Grants Scheme
5/84	10 July	Arrangements for the Approval of Advanced Further Education Courses in England, 1985-86
6/84	18 July	Education Support Grants
7/84	15 October	Education Act 1980: Application of Sections 2 and 3 to all maintained schools
Circulars 1985		
1/85	26 March	Youth Service
2/85	16 April	Arrangements for the Approval of Advanced Further Education Courses in England, 1986-87
3/85	5 June	The In-service Teacher Training Grants Scheme
4/85	28 June	The Future of one-year Certificate in Education Courses for Secondary Teachers of Business Studies and of Craft, Design and Technology
5/85	7 August	Education Support Grants
5/85	Addendum 20 December	Education Support Grants: Midday Supervision in Schools
6/85	16 September	The Further Education Act 1985: Commercial Activities in Further Education
Circulars 1986		
1/86	2 January	The In-Service Teacher Training Grants Scheme: Arrangements for the Academic Year 1986-87 and Revised Arrangements to Support GCSE Training in the Academic Year 1985-86
2/86	10 February	School Attendance and Education Welfare Services
3/86	21 April	Arrangements for the Approval of Advanced Further Education Courses in England, 1986-87 and 1987-88
4/86	17 July	Protection of Children: Disclosure of Criminal Background of those with Access to Children
5/86	25 June	Education Support Grants
6/86	29 August	Local Education Authority Training Grants Scheme: Financial Year 1987-88
7/86	29 August	Approval of Courses of Further Training for School and Further Education Teachers in England 1987-88 and Notification of Intended Arrangements for 1988-89
8/86	19 December	Education (No. 2) Act 1986
Circulars 1987		
1/87	18 February	Follow up to HMI Reports
2/87	17 March	Education (Publication of Proposals to Change Status of a Controlled School) Regulations 1987
3/87	6 May	Providing for Quality: The Pattern of Organisation to Age 19
4/87	13 May	Arrangements for the approval of Advanced Further Education Courses in England, 1977-78 and 1988-89
5/87	15 May	School Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Employment
6/87	24 July	Education (No. 2) Act 1986; Regulations made under Sections 51, 61, and 62 and 3rd Commencement Order
7/87	7 August	Education (No. 2) Act 1986: Further Guidance
8/87	11 August	School Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Employment
9/87	26 August	Local Education Authority Training Grants Scheme: Financial Year 1988-89
10/87	26 August	Approval for Courses of Further Training for School and Further Education Teachers in England 1988-89
11/87	25 September	Sex Education at School
Circulars 1988		
1/88	22 January	Physical and Mental Fitness to Teach of Teachers and of Entrants to Teacher Training
2/88	1 February	Disabled Persons (Services Consultation and Representation) Act 1986—Implementation Section 5 and 6 LAC 88(2)
3/88	16 June	School Teachers Pay and Conditions of Employment
4/88	6 July	Working Together for the Protecton of Children from Abuse: Procedures within the Education Service
5/88	15 August	Local Education Authority Training Grants Scheme: Finance Year 1989-90
6/88	18 August	The Transfer of Responsibility for Education in Inner London
7/88	6 September	Education Reform Act: Local Management of Schools
8/88	12 September	Education Reform Act 1988: Governance of Maintained Further Education Colleges
9/88	13 September	Education Reform Act 1988: Local Management of Further and Higher Education Colleges: Planning and Delegation Schemes and Articles of Government
10/88	14 October	Education Act 1988: Grant Maintained Schools
11/88	20 October	Admission of Pupils to County and Voluntary schools
12/88	9 December	Joint Circular Home Office/Department of Education and Science/Department of Health and Welsh Office—Protection of Children: Disclosure of Criminal Background of those with Access to Children
Circulars 1989		
1/89	9 January	Education Reform Act 1988: Local Arrangements for the Consideration of Complaints
2/89	12 January	Education Reform Act 1988: Charges for School Activities
3/89	20 January	Education Reform Act 1988: Religious Education and Collective Worship
4/89	20 February	Alcohol Misuse
5/89	22 February	Education Reform Act 1988: The School Curriculum and Assessment
6/89	7 March	Education Reform Act 1988: National Curriculum: Mathematics and Science Orders under Section 4
7/89	22 March	The Teachers (Compensation for Redundancy and Premature Retirement) Regulations 1989
8/89	4 April	Ethnically-based Statistics on School Teachers
9/89	19 May	Education Reform Act 1988: Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum
10/89	31 May	Education Reform Act 1988: National Curriculum: English Key Stage One Order under Section 4
11/89	31 May	Education Reform Act 1988: Statutory Approval of Qualifications under Section 5
12/89	30 May	School Teachers Pay and Conditions of Employment

Circular number	Date	Title
13/89	9 June	Local Management of Schools and Further and Higher Education Colleges: Order Under Section 222 of the Education Reform Act 1988
14/89	12 June	Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989
15/89	11 July	Education Reform Act 1988: Temporary Exceptions from the National Curriculum
16/89	25 July	Ethnically-based Statistics on School Pupils
17/89	27 July	The Education (School Records) Regulations 1989
18/89	16 August	The Education (Teachers) Regulations 1989
19/89	17 August	Adult Continuing Education and the Education Reform Act 1988: Planning and Delegation Schemes
20/89	18 August	Local Education Authority Training Grants Scheme: Financial Year 1990-91
21/89	23 August	Grant-Maintained Schools: Financial Arrangements
22/89	29 September	Assessments and Statements of Special Educational Needs: Procedures within the Education, Health and Social Services
23/89	8 November	Special Schools for Pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
24/89	10 November	Initial Teacher Training: Approval of Courses

National Union of Teachers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on proposals to restore negotiation rights to the National Union of Teachers.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend held a series of meetings with the teacher unions, including the National Union of Teachers, in October and November last year to discuss new pay determination arrangements. He is considering carefully the points made to him then. Further meetings will take place in due course.

Collective Worship

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the representations he has received concerning collective worship in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received various representations concerning collective worship in schools.

National Curriculum

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the cost to the Exchequer of implementing the national curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: The cost of delivering the national curriculum will be met largely by the redirection of existing resources. However, we are giving local education authorities specific grant support to help with implementation. In this financial year, some £70 million will be available from the Exchequer through education support grants and LEA training grants to support some £100 million LEA expenditure for this purpose. This is in addition to general rate support grant which local authorities may use to implement the national curriculum.

Some £20 million of Exchequer funds will additionally be deployed on central expenditure on the national curriculum, including the running costs of the National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council and the costs of developing standard assessment tasks.

Under-fives

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what submissions the committee examining the education of the under-fives has received; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mrs. Rumbold: The organisations and individuals listed in the table have submitted written evidence to the committee. Most organisations have made their submissions public, but the committee does not feel free to make the views of individuals more widely available. In these circumstances it does not propose to place copies of the evidence in the Library.

Association of Metropolitan Authorities
British Association for Early Childhood Education
Children's Theatre Association
Community Education Development Centre
Early Years Curriculum Lobby and National Campaign for Nursery Education (Joint Submission)
Geographical Association
National Association for Gifted Children Ltd.
National Childminding Association
National Curriculum Council
National Association of Head Teachers
Northamptonshire Early Childhood Centre
Rachel McMillan Nursery School
Pre-School Playgroups Association
Save the Children
Society of Education Officers
Sheffield Metropolitan Division of the National Union of Teachers
Trades Union Congress
Universities Council for the Education of Teachers
University of Warwick Department of Education
Voluntary Organisation Liaison Council for under Fives

Mr. C. Blyth and Mr. F. Wallace
Mrs. J. M. Burns
Mr. M. Hiscox
Ms. Beryl Johnson
Mrs. Carolyn A. Jones
Ms. Jane Kirby
Ms. M. Lally
Mrs. M. Lewis
Ms. Caroline Matusiak
Mrs. Janet Morris
Marjorie Ouvry
Mrs. Mary Richardson
Ms. Christine Stevenson
Mr. J. Thackray and Ms. F. Sturt
Jay Trevis
Ms. H. Waddup and Ms. M. Randell
Ms. Sylvia Walker
Ms. Dorothy Wedge

Computers

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what conclusion he has reached on the proposals for the future for the computer board for the universities and research councils, issued for consultation on 15 September 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The computer board is, like the former University Grants Committee, a non-statutory and strictly advisory body. The consultation proposals were for re-establishment of the board's functions with a new executive character within the Universities Funding Council (UFC); and for the relocation of the board's secretariat from London to Bristol, alongside the two higher education funding councils in 1991.

In the light of responses to the consultation exercise, particularly from the board and the UFC, I now confirm these proposals. Detailed arrangements will now be made to secure the change of status as soon as is practicable and, in any case, by not later than the date of the move to Bristol. As part of these arrangements, lead responsibility for supercomputing matters will, as recommended by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, be transferred to the research councils.

I pay tribute to the achievements of the board to date in relation to not only universities but the wider academic and research community. These proposals recognise that success and, against the background of changes in computing generally and the development of university funding arrangements under the Education Reform Act 1988, pave the way for this to be carried forward into the 1990s.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when letters will be sent to grant-maintained schools setting out their capital allocations for the financial year 1990-91.

Mrs. Rumbold: Letters are being sent today to existing grant-maintained schools and those approved as grant-maintained schools from April 1990 setting out allocations of capital grant totalling £6·6 million for the financial year 1990-91. A further sum of up to £1·9 million is available to meet commitments and contingencies, including the needs of schools coming into the sector after 1 April 1990.

Following bids from the schools, £5·8 million of the £6·6 million is allocated to named projects and £0·3 million is for committed expenditure resulting from projects in progress before the schools became grant-maintained.

The remaining £0·5 million is being allocated through a small formula-based capital allocation for each grant-maintained school. Governing bodies will be able to use this allocation for items of capital equipment and small capital works which, because of their relatively small size, were outside the scope of the capital bidding system adopted for grant-maintained schools.

Priority in the allocations has been given to schools' most pressing needs, including projects related to the health and safety of pupils. The allocations will also help with the introduction of the national curriculum.

The following is a list of the allocations:

Capital allocations for grant-maintained schools in 1990-91

All figures are in £000s

School	*Formula allocation*	*Named project*	*Named project allocation*	*Total allocation*
Audenshaw High School (Tameside)	17·4	Exterior repairs	30	
		Conversion of CDT room into chemistry laboratory	120	
		2 new art rooms and ancillary rooms	425	
			575	592·4
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School (Lancs)	17·4	Replace temporary accommodation	400	
		Roof repair	138	
		Renovate science laboratories	85	
			623	640·4
Bankfield High School (Cheshire)	15·6	Resite and improve technology, art and modern languages accommodation	480	495·6
Baverstock Grant-Maintained School (Birmingham)	18·9	Extractor fan for CDT room	10	
		Removal of asbestos	15	
			25	43·9
Beechen Cliff School (Avon)	18·2	Extend and improve the technology unit	210	
		Repairs to kitchen and dining room	180	
			390	408·2
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School London	16·6	Still to bid		
Castle Hall Grant-Maintained School (Kirklees)	15·3	Removal of asbestos	11	26·3
Claremont High School (Brent)	18·4	Exterior repairs	248	
		Renovation of laboratories	80	
			328	346·4
Colyton Grammar School (Devon)	15·6	New technology block	811	826·6

School	*Formula allocation*	*Named project*	*Named project allocation*	*Total allocation*
Heckmondwike Grammar School (Kirklees)	16·4	Repairs and asbestos removal	84	
		Flat roof repairs	43	
		New boilers	71	
			198	214·4
Hendon School (Barnet)	18	Washroom facilities	35	
		Laboratory improvements	99	
		Renew windows	46	
			180	198·0
Lancaster Royal Grammar School (Lancs)	18·1	Rewiring	87	
		Convert technical drawing room into information technology room	24	
		Build washrooms	44	
			155	173·1
London Nautical School (London)	15·4	Repairs	100	115·4
London Oratory School (London)	20	Renovation of laboratories	151	171·0
Netherthorpe School (Derbyshire)	16·3			16·3
Old Swinford Hospital (Dudley)	16·3	Repairs to stairs	20	
		Repairs to fencing	7	
		Extension to science prep room	8	
			35	51·3
Queen Elizabeth's Grant-Maintained School (Lincs)	15	Replace temporary accommodation	100	115·0
Queen Elizabeth's Grant-Maintained School for Boys (Barnet)	19·2	Repairs	90	109·2
Queensbury School (Beds)	16·8	Repairs	27	
		Extractor fan in CDT room	20	
		Fire safety work	10	
			57	73·8
Ribston Hall High School (Gloucs)	16	New technology unit	280	296·0
Skegness Grammar School (Lincs)	16·4	Furniture and equipment for ongoing project	25	
		Remodelling of classroom	39	
		Conversion of art room into a geography room	28	
			92	108·4
Small Heath School (Birmingham)	17·6	Roof repair/wiring	50	67·6
Southfields School for Girls (Northants)	16·7	Still to bid		16·7
Southlands School (Berkshire)	16·2	Still to bid		16·2
St. Francis Xavier's College (Liverpool)	19	Repair to flat roof	32	51·0
St. James CE (Bolton)	17	Rebuild block	650	667·0
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington (Kent)	15·7	Roof repairs	23	
		Repairs to old block	21	
			44	59·7
The King's School Grantham (Lincs)	17·5	2 new classrooms	128	145·5
Wilson's School (Sutton)	17·4	Build technology workshop and convert old space to science laboratories	200	217·4
Total	494·4		5,785	6,279·4

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Development Natural Resources Unit

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he had with the users and clients of the overseas development natural resources unit, Chatham, prior to his decision to turn it into a statutory agency; if he will summarise any responses; and if he will state the effects on payments to and the nature of services profferred arising out of the change of status.

Mrs. Chalker: The decision to accord agency status to the Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute (ODNRI) on 1 April 1990 was based on careful study of the needs of ODA customer departments, which are the institute's main source of income, and of the likely demand for its services from other aid donors. The broad conclusion was that ODNRI had a continuing and important role to play in the sustainable development of natural resources across the developing world.

ODNRI's principal objectives as an agency will be to maintain its international reputation and comparative advantage as a source of multidisciplinary, problem-solving expertise; to reflect in its work the particular needs of the British aid programme; to undertake work for other aid donors; and to extend and strengthen links with scientific institutions and universities in Britain and overseas.

ODNRI will remain part of the ODA. Payments for its services will be based on the full economic costs of providing them. The institute's skill base and the services that it offers will depend, as now, on the demands of its customers, acting on behalf of the ultimate beneficiaries of its work in developing countries. The institute will be free to expand if demand for its expertise justifies this.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Planning Applications

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions, for each year since 1980, applications for planning permission were refused by the Department of the Environment town and country planning division on the grounds of unsuitable road access; and if he will give details for each district council area.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent meeting with Dame Lydia Dunn and Mr. Allen Lee concerning the future of Hong Kong.

The Prime Minister: I had a useful meeting with Dame Lydia Dunn and Mr. Allen Lee, the two Senior Members of the Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils, on 23 January. I listened very carefully to what they had to say about Hong Kong's constitutional development. I assured them that we would take their views into account in taking our decisions about this important matter.

Travel

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Prime Minister if, pursuant to the answers given to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) in the *Official Report*, 27 November 1989, column *92*, and to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) in the *Official Report*, 1 December 1989, column *446*, she will list those occasions since 1 January 1987 when she has travelled on official business on a British Rail train.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) on 27 November at column *92*.

ENERGY

Power Generation

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions since May 1979 he or Ministers of his Department stated *(a)* in Parliament and *(b)* outside Parliament that nuclear-generated power is cheaper than coal-generated power.

Mr. Wakeham: Such statements are not recorded centrally, and the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, I draw the right hon. Member's attention to my statement to the House on 9 November 1989, when I stated that

"The Government have for some time recognised that our nuclear power is more costly than power from fossil-fuelled generating stations".—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1989; Vol. 159, c. 1175.]

Cash Limits

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limits or running costs limits for 1989-90.

Mr. Wakeham: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 3 will be increased by £1,210,000 from £37,889,000 to £39,099,000. The increase is sought because of higher than forecast costs of staff, including some additional staff, and certain supporting services, partially offset by savings and increased appropriations in aid. For the same reasons, the limit on the Department's running costs in the vote is also increased by £1,225,000 from £38,122,000 to £39,347,000.

The increase in cash limit for class VI, vote 3 will be fully offset by a reduction of £2,100,000 in the cash limit for class VI, vote 2 from £289,488,000 to £287,388,000 and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Office of Electricity Regulation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any changes will be made to the Office of Electricity Regulation's (OFFER) cash limit or running costs limit for 1989-90.

Mr. Wakeham: I understand that a Supplementary Estimate will be submitted by the Director General of the Office of Electricity Regulation, who is accountable for the vote. The following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 7 relating to expenditure by the Office of Electricity Regulation has been reduced by £1,499,000 from £7,796,000 to £6,297,000. The running costs limit has been reduced by £2,653,000 from £6,320,000 to £3,667,000.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Defamation

Mr. Waller: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects the review of the law of defamation to be completed.

The Attorney-General: Good progress has been made with the review and my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor hopes that it will be completed fairly soon.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the accountancy firms which act as auditors to public bodies sponsored by his Department.

Mr. Redwood: The following accountancy firms audit nationalised industries and executive non-departmental public bodies for which my Department is responsible:

Firm	*Public body*
BDO Binder Hamlyn	British Hallmarking Council
Coopers and Lybrand	National Consumer Council
	Gas Consumers Council
Ernst and Young	English Industrial Estates Corporation
	National Film Development Fund
	Post Office (and Girobank)
Grant Thornton	Hearing Aid Council
Peat Marwick McLintock	British Technology Group (NRDC, NEB)
Price Waterhouse	British Shipbuilders
Touche Ross and Company	Policyholders' Protection Board

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of Britain's top 100 companies are audited by accountancy firms criticised by his Department's inspectors.

Mr. Redwood: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any of the individuals prosecuted in 1988 and 1989 in connection with insider dealings are accountants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Three of the individuals who were tried for insider dealing offences in 1988 and 1989 are known to have a professional accountancy qualification. In one other case where a prosecution was begun in 1989 the defendant has an accountancy qualification.

Company Prosecutions

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Redcar of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *187*, how many of the 113 successful prosecutions completed since 1 January 1979 were commenced before that date.

Mr. Redwood: It is not possible to provide the information requested by the hon. Member within the time limit imposed on costs. The figure given includes prosecutions carried out not only by my Department but by other prosecution authorities, for example, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Serious Fraud Office and the police and full records for these are not maintained within the Department.

Petrol

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of petrol.

Mr. Redwood: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of petrol was received on 20 December 1989. It will be published as soon as possible.

Office of Telecommunications

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he proposes to make any changes to the running costs limit for the Office of Telecommunications for 1989-90.

Mr. Forth: The running costs limit will be reduced by £37,000 from £4,196,000 to £4,159,000 to compensate for an overspend in 1988-89.

Companies Act 1989

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he proposes to commence any provisions of the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: Parts of section 75 of the Companies Act 1989 came into force on 25 January 1990. These provisions extend the purposes for which information which is restricted information for the purposes of section 179 of the Financial Services Act 1986 may be disclosed.

Vietnam

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why export credit guarantee cover has not generally been available for contracts with Vietnam since 1982.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* ECGD's assessment of individual markets is based upon economic considerations. It is not departmental policy to publish the full details of these assessments, but in the case of Vietnam, I can say that cover for medium and long-term business was withdrawn following defaults on repayment. Vietnam is currently in breach of its financial obligations to the International Monetary Fund and its major creditor countries.

WALES

Ambulance Dispute

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the ambulance dispute in Wales.

Mr. Grist: This is an unnecessary and damaging dispute. The offer made by the management side is fair and constructive and is the most the NHS can reasonably afford without cutting into patient services. It should be accepted and normal working resumed.

The industrial action being taken by ambulance staff has not so far affected accident and emergency services in any part of Wales. Non-urgent and outpatient services are however being disrupted to varying degrees. Day patients, particularly the elderly and infirm, are suffering as a direct result of this action.

We hope that the dispute can be settled quickly to avoid any further hardship to patients.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many complaints about the pay arrangements for supply teachers he has received; and to which local education authority they referred.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Two. The local education authorities to which they referred were West Glamorgan and Gwent.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will detail the total assistance given to the fishing industry *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* for vessels registered for the port of Milford Haven in each year since 1974.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* Details of total assistance given to the fishing industry in Wales for each year since 1974 are contained in the published "Appropriation Accounts" covering the period; copies are available in the Library of the House. These publications contain details of EC grant aid for the construction and modification of fishing vessels and for marketing, processing and infrastructure projects associated with the fishing industry, as well as Government expenditure on harbour grants, grants for the decommissioning of fishing vessels and costs incurred on fisheries protection operations.

Assistance was given to Milford Haven registered vessels in two of the years since 1974, as follows:

1988 £	*1989* £
297,139	42,776

Welsh Language

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by grade those posts in his Department for which a knowledge of Welsh is essential.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The information is as follows:

1 Grade 7
1 HEO
2 EO
1 AO
2 Typists

In addition there are a number of work areas within my Department in which a proportion of Welsh speakers is very desirable. Staff are recruited and deployed accordingly.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by grade those staff, excluding Her Majesty's inspectorate, in his Department's education division, whose duties involve the Government's proposals for the introduction of Welsh in the national curriculum who are able to conduct the full range of their responsibilities through the medium of Welsh.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* No such criterion is used, but the following information relates to numbers of Welsh speakers whose duties include the proposals for the introduction of Welsh in the national curriculum.

1 Grade 2
1 Grade 3
1 Grade 5
1 HEO

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Benefits

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how he proposes to consult disability organisations on his plans for disability benefits outlined in "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People."

Mr. Scott: We have sent a copy of our proposals to a wide range of disability organisations and other interested bodies, including the Disability Benefits Consortium which represents over 250 organisations of and for disabled people. We shall take account of comments made during the course of our detailed work on the major changes we have announced, in particular the new disability allowance and the disability employment credit.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what basis the Government estimate that 50,000 people might be entitled to disability employment credit.

Mr. Scott: The estimate of 50,000 potential disability employment credit (DEC) recipients is a tentative one, derived by examining the OPCS disability survey data to identify two main eligible groups:

(a) disability and incapacity benefit recipients not currently working but who, in response to the survey questions on employment, indicated interest in and capacity for doing some limited paid work, and
(b) disability benefit recipients who were already working but whose hours of work and earnings indicated potential entitlement to the DEC.

The final figure of 50,000 reflects further broad assumptions about the extent to which these people are likely to be able to find suitable jobs and to take advantage of the DEC.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions are made about the level of disability employment credit in suggesting in paragraph 5.17 of "The Way Ahead" that the gross cost of the new benefit will be £80 million.

Mr. Scott: It is assumed that applicable amounts for the disability employment credit will broadly follow those for family credit, but precise details of the credit are still to be considered.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what his Department estimates to be the average costs arising from disability, other than those associated with mobility or attendance needs.

Mr. Scott: The surveys of disability carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) found that average extra costs arising from disability ranged from £3·20 for the least severely disabled adults to £11·70 for the most severely disabled adults. The majority of disabled people have more than one disability, and OPCS found that it was not possible to produce reliable estimates of the extra costs attributable to each type of disability.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the proposed age-related additions to severe disablement allowance will take account of recipients of NCIP and HNCIP transferred to SDA.

Mr. Scott: Yes. Our intention is that people who have transferred from NCIP and HNCIP will have the addition related to their age when incapacity for work began for the purposes of these benefits.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give (i) the extra expenditure and (ii) any savings for each year up to 2000 as a result of each of the main measures on disability benefits which he announced on 10 January; and if he will make further projections for *(a)* extra costs and *(b)* savings for each of these measures between the years 2000 and 2025 where these can be estimated in broad orders of magnitude.

Mr. Scott: The available information is given in the table. It is not possible to provide reliable estimates for each measure in every year, particularly in the longer term, since the costs and savings depend on a large number of factors which cannot be accurately forecast. The table therefore gives estimates for the next four financial years, together with projections of the likely effects in 2000-01 and 2025-26 The figures for 2000-01 and, in particular, those for 2025-26 are subject to considerable margins of uncertainty.

1990-91

£ million 1989-90 prices

	Extra Costs (+)	*Savings (−)*	*Net Effect*
Increase in adults' disability premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+18	—	+18
Introduction of £10 carers' premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+6	—	+6
Increase in disabled child's premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+8	—	+8
Extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies	+5	—	+5
Extension of Attendance Allowance to terminally-ill people without a waiting period	+13	—	+13
Increase in top rate of Invalidity Allowance to £10	+1	neg.	+1
Extension of Mobility Allowance to people who are deaf and blind	+4	—	+4
Additional funds for the Independent Living Fund[2]	+19	—	+19
Introduce Disability Allowance	—	—	—
Abolish upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs	—	—	—
Introduce age-related addition in Severe Disablement Allowance	+35	−20	+15
Introduce Disability Employment Credit[3]	—	—	—
End entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance in new cases	neg.	−1	−1
End accruals of new rights to Invalidity Benefit Additional Pension	—	—	—
Totals[4]	+109	−21	+88

1991-92

£ million 1989-90 prices

	Extra Costs (+)	*Savings (−)*	*Net Effect*
Increase in adults' disability premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+19	—	+19
Introduction of £10 carers' premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+15	—	+15
Increase in disabled child's premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+8	—	+8
Extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies	+6	—	+6
Extension of Attendance Allowance to terminally-ill people without a waiting period	+28	—	+28

	Extra Costs (+)	Savings (−)	Net Effect
Increase in top rate of Invalidity Allowance to £10	+1	neg.	+1
Extension of Mobility Allowance to people who are deaf and blind	+5	—	+5
Additional funds for the Independent Living Fund[2]	+26	—	+26
Introduce Disability Allowance	—	—	—
Abolish upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs	—	—	—
Introduce age-related addition in Severe Disablement Allowance	+110	−60	+50
Introduce Disability Employment Credit[3]	—	—	—
End entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance in new cases	+1	−18	−17
End accruals of new rights to Invalidity Benefit Additional Pension	—	—	—
Totals[4]	+219	−78	+141

1992-93

£ million 1989-90 prices

	Extra Costs (+)	Savings (−)	Net Effect
Increase in adults' disability premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+19	—	+19
Introduction of £10 carers' premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+15	—	+15
Increase in disabled child's premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+8	—	+8
Extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies	+6	—	+6
Extension of Attendance Allowance to terminally-ill people without a waiting period	+29	—	+29
Increase in top rate of Invalidity Allowance to £10	+1	neg	+1
Extension of Mobility Allowance to people who are deaf and blind	[1]—	—	—
Additional funds for the Independent Living Fund[2]	+27	—	+27
Introduce Disability Allowance	+115	—	+115
Abolish upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs	—	—	—
Introduce age-related addition in Severe Disablement Allowance	+115	−65	+50
Introduce Disability Employment Credit[3]	+80	−90	−10
End entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance in new cases	+2	−43	−41
End accruals of new rights to Invalidity Benefit Additional Pension	+5	−10	−5
Total[4]	+422	−208	+214

1993-94

£ million 1989-90 prices

	Extra Costs (+)	Savings (−)	Net Effect
Increase in adults' disability premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+19	—	+19
Introduction of £10 carers' premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+15	—	+15
Increase in disabled child's premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+8	—	+8
Extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies	+6	—	+6
Extension of Attendance Allowance to terminally-ill people without a waiting period	+30	—	+30
Increase in top rate of Invalidity Allowance to £10	+1	neg.	+1
Extension of Mobility Allowance to people who are deaf and blind	—	—	—

	Extra Costs (+)	*Savings (−)*	*Net Effect*
Additional funds for the Independent Living Fund[2]	+28	—	+28
Introduce Disability Allowance	+230	—	+230
Abolish upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs	—	—	—
Introduce age-related addition in Severe Disablement Allowance	+120	−65	+55
Introduce Disability Employment Credit[3]	+80	−90	−10
End entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance in new cases	+3	−64	−61
End accruals of new rights to Invalidity Benefit Additional Pension	+5	−30	−25
Totals[4]	+545	−249	+296

2001-02

£ million 1989-90 prices

	Extra Costs (+)	*Savings (−)*	*Net Effect*
Increase in adults' disability premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+25	—	+25
Introduction of £10 carers' premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+20	—	+20
Increase in disabled child's premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+10	—	+10
Extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies	+5	—	+5
Extension of Attendance Allowance to terminally-ill people without a waiting period	+25	—	+25
Increase in top rate of Invalidity Allowance to £10	+1	neg.	+1
Extension of Mobility Allowance to people who are deaf and blind	—	—	—
Additional funds for the Independent Living Fund[2]	—	—	—
Introduce Disability Allowance	+280	—	+280
Abolish upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs	+100	—	+100
Introduce age-related addition in Severe Disablement Allowance	+110	−60	+50
Introduce Disability Employment Credit[3]	+80	−90	−10
End entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance in new cases	+10	−140	−130
End accruals of new rights to Invalidity Benefit Additional Pension	+105	−475	−370
Totals[4]	+771	−765	+6

2025-26 ([5])

£ million 1989-90 prices

	Extra Costs (+)	*Savings (−)*	*Net Effect*
Increase in adults' disability premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+30	—	+30
Introduction of £10 carers' premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+25	—	+25
Increase in disabled child's premium in Income Support and Housing Benefit	+10	—	+10
Extension of Attendance Allowance to disabled babies	+10	—	+10
Extension of Attendance Allowance to terminally-ill people without a waiting period	+30	—	+30
Increase in top rate of Invalidity Allowance to £10	*—	neg.	*—
Extension of Mobility Allowance to people who are deaf and blind	—	—	—
Additional funds for the Independent Living Fund[2]	—	—	—
Introduce Disability Allowance	+370	—	+370

	Extra Costs (+)	Savings (−)	Net Effect
Abolish upper age limit for payment of help with mobility needs	+180	—	+180
Introduce age-related addition in Severe Disablement Allowance	+120	−65	+55
Introduce Disability Employment Credit[3]	+80	−90	−10
End entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance in new cases	+15	−165	−150
End accruals of new rights to Invalidity Benefit Additional Pension	+525	−1,825	1,300
Totals[4]	+1,395	−2,145	−750

[1] Additional expenditure on Mobility Allowance for the deaf-blind is included in the Disability Allowance totals after 1992-93.
[2] Subject to decisions about the future of the Indpendent Living Fund.
[3] The net effect on expenditure on the Disability Employment Credit is difficult to predict and will depend on whether recipients were previously receiving out-of-work benefits.
[4] Totals revised upwards since the Autumn Statement to reflect a small downwards adjustment of estimated savings from the change in the Reduced Earnings Allowance. Totals may not equal sum of components because of rounding.
[5] Estimates for 2025-26 are rounded to the nearest £5 million, except in the case of ending new accruals of IVB additional pension rights where they are rounded to the nearest £25 million. Asterisk denotes less than £2½ million.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps his Department is taking to extend cold weather payments to include senior citizens, the sick and disabled who do not receive income support.

Mr. Scott: We are satisfied that the social fund cold weather payments scheme concentrates the help available on those most at risk from the cold and who are most in need of help to pay for extra heating.

DEFENCE

Aldermaston

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement as to progress by his Department's fraud squad on its inquiries into fraud on construction projects at the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston.

Mr. Neubert: I have nothing to add to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 9 January at column 804.

Recruitment

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many men and women were recruited to the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force in 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988; how many left each of the services prematurely; and what the average length of service was for each.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information on premature wastage is not readily available for calendar years but is available for financial years. The total intakes to the United Kingdom regular forces in financial years 1985-86 to 1988-89 are detailed in table 1. The total numbers of exits from the services under premature wastage outflow categories during the same period are detailed in table 2. The categories included in the outflow numbers are those listed in table 4.18 of volume 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates" with the exception of "Time and age expiries or exercise of rights at option point" and for service women only "By exercise of right to give 18 months notice". Details of average length of service could not be produced without disproportionate cost.

Table 1—Intake to United Kingdom Regular Forces from civilian life

Number

	Total	Males			Females		
		Total	Officers	Servicemen	Total	Officers	Servicewomen
All Services							
1985-86	32,651	30,407	2,799	27,608	2,244	327	1,917
1986-87	34,049	31,014	2,920	28,227	2,902	360	2,542
1987-88	33,826	31,215	2,548	28,667	26,11	362	2,249
1988-89	33,863	30,862	2,262	28,600	3,001	361	2,640
Royal Navy							
1985-86	4,276	3,987	568	3,419	289	32	257
1986-87	5,336	4,791	592	4,199	545	36	509
1987-88	5,181	4,601	455	4,146	580	26	554
1988-89	5,298	4,598	484	4,114	700	31	669
Royal Marines							
1985-86	1,093	1,093	65	1,028	—	—	—
1986-87	1,233	1,233	62	1,171	—	—	—
1987-88	991	991	53	938	—	—	—
1988-89	937	937	43	894	—	—	—
Army							
1985-86	20,268	19,173	1,374	17,799	1,095	151	944
1986-87	19,918	18,718	1,362	17,356	1,200	154	1,046
1987-88	21,041	19,895	1,254	18,641	1,146	148	998
1988-89	21,348	19,921	1,150	18,771	1,427	147	1,280

	Total	Males			Females		
		Total	Officers	Servicemen	Total	Officers	Servicewomen
Royal Air Force							
1985-86	7,014	6,154	792	5,362	860	144	716
1986-87	7,562	6,405	904	5,501	1,157	170	987
1987-88	6,613	5,728	786	4,942	885	188	697
1988-89	6,280	5,406	585	4,821	874	183	691

Table 2—Premature outflow from United Kingdom Regular Forces

Number

	Total	Males			Females		
		Total	Officers	Servicemen	Total	Officers	Servicewomen
All Services							
1985-86	22,407	20,413	2,303	18,110	1,994	150	1,844
1986-87	21,901	19,911	2,286	17,625	1,990	152	1,838
1987-88	22,474	20,383	2,191	18,192	2,091	153	1,938
1988-89	24,251	22,452	2,187	20,265	1,799	162	1,637
Royal Navy							
1985-86	4,700	4,344	369	3,975	356	17	339
1986-87	4,702	4,332	380	3,952	370	17	353
1987-88	4,145	3,760	389	3,371	385	20	365
1988-89	4,091	3,747	409	3,338	344	17	327
Royal Marines							
1985-86	809	809	36	773	—	—	—
1986-87	831	831	39	792	—	—	—
1987-88	777	777	27	750	—	—	—
1988-89	766	766	38	728	—	—	—
Army							
1985-86	12,680	11,657	1,335	10,322	1,023	76	947
1986-87	12,343	11,401	1,287	10,114	942	49	893
1987-88	13,508	12,492	1,256	11,236	1,016	65	951
1988-89	14,233	13,490	1,139	12,351	743	58	685
Royal Air Force							
1985-86	4,218	3,603	563	3,040	615	57	558
1986-87	4,025	3,347	580	2,767	678	86	592
1987-88	4,044	3,354	519	2,835	690	68	622
1988-89	5,161	4,449	601	3,848	712	87	625

Number

	Financial years					1 April to 31 December	
	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1987	1988
All Services	31,926	34,554	36,521	36,961	36,938	27,167	28,964
Male officers	3,372	3,194	3,388	3,258	3,374	2,660	2,643
Commissioned officers	2,829	2,577	2,678	2,492	2,690	2,126	2,168
Time and age expiries or exercise of right at option point	1,276	1,106	1,085	972	1,183	912	898
Premature release at own request[1]	917	1,094	1,223	1,121	1,154	952	969
Redundancies	308	10	7	6	—	—	—
Medical reasons and deaths	102	104	110	106	91	76	89
Other reasons	226	263	253	287	262	186	212
Officers designate	543	617	710	766	684	534	475
At own request	84	73	119	127	110	75	95
Medical reasons and deaths	13	12	8	26	20	12	6
Other reasons	446	532	583	613	554	447	374
Servicemen	26,096	28,901	30,493	30,936	30,660	22,376	24,304
Before completion of 6 months service	5,580	5,925	5,437	6,299	6,535	4,541	4,844
By exercise of right	3,655	4,009	3,863	4,414	4,372	3,008	3,379
Unsatisfactory, disciplinary and other reasons	1,805	1,695	1,429	1,721	2,030	1,439	1,350
Medical reasons and deaths	116	215	144	161	132	93	114
Compassionate release	4	6	1	3	1	1	1
After completion of 6 months service	20,516	22,976	25,056	24,637	24,145	17,835	19,460
Time and age expiries or exercise of right at option point	10,779	11,501	12,383	13,311	12,468	9,269	9,556

	Financial years					*1 April to 31 December*	
	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1987*	*1988*
Premature release at own request[1]	4,221	6,113	7,215	6,742	7,052	5,181	6,275
Redundancies	346	422	505	147	26	10	—
Unsatisfactory, disciplinary and other reasons	4,010	3,538	3,379	3,067	3,152	2,334	2,382
Medical reasons and deaths	948	1,194	1,408	1,197	1,254	938	1,122
Compassionate release	212	208	166	173	143	103	125
Female officers[2]	304	298	351	334	328	251	259
Time and age expiries or exercise of right at option point	165	162	201	182	175	124	135
At own request	112	108	110	120	120	100	102
Medical reasons and deaths	6	12	3	7	5	5	4
Other reasons	21	16	37	25	28	22	188
Servicewomen	2,154	2,161	2,289	2,433	2,556	1,80	1,758
Time and age expiries or exercise of right at option point	68	58	96	136	167	124	119
By exercise of right to give 18 months notice	308	305	349	459	451	289	351
At own request	329	307	296	373	358	254	279
Marriage, pregnancy	1,199	1,261	1,325	1,171	1,247	974	822
Unsatisfactory, disciplinary and other reasons	198	185	182	237	267	185	151
Medical reasons and deaths	43	41	36	53	61	49	32
Compassionate release	9	4	5	4	5	5	4

[1] The numbers shown as premature release at own request, for both officers and servicemen, relate only to trained personnel.
[2] As the numbers for female officers designate are small, they have been included in those for female officers.

Ambulance Service

Sir Alan Glyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional training is being undertaken and equipment provided for the ambulance service provided by the Army to bring it up to the same standard as the normal civilian ambulance service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All service medical attendants receive basic training in medical skills. The majority of those assisting in maintaining a service to the public during the present dispute are full-time medical personnel who normally work in hospitals, medical centres and medical field units. Many of these men will already have been trained specifically to handle medical emergencies. Refresher and additional training has been given where necessary and additional equipment has been fitted to service vehicles to ensure that an effective emergency service can be provided to the public.

Colombia

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional sums are being paid to Special Air Service forces serving in Colombia as part of the anti-drug campaign; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to comment on matters concerning special forces. Service personnel serving overseas receive their normal pay and, in addition, allowances appropriate to the country in which they are deployed.

HEALTH

Self-governing Hospitals

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals being considered for self-governing status, have academic, medical or scientific staff working at them with honorary appointments; and what arrangements he has made with the related university authority to ensure that the teaching and research work of academic staff continues and develops.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Until Parliament has approved the necessary legislation, no units will be considered for NHS trust status. However 190 units have expressed interest, including 80 which I understand are likely to be in a position to apply for NHS trust status in April 1991. A number of the units expressing interest include hospitals with significant connections with university, medical and dental schools; all of these might therefore be expected to have working at them clinical academic staff with honorary NHS contracts.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health will continue to be responsible for the provision of clinical services for medical education and research. The NHS and Community Care Bill, currently before the House, empowers NHS trusts to provide teaching, training and research. We are also receiving advice from the steering group on undergraduate medical and dental education, which contains representatives of all the main bodies with responsibility for undergraduate medical and dental education.

General Practitioners (Complaints)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any proposals to allow lawyers to represent patients in complaint hearings against general practitioners before family practitioner committees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There are no plans to change the present procedures under which neither party may be represented by a paid advocate except where appeals are concerned.

Haemophiliacs

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the haemophiliac sufferers contaminated with the HIV virus have not yet received the capital sum promised them via the McFarlane Trust: and when he expects the payments to be made.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Detailed arrangements for payment of the ex-gratia sums announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 23 November 1989 at columns 11-12 are being finalised. Discussions with the McFarlane Trust are almost complete and we hope that it will be possible to start making the payments within a matter of days. A further statement will be made as soon as possible.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Corporation Tax

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Exchequer of introducing a nil rate corporation tax band on the first £5,000 of a company's profits; and what would be the cost if it were to be introduced *(a)* for companies in the first five years from registration for value-added tax and *(b)* for non-registered companies.

Mr. Lilley: On the assumption that a single £5,000 nil rate band would be available to a company group and would be divided equally between the members of the group, the direct revenue cost is tentatively estimated at some £100 million. This estimate is based on the existing distribution of taxable profits and therefore excludes the effect of behavioural changes. These cannot readily be quantified but they are likely to have a further very substantial effect upon revenue. I regret that information required to provide estimates under conditions *(a)* and *(b)* is not available.

Research and Development

Mr. Warren: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the amounts of money spent by the Governments of the United Kingdom, West Germany and France on research and development in industry, the universities and defence during their last financial years; and what are their spending expectations in each of these categories separately in their current financial years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The available information relates to net central Government expenditure on research and development analysed by the European Community objectives, industrial production and technology, research financed from general university funds and defence. For the United Kingdom the information for 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 was published in table 7 on page 95 of the August 1989 issue of "Economic Trends", a copy of which is in the Library. Comparable figures for France and West Germany for the years available are given in the table.

£ million

	West Germany		*France*	
	1987	*1988*[1]	*1987*	*1988*[1]
Industrial production and technology	808	800	761	771
Research financed from general university funds	1,551	1,693	683	735
Defence	660	687	1,952	2,357

Source: Statistical office of European Community: Government financing of R and D in Member States 1980-88.

Notes:

1. Converted to £ sterling using purchasing power parities calculated by OECD.
2. The figures relate to appropriations for commitments and are not strictly comparable with outturn data.

[1] Provisional.

Drugs

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the balance of payments deficit is affected by the illegal importation of drugs.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Illegally imported drugs are not included in the published data.

Companies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been expended by the United Kingdom on the acquisition of companies abroad and on the acquisition by foreign companies of United Kingdom companies in 1989; and what are the comparable figures for each year since 1979 at constant prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest available figures are given in business bulletin "Cross-Border Acquisitions and Mergers—Third Quarter 1989." Figures are available on this basis only from 1986. A copy of this publication is available in the Library. Because the figures relate to transactions for which there are no suitable price deflators, values on a constant price basis are not available.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any proposals to review the overall position of charities in respect of value added tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1989-90 for the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Lilley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for class XIX vote 7 will be increased from £1,234,973,000 to £1,237,173,000 and the running cost limit for Inland Revenue from £1,202,092,000 to £1,202,308,000. The change in running cost limit arises from a transfer from the Cabinet Office (Office of the Minister for the Civil Service) for challenge funding (class XX, vote 1) and the costs associated with the distribution of profit-related pay pamphlets (these are recovered from HM Treasury—class

XIX, vote 11). The change in the cash limit also includes an amount for capital to provide for purchase of land in Nottingham for the relocation of London headquarters staff; this increase will be met from existing but unallocated public expenditure provision.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1989-90 for Customs and Excise.

Mr. Ryder: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for class XIX vote 2 will be increased from £563,065,000 to £580,342,000 and the running cost limit for Customs and Excise from £505,620,000 to £505,897,000. The change in the running costs limit arises from the transfer from the Cabinet Office (Office of the Minister for the Civil Service) (class XX, vote 1) for challenge funding and the costs associated with a programme for the training of overseas customs officers, the costs of which are being met by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (class II, vote 1) and the Home Office (class XI, vote 3). There is therefore no net increase in public expenditure as a result of these increases. The change in the cash limit also includes an amount to cover the costs of payments made or being made in respect of interest (or ex-gratia payments in lieu of interest) on repayments of VAT, the need for which I announced in a written reply on 19 December 1989 (*Official Report*, col *178*): these costs fall outside the definition of the public expenditure planning total.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the effect of his decision to bring forward payments of revenue support grant to local authorities on the central Government borrowing requirement in 1990-91.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*holding answer 16 January 1990*]: Assuming current interest rates, there will be an interest cost of less than £100 million to central Government in 1990-91, compared with the situation if grant were still to be paid according to the present rate support grant profile. This has no effect on the PSBR, since local authorities will save the cost of borrowing the amounts brought forward.

Aquisitions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value for 1989 of takeover acquisitions made by *(a)* United Kingdom companies abroad and *(b)* foreign companies in the United Kingdom; and what the comparable figure was for (i) five years and (ii) 10 years ago.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest available figures are given in Business Bulletin "Cross-Border Acquisitions and Mergers—Third Quarter 1989". Figures are available on this basis only from 1986. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in output per head in manufacturing since 1979 together with the increase in output per head in the rest of the economy.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The increases in output per head in manufacturing and non-manufacturing between 1979 and the third quarter of 1989 were 53 per cent. and 14 per cent. respectively.

EMPLOYMENT

Homeworkers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many accidents causing *(a)* minor injuries, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* fatalities there have been in the last 10 years to homeworkers while they were engaged with their work in their homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Injuries occurring in domestic premises arising out of homework activity are not separately identified from the generality of injuries to employees and the self-employed and therefore data cannot be supplied.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many representations he has received from right hon. and hon. Members since 1979 concerning the rights of homeworkers;

(2) how many representations he has received since 1979 from members of the public concerning rights of homeworkers.

Mr. Nicholls: Records show that 14 letters on the subject of homeworking have been received direct from members of the public since 1979 and 16 through Members of Parliament. Members have also sent seven letters on their own account. Ministers have also received deputations including a Member of Parliament on two occasions. It is not possible in the time available to state how many of the letters should be categorised "representations on the rights of homeworkers".

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the average rates of pay *(a)* per week and *(b)* per item made for homeworkers in England and Wales giving the most recent figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not available.

National Insurance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of national insurance contributors paying the share fishermen's rate *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in Grimsby and *(c)* in Scotland in the latest available year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

During 1986-87, the latest year for which final figures are available, a total of 12,300 United Kingdom contributors paid the share fishermen's rate of national insurance contribution: of these 11,600 were in Great Britain. I regret that separate figures are not available for either Scotland or Grimsby.

Stockport

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations Stockport metropolitan borough council has had with his Department about a questionnaire, a copy of which has been sent to him, being circulated by the council to the unemployed in Stockport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* The Stockport metropolitan borough council discussed the questionnaire with the manager of Stockport "C" unemployment benefit office and the employment service area manager at Rochdale, who agreed to distribute the questionnaire.

This needs to be set in the wider context of the overall reduction in long-term unemployment which has been achieved by activities of the employment services in Stockport. In the past 12 months unemployment in the Stockport metropolitan borough council area has fallen by 23 per cent, with long-term unemployment falling by 28 per cent.

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his letter of 11 January to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, replying further to his holding answer of 19 December to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, *Official Report,* 20 December, column *235,* whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage median, quartile and decile increases in weekly earnings in each case between 1972-79 and 1979-89.

Mr. Nicholls: Information is not available to compile statistics of the median, quartile and decile percentage increases in weekly earnings.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage increase since April 1979 to the latest available date in real hourly and weekly earnings of full-time manual male employees in manufacturing industry and of full-time non-manual male employees in the rest of the private sector together with the increase in output per hour and per head in manufacturing and in the rest of the private sector or, failing that, the rest of the economy.

Mr. Nicholls: The real increases in average gross hourly and weekly earnings of full-time adult manual male employees in manufacturing industry from April 1979 to April 1989 (the latest available date) were 15 per cent. and 14 per cent. respectively. Figures are not readily available for the private sector less manufacturing and would involve disproportionate cost to compile.

The increases in manufacturing output per hour and output per head between April 1979 and November 1989 were 52 per cent. and 51 per cent. respectively. The increase in output per head in the whole economy less manufacturing between the second quarter of 1979 and the third quarter of 1989 was 12 per cent. Output per hour data are not available for sectors other than manufacturing.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in the Hong Kong administration as presently constituted would be excluded after 1997 from office under the provisions of article 74 of the joint declaration.

Mr. Sainsbury: Section IV of annex I to the joint declaration stipulates that British and other foreign nationals may serve as public servants at all levels

"except as heads of major Government departments (corresponding to branches or departments at Secretary level) including the Police Department, and as Deputy Heads of some of those departments".

The Chinese Government have elaborated on this provision in the draft Basic Law. Based on the most recent reports of proposals by Basic Law drafters, we estimate that there are currently between 20 and 30 officials holding such posts.

Somalia

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by the British Government to seek an end to the killing of political opponents of the Somali Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made very clear to the Somali Government our concern about continuing reports of serious human rights violations. We have also made adjustments to our aid programme.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to send a diplomatic mission to visit Somalia to investigate claims that the Somali Government have murdered civilians; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have an embassy in Mogadishu which monitors the human rights situation closely. We also keep in touch with other Governments and with NGOs about the human rights situation in Somalia.

SCOTLAND

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received any representations from the Institute of Civil Engineers about infrastructure projects in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Institution of Civil Engineers has provided comments on the consultative paper issued by the Scottish Development Department on the routes south of Edinburgh study. These, and other comments which have been received, are currently being considered and a statement on the results of the consultation exercise will be made in due course.

Rents into Mortgages Scheme

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on the rents into mortgages scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 19 January, Scottish Homes, the body responsible for the administration of the rents to mortgages scheme, had received over 450 inquiries from tenants interested in purchasing their homes under the scheme. Twenty-eight firm applications have already resulted from these inquiries.

Since the launch of the scheme on 30 October last year there has been continued interest shown by tenants of both Scottish Homes and the new town development corporations. I am satisfied that good progress is being made towards encouraging owner-occupation among those eligible tenants who have hitherto been unable to consider purchase of their homes.

Roodlands Hospital, Haddington

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current investment programme to upgrade the operating theatre at Roodlands hospital, Haddington and on the delay in recommissioning that theatre.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The investment programme at Roodlands hospital falls within the delegated authority of Lothian health board and the issue is therefore a matter for the board.

Home Improvements Grants

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to apply means-testing to the award of home improvements grants; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government issued a consultation paper in May 1988 setting out their proposals for the reform of the present improvement and repairs grants system in Scotland. The proposals included the introduction of a test of financial eligibility to determine grant entitlement, so that resources could be directed to those most in need of assistance.

The consultation paper was the subject of many detailed and constructive comments from a wide range of bodies. These are being fully considered as proposals for a new system are developed, but there are no plans to legislate on this subject in Scotland for the time being. A further consultation paper will be issued before any legislation is introduced for consideration by Parliament.

Crown Office

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Lord Advocate proposes any changes to the Crown Office cash and running cost limits for 1989-90.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The cash limit for class XI, vote 14 will be reduced by £499,000 from £26,798,000 to £26,299,000. This is the net effect of a token Supplementary Estimate of £1,000 and a decrease of £500,000 to offset the increase sought on class XI, vote 13 for Crown Office, Scotland: Crown prosecutions and legal services. Within this total the running cost limit for the Crown Office will be increased by £850,000 from £19,786,000 to £20,636,000. This is to enable the Crown Office to meet the cost of hiring additional casual staff, greater than expected salary increases, additional costs relating to tape recording of interviews with suspects and higher than expected costs of hiring temporary procurators fiscal. This increase is fully offset by saving on capital expenditure elsewhere on the vote.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make any further changes to the cash limits for 1989-90 within his responsibility.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. I intend to make changes to six of the cash limits and to two running cost limits within my responsibility.

As a result of expected savings on two services the cash limit for class XVI vote 2, agriculture services and fisheries, Scotland, will be reduced by £1,600,000 from £81,624,000 to £80,024,000.

The cash limit for class XVI vote 10, privatisation of the electricity supply industry, Scotland, will be reduced by £1,050,000 from £6,000,000 to £4,950,000.

The cash limit for class XVI vote 11, administration of justice, Scotland, will be reduced by £2,000,000 from £35,474,000 to £33,474,000.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the running costs limit for the Scottish Record Office vote, class XVI, vote 18 will be increased by £30,000 from £2,551,000 to £2,581,000 to cover increased accommodation charges. This increase will be offset by a corresponding reduction in the running costs limit of the General Register Office for Scotland, class XVI, vote 19 from £5,865,000 to £5,835,000. The cash limit for vote 19 will be reduced by £250,000 from £5,368,000 to £5,118,000.

The non-voted cash limit SO/LA2, which covers housing capital expenditure by local authorities and capital expenditure by new towns, will be reduced by £1,138,000 from £345,424,000 to £344,286,000.

These reductions in cash limits will be used to offset increases in other votes.

Team Sports

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to respond to the report of the Team Sport Enquiry Group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* I will be responding very shortly.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many neighbourhood watch schemes have been set up in each of the past five years in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Strathclyde and Scotland as a whole; and what was the financial support given to these schemes by the Scottish Office.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The number of schemes in existence as at 31 December in each of the last three years was as follows:

	Greenock and Port Glasgow	*Strathclyde region*	*Scotland*
1987	6	127	259
1988	44	475	629
1989	58	674	1,093

Figures are not available centrally for earlier years. However, I understand that the first Scottish schemes were set up in 1984, and the first schemes in Strathclyde were set up in 1987.

Neighbourhood watch schemes are set up by members of the public with the assistance of the police and are not funded directly by the Scottish Office.

Storm Damage

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the final cost of the damage and restoration work arising from the flooding and gales of 13 February 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The costs of damage and restoration work fell on both the public and private sectors and no comprehensive record of them is held centrally. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced on 27 April 1989 that a scheme of special financial assistance to those local authorities which had suffered an undue financial burden would be made available on the same basis as had operated in England and Wales in 1987 (*Official Report* Vol. 151, Cols. *609-12*). On 9 November 1989 my right hon. and learned Friend announced (*Official Report* Vol. 159, Col. *742*) that a quarter of a million pounds would be made available to those authorities which had qualified for assistance under the scheme.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Oil

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many waste disposal authorities in the United Kingdom have provision for recycling of car and motor vehicle oil; and what percentage of such oil is now recycled.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This information is not immediately available but the Department is about to conduct a survey of local authorities which will cover, among other things, what facilities exist for the collection and processing of waste oil.

Community Charge

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the community charge in relation to blind people.

Mr. Chope: Blind people on low incomes will be able to claim community charge benefit, which can provide rebates of up to 80 per cent. of the charge. Registered blind people can qualify for community charge benefit at higher levels of income than other claimants because their applicable amount contains a disability premium. Blind people in receipt of income support have had their benefit increased to reflect the fact that they have to pay at least 20 per cent. of the charge. The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) has produced information on the community charge in Braille, based on a leaflet published by the Department of the Environment; and the Department is pursuing with the RNIB the possibility of help with the production of further material. Registered blind people may qualify for extra help under the transitional relief scheme if they have to pay a community charge but did not formerly pay rates or rent (or were not the partner of anyone who did).

Waste Disposal

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to make provision for a waste disposal authority to refuse a site licence when a landfill is proposed on a site of special scientific interest.

Mr. Trippier: This is a matter for the planning authority to consider as part of the planning application process. The planning authority should have regard to circular 27/87 which contains guidance on the procedures to be followed in considering any development on land used for nature conservation.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to provide statutory powers for voluntary groupings of waste regulation authorities to pool their skills and powers.

Mr. Trippier: Waste disposal authorities are already able to exercise their statutory powers through arrangements with other authorities under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make it a condition for the issuing of a waste disposal site licence that the applicant has to demonstrate a certain defined minimum standard of waste management education, training and experience.

Mr. Trippier: The Environmental Protection Bill contains provisions for the waste regulation authority to refuse a licence to an applicant who is not a fit and proper person. Part of the test of being a fit and proper person is that the applicant would provide technically competent management for the proposed facility. The Secretary of State may prescribe, through regulations, the qualifications and experience required of a person for this purpose.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to make it a legal requirement for waste regulation authorities to conform to the frequency of site visits laid down in the waste management papers issued by his Department.

Mr. Trippier: The Environmental Protection Bill contains provisions for the waste regulation authorities to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State with respect to the discharge of their functions in relation to licences. Such guidance would include advice on the frequency of site visits. The authorities will also be required to publish annual reports on their performance in relation to this guidance.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many executive, administrative and support staff are currently employed by the Property Services Agency; and how many of these staff the Property Services Agency anticipate will be required over each of the next four years;

(2) if he will list the Property Services Agency requirements for executive, administrative and support

staff over the next four years as projected in the business plans currently being considered by the Property Services Agency chief executive.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* At 1 January 1990 there were 5,912 administrative, executive and support staff employed in the Property Services Agency, excluding the Crown Suppliers. Future staff requirements will depend on the future workload.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Haddock

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance his Department intends to give fishermen as to how they will reduce effort on haddock; and whether fishermen's organisations will receive a consultation document on any such proposals.

Mr. Curry: The fisheries Departments have issued a consultation paper to the industry about possible measures to bring about a 30 per cent. reduction in fishing for North sea haddock in 1990. The proposals will be discussed at a meeting with the industry on 29 January.

Transferable Quotas

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for the introduction of individual transferable quotas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Individual transferable quotas have been operated successfully in a number of countries and I am investigating whether they would have a useful role to play here. If I believe that they could be adapted to our conditions, the industry will be fully consulted about possible schemes. No definitive plan exists at present.

Scallop Dredging

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has been done on the effect of scallop dredging on the sea bed.

Mr. Curry: Scallops are principally caught off the western coast of Great Britain. The research undertaken by my Department has largely been confined to studying the behaviour of this fishery and the biological factors determining abundance of stocks.

Fishing Boats

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he plans to apply to join the EEC temporary lay-up scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: As the hon. Member knows, we are considering with the industry the measures necessary to reduce fishing for North sea haddock in 1990. Our proposals do not envisage financial assistance for laying up. A laying-up scheme does nothing to reduce capacity on a permanent basis and would serve to encourage marginal fishermen, who might otherwise have left the industry, to remain in it.

Irish Sea (Pollution)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has funded any research at the university of Liverpool on radioactive and toxic waste pollution in the Irish sea.

Mr. Curry: None.

Glis Glis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions during each of the last five years the Forestry Commission has *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted licences to trap glis glis; and what were the numbers taken in respect of each licence.

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

	Licences applied for	*Licences granted*	*Numbers taken*
1985	—	—	—
1986	1	1	4
1987	1	1	43
1988	1	1	6
1989	1	1	None

Goats

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning the illegal slaughter of goats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Goats slaughtered for sale for human consumption must be slaughtered in accordance with the provisions of the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 and the Slaughter of Animals (Prevention of Cruelty) Regulations 1958. Enforcement of the legislation is the responsibility of the local authorities. I am not aware of any goats being slaughtered in contravention of this legislation.

Gumboro Virus

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* laying hens and *(b)* other hens killed by the Gumboro virus in the current outbreak of the disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Gumboro disease does not normally cause death in laying hens. Estimated losses to the broiler sector from the disease since May last year are in excess of 5 million birds. It is believed that more than 500,000 replacement pullets have also been lost.

Since 30 October last year, a less attenuated live vaccine has been available, for use under state veterinary service supervision. It is hoped that this may have a beneficial effect on the situation.

Eggs

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits have been made by the north regional marketing inspector to retail premises since 1 January in connection with the marketing of eggs which have not been through a packing station; and in which local authority areas the visits took place.

Mr. Curry: No enforcement visits have been made for this purpose by the regional egg marketing inspector for the northern region since 1 January.

As previously explained to the hon. Member *(Hansard* 6 November, columns *468-69*), enforcement of the EC regulations on egg marketing standards at the retail level is a matter for local authorities. The Ministry's egg marketing inspectors will provide assistance to local authorities on request.

Food Irradiation

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the studies available to him on the effects of irradiation of food include long-term populational surveys for potential carcinogenic effects.

Mr. Maclean: The studies examined by the independent expert scientific committee that confirmed the safety and wholesomeness of irradiated food included a number of animal studies extending over several generations. The extensive data reviewed produced no evidence of potential carcinogenic effects.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hind: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether it is intended to change the cash and running cost limits on any departmental Vote for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Gummer: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class IV vote 2 (Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce: administration) will be increased by a token £1,000 from £38,225,000 to £38,226,000. The running costs limit for the board will be increased by £540,000 from £19,881,000 to £20,421,000 which includes £89,000 in respect of take-up of the full end-year flexibility entitlement as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 20 July 1989 (*Official Report*, columns *258-62*). Provision for payments for agency services will be decreased by £523,000 and recovery of value-added tax in respect of capital items will be increased by £16,000. These changes reflect an increase in running costs to remove the backlog of external trade claims and a reduction in appropriations-in-aid, offset by reduced expenditure by the board's agents, principally as a result of the changes to the Community support arrangements for beef.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food cash limit for class IV, vote 4 (other agricultural and food services and support for the fishing industry) will be reduced by £2,500,000 from £148,931,000 to £146,431,000 and that for class IV, vote 5 (departmental research, advisory services and administration) will be reduced by £2,000,000 from £256,942,000 to £254,942,000, with a consequential reduction in the running cost limit for MAFF of £2,000,000 from £262,386,000 to £260,386,000. These reductions mainly reflect the tightening of the eligibility criteria for grant on fishing vessels and difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff.

North Sea

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government will make it their policy to bring an end to the dumping of chemical waste in the North sea; what countries bordering the North sea permit the discharge of industrial waste into it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: It is established Government policy to terminate the dumping at sea of liquid industrial waste. The search for environmentally acceptable means for disposal of the wastes on land has been pressed forward urgently since the second North sea conference. The number of licences has already been reduced since 1987 by more than half; and the remaining licences will be terminated as soon as alternative means of disposal can be put in place. Important processes including the production of medicines are involved, and the necessary investment will often be high. Nevertheless I anticipate that most sea disposal licences should be ended this year or next.

All countries which border the North sea, or which border rivers entering it, permit the discharge of waste into the North sea.

The main sources of pollutants entering the North sea are rivers. Eighty per cent. of the riverborne pollution is from the continental rivers. Fifty per cent. of total riverborne pollution originates in the Rhine and the Meuse. For comparison the United Kingdom's dumping of liquid industrial waste adds no significant levels of pollutants to the sea.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to make a change to the cash limit for 1989-90 for the prisons vote, class XI vote 2.

Mr. Waddington: Yes. The cash limit on the prisons vote (class XI, vote 2) has been reduced by £2,506,000 from £1,140,131,000 to £1,137,625,000 to reflect the reduced prison population and adjustments to the building programme.

Deportation

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there have been any changes in the panel of three advisors appointed to consider representations from persons required to leave the country on security or political grounds, who have no right of appeal under the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. Waddington: I have re-appointed the right hon. Lord Justice Lloyd as chairman of the panel and Mr. David Neve as a member. Sir Robert Andrew KCB has been appointed as the third member and Sir Mark Russell KCMG and Mr. Gerry Gillman as reserve members. I should like to record my thanks to the retiring members, the hon. Sir Patrick Nairne GCB MC, Sir John Garlick KCB and Mr. Edward Hewlett for their services to the panel.

Metropolitan Police Forensic Science Laboratory

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times since 1 January 1989 scientists at the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory have been unable to visit scenes of crimes due to understaffing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I understand that since 1 January 1989 it has not been possible for scientists at the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory to visit scenes of crimes on an estimated 16 occasions. The provision of specialist assistance at major crime scenes remains a high priority for the laboratory.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases since 1 January 1989 has the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory had to decline to provide the police with forensic science reports, on the grounds of understaffing or overwork; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I will write to the hon. and learned Member.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proposals he has to attract more trained forensic scientists to the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory; and if he will make a statement;

(d) what assessment he has made of the effect of restrictions in staffing levels in the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory on the quality and number of investigations carried out there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Forensic scientists are not trained at first degree level. The Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory therefore concentrates on recruiting and training its own scientists and a graduate recruitment exercise is currently under way.

The staffing level for the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory is set by the Commissioner within the total of civil staff whom he is authorised to employ. The ceiling is currently 216, which I understand the Commissioner considers to be appropriate to the amount of work undertaken; on 1 January there were 203½ staff in post. The impact of this shortfall of staff on the work of the laboratory, and the need for pay flexibility and other relevant management issues, are under consideration.

Police Pay

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds he refused to implement in full the recent decisions of the police arbitration tribunal regarding the pay structure for police officers in England and Wales; and if he will reconsider his decision.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I assume that the right hon. Member is referring to the tribunal's award on police rent allowance, which provided the basis for a recent police negotiating board agreement. The decision of the PNB is a recommendation which my right hon. and learned Friend can accept or reject. In considering the agreement, we had to have regard not only to the interests of the police service but to the wider public interest. After careful consideration, my right hon. and learned Friend concluded that he should set aside certain aspects of the board's agreement. Draft regulations, giving effect to my right hon. and learned Friend's decisions, have been sent to the board for comment and we shall consider carefully any representations which the board may make.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to review the definition of subversive following the political changes in eastern Europe; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: No: it remains necessary to protect national security from actions intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means. This does not prevent careful assessments and responses being made to any changes in the threat.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to introduce regulations that allow voters to opt out of or opt into the sale of their name and address from electoral registers; whether he has had discussions with the data protection registrar concerning the sale of the names and address from the electoral register; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his question on 15 January at column *27*. The data protection registrar was consulted before the introduction of provisions in the Representation of the People Regulations 1986, governing the sale of the electoral register in data form.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to take steps to inform voters of the fact that their name and address are routinely sold or disclosed from the electoral register for poll tax purposes; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no such plan.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has plans to introduce regulations in order to protect the name and address of voters who may be vulnerable to attack if their name and address appeared on an electoral register that is available for sale or inspection by the public; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to do so at present, but we shall continue to keep the position under careful review.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has provided guidance to electoral registration officers concerning the inspection or sale of the names and address from the electoral register without the knowledge of consent or the voter; whether his Department has studied the implications of linking copies of the electoral register information to that of the census or to other large databases; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No, although the Home Office does issue guidance to electoral registration officers on all relevant aspects of the electoral registration process, including the provisions governing the inspection and sale of the register. We have not carried out any research concerning the combined use of information from the electoral register and the census or other databases.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by location the UKWMO to wartime headquarters covering links to county standby emergency centres.

Mr. John Patten: Where no direct communications link is provided between a county standby emergency centre and the relevant UKWMO control, arrangements are being made for an indirect link via the regional government headquarters to which the standby centre is, or is planned to be, connected.

Criminal Injuries

Sir Bernard Braine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims for awards from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board made in 1988 and 1989 are still outstanding; in how many cases such claimants have died of their injuries before their claims were settled; what are the reasons for the delays in settling claims; and what steps are now being taken to speed up settlement.

Mr. John Patten: On 31 March 1988 and 31 March 1989 respectively 77,965 and 82,520 applications were outstanding. The board does not keep records of outstanding claims by year of application; nor of the number of applicants who die before their claims are settled.

Greatly increased applications over recent years, expected to exceed 50,000 this year, have led to the build-up of a heavy backlog, which is causing delays to all claims.

We have taken concerted action to enable the board to reduce delays and meet the increased demand. The board's staff have been increased from 220 in 1987 to 330 now through local recruitment to a new office in Glasgow; we have appointed more board members; the board's internal procedures have been reviewed and improved; a major computerisation programme is under way; and we have amended the compensation scheme to allow the board among other things to speed up its operations by delegating decisions to staff and reviewing disputed cases on the papers. The terms of the revised scheme, which will take effect on 1 February 1990, were set out in full in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 8 December 1989 at columns *409-17*.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's responsibilities in respect of the administration of magistrates courts.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Secretary's statutory responsibilities are set out in appendix B1 to the report of the "Scrutiny of Magistrates' Courts 1989", a copy of which is in the Library. We are still considering the proposals in the report directed to the reconstitution of the administration of the magistrates courts service as an executive agency.

Green Goddess Fleet

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria were applied in considering *(a)* the in-house bid and *(b)* external bids for the contract to maintain his Department's green goddess fleet of fire appliances;

(2) what was the nature of the tendering process for the maintenance of the green goddess fire appliance fleet.

Mr. John Patten: Twenty-four contractors were invited to tender for the storage and maintenance of the emergency fire service stockpile against an operational requirement prepared by the Home Office. Following standard Government procedures, all compliant tenders were assessed on the basis of value for money, and a comparison was made with the cost and efficacy of the existing in-house undertaking.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the green goddess fire appliance fleet housed at Bruntingthorpe aerodrome is presently capable of being brought into immediate service.

Mr. John Patten: A total of 218 green goddess fire appliances are housed at Bruntingthorpe, and of these 215 (over 98 per cent.) are capable of being brought into immediate service.

Passports

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many passports are currently issued to Mr. Peter Hain; and if he will withdraw any issued under aliases;

(2) what measures are available to him to prevent British citizens from being issued with new passports under an assumed name without change of name by deed poll;

(3) whether he will consider introducing checks at airports and other places of departure in the United Kingdom to ensure that British passport holders have not falsified information in their passport application;

(4) whether the issue of an additional passport bearing a name differing from that on the original application and without change by marriage or deed poll is available to British citizens.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It would not be appropriate to disclose details of individual cases, but the passport department does require documentary evidence, such as a marriage certificate or declaration by deed poll, to be submitted in support of passport applications involving a change of name. Although checks are made, it would be impractical to scrutinise in detail the passports of all United Kingdom citizens on embarkation.

Political Refugees

Sir Donald Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 8 January, *Official Report*, column *467*, in what respects the criteria under which political refugees are now admitted to the United Kingdom do not meet the potential problems faced by people in Hong Kong.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The United Kingdom has placed no geographical limits on its adherence to the 1951 UN convention.

Magistrates Courts (Wales)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of magistrates court service in Wales.

Mr. John Patten: We are still considering the proposals in the report of the "Scrutiny of Magistrates' Courts 1989" directed to the reconstitution of the administration of the magistrates courts service in both England and Wales as a single executive agency.

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

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